

Woe to You Pharisees!

Notes for 24 Sep

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Background

Matt	Mark	Luke	John
23:1-39			

Discussion

For many Christians and non-Christians, the term Pharisee is shorthand for hypocrite, and they are characterised by a slavish adherence to legalism. There are of course many New Testament texts that do say negative things about Pharisees, and when we interpret them, we need to realise two important issues: the difference between intra- and inter-group debates, and how generalised language stigmatises. The first we can illustrate with nationality, imagine a foreigner saying something offensive about your country. Now imagine someone from your country saying the same thing. The words of the foreigner can be seen as discrimination, whereas those of your countryperson are much more likely to be seen as political criticism. Your countryperson is allowed to say things about their own country that a foreigner is not. When Jesus or Paul criticise aspects of Judaism or some Jewish people, they are doing it as part of the group, but when Christians repeat those words, they are doing it from the outside. This helps understand why Jewish people like Jesus and Paul can say things, but when Christians repeat them they can be considered Judeophobic (this is term we use to refer to language, thought and actions that stigmatise or discriminate against Jewish people). But, from a more general point of view, there is an even bigger issue at play here: generalised language stigmatises. It's good practice to avoid generalising language whenever possible.

A really good way to make generalised language personal is Google autocomplete. Go to google.com, start typing a few words, and Google will give you common suggestions. Try it out with your own faith tradition. Type in things like:

- 'Why don't Adventists',
- 'Why are Adventists',
- 'Why Adventists'

and reflect on these generalised statements.

Do you see where they are coming from?

Do they reflect your faith identity and practice?

Pick one or two that are especially negative, and consider how these statements make you feel.

Now, read these New Testament texts and reflect how repeating them stigmatises (aspects of) Judaism and reinforces Judeophobic readings of the New Testament:

1. [Matthew 23:1–39](#)
2. [John 8:31–47](#)

What options do you see for interpreting these texts without reinforcing Judeophobia?

Some more food for thought

Does Adventism have any doctrines or statements that refer to Judaism or Israel?

How do they resonate with concerns raised here?

Some additional reading:

["Stereotyping Pharisees, A Christian Instinct in Need of Lament"](#) by Scot McKnight