

The Sects - cont.

strict three-year probation and then take an oath not to reveal any of the group's secrets. The Dead Sea Scrolls uncovered in 1947 and 1948 may have been the work of a group of Essenes. This would demonstrate their veneration for the Mosaic Law.

True religion is not found by separating oneself from the outside world (John 17:14-16). Instead, we are supposed to be a light to the world (Matthew 5:14-15). Like the Pharisees, the Essenes would sometimes make their own traditions into law. For example, they were so strict in their conduct that one of their documents said it was wrong to lift an animal out of a pit on the Sabbath. As Jesus pointed out in Matthew 12:11, even the Pharisees would know this was extreme legalism. And, the ascetic lifestyle is not a requirement to obey God (Luke 7:34; Colossians 2:20-23).

Jewish Sectarianism

All three Jewish sects saw themselves as the "truly righteous" ones! Yet, the Bible condemns the Pharisees and Sadducees by name, and would also reject the Essenes by implication of plain Scripture. Traditionalism, elitism, and separatism are all condemned in scripture. The way we see ourselves may not be the way God sees us! - *Chris Reeves*

Sentence Sermons

- Life doesn't come with an instruction book — that's why God gave us the Bible.
- There is never a wrong time to do the right thing and never a right time to do the wrong thing.
- Honesty is the first chapter in the book of wisdom.
- We should always alter our life to conform to the unaltered word of God.

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For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses.
- 2 Corinthians 10:3-4 -

The Sects of the Jews

There were three major religious societies of Judaism during the earthly ministry of Christ: the Pharisees (Acts 15:5), Sadducees (Acts 5:17), and Essenes (not mentioned by name in scripture). All three were guilty of perverting God's law in different ways. So, what lessons can Christians today learn from these ancient, devoutly religious groups?

The Pharisees

The Pharisees were by far the most influential and conservative of the three Jewish sects (Acts 5:34; 23:6; 26:5; Philippians 3:5). The word "Pharisee" means "separated one". Most scholars believe that the Pharisees originated as a party during the Maccabean Revolt against the Greek Hellenizers in 165 B.C.

The Pharisees accepted the authority of the written law, but also believed that the oral teachings and traditions of the scribes were authoritative (Mark 7:1-13, Matthew 12:2; 15:1ff). They zealously sought to proselytize the common people (Matthew 23:15). They saw themselves as "the party of the pious." Ceremonial purity was emphasized. They would not purchase food or drink from a "sinner." They would entertain "sinners" in their own houses but would not enter the houses of unbelievers (Luke 7:36-39; Galatians 2:11-12).

Two greatest dangers for any "party of the pious" are self-satisfaction and an unhealthy spiritual pride (Luke 7:30; 18:9-14). A third great danger is to have a form of religion without true spirit (Matthew 5:20; 23:1-7; Lk. 11:39ff). A symptom of Phariseism is spiritual arrogance or religious "showing-off" (Matthew 6:1-18).

The Sadducees

The origin of the Sadducees is uncertain and the meaning of the name is obscure - perhaps "righteous one" or "follower of Sadoc". The earliest mention is during the time of Maccabees - perhaps a few years after the beginning of the Pharisees.

The Sadducees were always a party of the Jewish elite and identified themselves as part of the priestly aristocracy - the "truly righteous" ones. During the time of Christ, they controlled the High Priesthood and the temple worship.. They were not interested in proselytizing the common people. You had to be part of the "in" crowd to be a Sadducee. They did *not* accept scribal tradition as authoritative. In fact, they believed only the first five books of the Old Testament carried God's authority (Matthew 22:23,31-32,34). They believed the soul dies with the physical body. They did not accept the concepts of immortality or eternal rewards and punishments. Thus, they also rejected any notion of spirit life (Acts 23:6-8).

We can appreciate the Sadducees' respect for written law and their rejection of the Pharisees' concept of tradition. However, as a religious party they were equally condemned in Scripture (Matthew 3:7). They were unwilling to accept *all* of God's written word. They practiced an early form of "buffet-style" religion, picking and choosing what they wanted to believe (Luke 24:44; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21). They did not accept Jesus as the Messiah (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). And, their concept of "elitism" is contrary to Christianity (1 Timothy 2:3-4; James 2:1-4).

The Essenes

The Essenes are not mentioned specifically in the New Testament. Their name may mean "holy ones." Their origin is shrouded in mystery. They arose, probably during the same time as the other two sects of the Jews.

The Essenes' motto was: "We need to purify ourselves against corrupting, outside influences." The Essenes adopted a rigorous, monastic lifestyle. They lived a simple life where all material goods were shared in common and there were strict rules of conduct. Most groups of Essenes abstained from marriage and believed that all matter was inherently evil (Ecclesiastes 5:18-19, 9:7-10; 1 Timothy 4:1-3). Proselytes had to undergo a