

Talks – Modern Pharisees – myfishbites.com

Intro

This talk is a bit of fun but it's also really serious because Christians are having their voice silenced and we need to be aware of what is happening around us so we can stand up against people's intolerance.

At the same time, as Liberal Democrat MP Tim Farron said, Christianity is meant to be counter-cultural and Jesus said that we can expect opposition as Christians because we're in a battle against evil. And remember that it is Jesus who they are persecuting and not you. But those doing this are similar to the Pharisees...

The Modern Pharisees



"YOU WILL OBEY!"

Jesus always had a problem with the Pharisees. In his day, these were religious men who were the Jewish leaders. They were more interested in promoting their agenda, doing things their way, being seen and wanting to be in charge – even if it meant problems for everyone else. They only cared about themselves and their ideas and wanted to make everyone subject to their way of seeing and doing things.

Sound familiar? It is.

Jesus of course was the number one enemy of these Pharisees.

And today, we're seeing a rise in modern pharisees who want to control, be in charge, dominate and silence anyone who thinks differently. They often do this in subtle ways but more and more, they are loudly demanding everyone listens to them and does things their way.

Behind these people are spiritual forces of darkness and they hate God. So once again, it is Jesus they see as their enemy. And as believers in Jesus, we are often a target.

It's time to pray like you've never prayed, to love like you've never loved and to stand like you've never stood. The world around is falling apart and needs to hear the truth about Jesus. He is the only hope.

Video – The Daleks – ‘You Will Obey’

Direct Link – <https://youtu.be/4Swevi4g8x0> (working June 19)

The Bible - Mark 2.15-16

15 While Jesus was having dinner at Levi's house, many tax collectors and sinners were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. 16 When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw him eating with the sinners and tax collectors, they asked his disciples: 'Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?'

Mark 5.23-28

23 One Sabbath Jesus was going through the cornfields, and as his disciples walked along, they began to pick some ears of corn. 24 The Pharisees said to him, 'Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?'

25 He answered, 'Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need? 26 In the days of Abiathar the high priest, he entered the house of God and ate the consecrated bread, which is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions.'

27 Then he said to them, 'The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. 28 So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.'

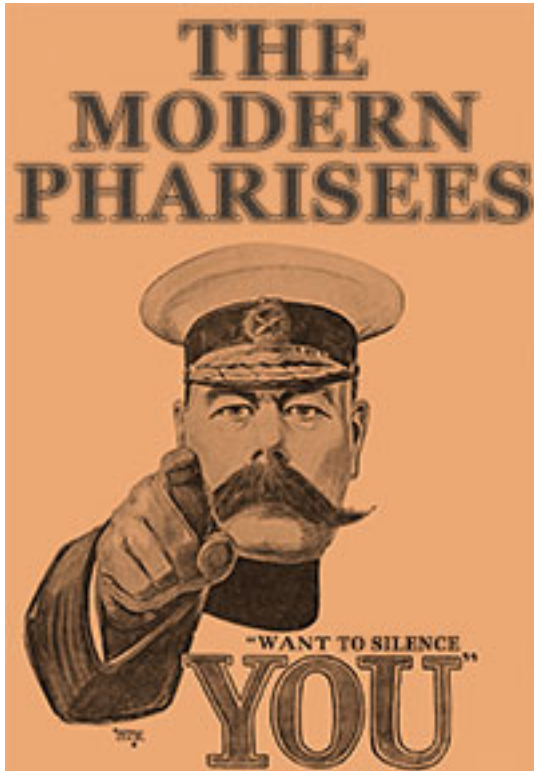
Mark 3.1-6

Another time Jesus went into the synagogue, and a man with a shrivelled hand was there. Some of them were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal him on the Sabbath. Jesus said to the man with the shrivelled hand, 'Stand up in front of everyone.'

Then Jesus asked them, 'Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?' But they remained silent.

He looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts, said to the man, 'Stretch out your hand.' He stretched it out, and his hand was completely restored. Then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus.

The Pharisees



Time and time again, the Pharisees were more concerned about their position and the rules than they were about people. They made decisions based on their way of thinking – a way that everyone had to obey.

They left no room for common sense, compassion, love or truth. They were selfish, self-centred and full of their own self-importance and knowledge. It was about them and their rules.

The top of their list of enemies was Jesus. Part of his 'crimes' (that's what they called it) was that he went about in the power of God and did good, healed all and released people from the

power of the devil.

So remember, if someone opposes a person who goes around setting people free from the devil, where do you think that opposition really comes from? Yes, from the devil.

So let's read about Jesus and what he did. There's a good summary in Acts 10.38 in the Bible.

[Acts 10.38 – God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, \(who\) went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.](#)

The Pharisees got very upset through these 'terrible' (not!) things Jesus did: He healed people; he healed people on the Sabbath; he stopped people stoning a woman to death (pointing out that everyone had sinned); he allowed his disciples to eat on the Sabbath; he hung out with and helped the needy like the poor, the sinner and those that others saw as being the lowest kinds of people.

These are all pretty bad 'crimes' right...? Not! But the Pharisees didn't like it. And they didn't like the fact that Jesus said he was the Son of God and that being made right with God wasn't through rules but through a relationship with God.

So these Pharisees figured out a way to kill Jesus. They didn't have the courage to do things themselves and didn't want to turn the people against them. They were people-pleasers – doing what the people wanted and whatever made them look the best. Then they faked charges against Jesus that were totally untrue and then had him killed. After Jesus had been killed, they even asked for someone to guard the tomb as they remembered Jesus said he would rise from the dead.

In some ways, the Pharisees knew the Bible more than the followers of Jesus. But they used it against Jesus rather than getting to know Jesus through what he said and did. Is the same true today?

The Modern Pharisees

In 2017, an Australian journalist who is not a Christian wrote a piece in the Sydney Herald News calling the Christians of Australia to "open your eyes to what is happening around you and prepare for persecution in the dark days ahead." He called for strong Church leaders to arise, saying that "whilst I am not a Christian, I stand amazed that Christian bishops and ministers are not warning Christians of what is already breaking over their heads."

Jesus told us that in the last days, opposition would rise, the world would become more divided, there would be more natural disasters on the earth and above the earth and that things would start to fall apart. We also know that many people will come to faith and that the Gospel will be preached to every nation, tribe and tongue. All this is happening at a very fast rate.

There are many very aggressive self-interest groups who want to silence the voice of anything and anyone who is Christian. These people don't believe in God and don't want anyone else to either. They often campaign in the name of equality and tolerance, yet they show great inequality and intolerance towards Christians, the church and the Bible.

These are the Modern Pharisees who want everything done their way and don't want anyone else to think differently. Their voices are loud, proud and often sound reasonable – but scratch below the surface and there is real hatred and hostility there. It's not the people, of course, it's actually a spiritual battle. Remember that any Christian who hates people is wrong and hasn't fully understood the love of God or isn't fully living in the love of God. So we never hate people – Jesus tells us to love our enemies and when we're walking in his love, we can.

A Premier Radio survey in Summer 2017 found that 93% of Christians in the UK believed that Christianity is becoming marginalised.

Back in the time Jesus walked the earth, he faced opposition for helping others, for doing good and for saying he was the way to God. In our world today, many of these things are considered as 'hateful' or even crimes. But they're not!

God's Power denied but we need to demonstrate it

The worst thing about people denying God's power is that God is a restorer, healer, supporter, encourager and wants to help people – to bring them back to fullness and life and love. When Christians pray, people are healed – yet we're not allowed to pray in hospitals for patients. So we find that silencing Christians actually damages society and denies people the opportunity to be healed and made whole in every area of life! Just imagine the savings to the NHS, police, prison service, social services! Where God has moved in other countries, hospitals have been emptied and prisons closed down, such is the power of God. All this glorifies God.

Just like in the time of Jesus, the modern pharisees won't allow this and are more concerned about the rules than about people getting well !

Romans 15.18–19 – Yet I dare not boast about anything except what Christ has done through me, bringing the Gentiles to God by my message and by the way I worked among them. They were convinced by the power of miraculous signs and wonders and by the power of God's Spirit. In this way, I have fully presented the Good News of Christ from Jerusalem all the way to Illyricum

Paul tells us that the Gospel of Jesus fully preached is evidenced by and needs the power of miraculous signs and wonders from God's Holy Spirit in us. We need to be ready to step out in faith with God's power, presence and love – the world increasingly really needs the power of God that is in all believers in Jesus! Get out and let the light shine!

'Blasphemy'!

In Pakistan, there is a thing called the 'Blasphemy Law' which means that if you speak out against Islam (or someone says you did), the law takes very strong action against that person. They are rejected by their family, often they are killed by people (who mostly go unpunished) or are found guilty by the state.

Is it possible that in a different kind of way, our country is becoming a bit like this – but with the Modern Pharisees making the 'blasphemy' rules? It increasingly seems that (especially) as a Christian, if you oppose their 'blasphemy laws and rules' you will be punished.

If you're a Christian, you should be concerned that the Christian voice is being silenced by these modern pharisees who want to shut you up and stop you believing in God.

Some examples where Christians are feeling persecuted include:

- Christians removed from jobs, from courses, from Universities – or suspended.
- Christians businesses forced to close because they are forced to follow the agendas of others that would go against people's Christian principles or the Bible.
- Christians being arrested for preaching the Gospel in the streets.
- Christian businesses being targeted by activists and then told what they can and can't do, even where it goes against their beliefs
- Christianity being attacked in the public place, including many exaggerations about 'abuses' of Christianity, lies and many half-truths. Often the Christian voice is not heard.
- Many major news websites increasingly promoting an anti-Christian agenda, actively pushing other causes that Christians mostly would not support.
- Christians having laws and court judgments going against them in relation to prayer, their rights, their beliefs and the against the Bible.
- Christians have also suffered death threats and even attacks from those who oppose them.
- Christians are by far the most persecuted group in the world today. More Christians are being imprisoned, tortured, having property burned down, refused basic rights and being killed than ever before.
- Churches threatened with having to do things that are against the Bible.

So What Can We Do?

In spite of all these problems, did you know that the church in the UK and around the world is growing faster than it ever has in history? The church is also helping people more and more around society!

1. We pray



The Bible tells us to pray for everyone – but first we should pray for those in government and in responsibility – so that we can live peaceful lives and go about our business. And we pray for those who hate us!

We should pray for Godly government and for leaders who do the right thing for society and people. We can also pray that God would change or remove people who do evil.

We should pray that evil will be pushed back and that God will make things right. We pray that God's kingdom comes and God's will is done on earth as in heaven. We pray for 'revival' – that God would once again move in power so that millions will come to know him and that the nation will be turned back to God. And we ask God for our part in this.

2. We get informed

Find out what is happening and stay informed. There are plenty of sites keeping you up to date with what is happening against Christians.



We should also find out facts about the truth of the Bible and its truth. It wasn't just chucked together randomly. It isn't about God hating people or killing them, but constantly wanting people to know him and to do good to humanity. The Bible has prophecies that are perfectly true. No archaeological find has ever disproved the Bible but only proved it.

Christianity is the basis of our laws, prisons, schools, housing. Christians have made a massive positive difference in society through history and is the largest care and social services provider in the world today by far. Christians aren't going round killing people and even when those things happened, it was rarely as bad as people say, was sometimes done for good reason (protecting Europe from Islamists) and where people have abused things, it was done against the nature of Jesus.

The Bible is not anti-science – it is the basis for science. Religion does not harm society or people overall – it clearly benefits people as many studies have shown. A strong family unit and Christian principles strengthen the whole of society – Christian principles actually work. They help stop crime, breakdown, violence, fraud,

poverty. It gives people strong values, strong community, hope, help, care and a reason for living. Christians add a huge amount of value to a nation and do so because of Jesus. Is isn't just some small-minded self-help club! God doesn't want to bind people up in rules but set them free to live life to its fullest.

3. We can take action



Can you write to your MP about any concerns and ask them to protect the rights of Christians?

We hear a lot about hate crimes but very rarely about those against Christians!

Ask your MP to protect the rights of Christians in a world where we value equality and tolerance.

Can you financially support organisations supporting persecuted Christians?

4. Stay Strong



Don't back down in the face of what people say but in love, stay strong and keep speaking about God's truth and love.

Never react badly but love your enemies. This is the nature of Jesus.

Keep strong in the Bible and in the Word of God. Read your Bible, know God and do daily notes if you can to stay solid with God.

Know who God says you are – powerful, full of him and loved perfectly by God.

5. Go around doing good, healing the sick and pushing back evil



Don't get distracted by what others say but keep speaking God's Word, the Good News – in love, in words and in deeds.

Keep on helping the poor, loving people, reaching out to those in need, supporting good causes.

Christians are little 'mini Christs' so we should model Jesus and go round doing what he did! There's a great book by a guy called Robby Dawkins called 'Do What Jesus Did' and even if you don't buy it, the idea is a great one!

6. Get Involved in Leadership



Get involved in positions of leadership. At the University nearby, many Christians are involved in positions within the Student Union and elsewhere.

Get involved in leadership at school, at college, at Uni, at work and anywhere you can.

You can also go to places like Care For The Family and get trained in leadership.

Consider getting into politics, the media, local government and places where you can speak God's truth and love and have a positive influence for people and for God.

7. Remember God wins!



God has promised that his church will never be defeated. Every attempt by the enemy to silence God has never worked and never will. In fact the church is growing and growing. One French philosopher said that Christianity would be dead – now his house is used for printing Bibles. God's got a good sense of humour!

The Bible also tells us in Ephesians that (like the Hillsong song says) the enemy's been defeated. Jesus has already won – we're just in the days where things are winding up. When we see what's happening around us, we should never get discouraged or depressed or feel weighted down. God is doing loads of amazing things and will one day come back and make all things right. And he will reward you for being faithful.

God is a rewarder of those who seek him, obey him and love him and others. God loves us so we can love others so they will love him. So don't worry about the modern pharisees, keep living for God.