

Sunday School Lesson

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believe as they did. They felt they were contaminating themselves if they associated with the people who did not follow the law in its most strict sense. What should be our attitude toward those who do not practice religion as we do?

2. The second characteristic was their legalism. They did not allow anyone to diverge from what they regarded as the true interpretation. This included not only the law as found in the first books of the Old Testament but also the oral tradition that had been handed down from the past.

In spite of this legalistic attitude, however, the interpretations of the Pharisees remained flexible.

3. The third characteristic was their openness to new ideas. They accepted as Scripture the works of the prophets as well as some other books of our present Old Testament.

Nowhere may the differences between Pharisees and Saddu-

ees be observed better than in their religious beliefs. The Pharisees believed (1) that God was leading men and nations toward the fulfillment of some divine purpose; (2) that there would be a resurrection and a future life; (3) that angels existed; (4) that in time the kingdom of David would be restored on earth; and (5) that a Messiah would be raised up to rule over Israel.

Note that it was not the Pharisees as a whole that Jesus condemned but only those who used their traditions to hinder the spiritual growth of men. It is likely that large numbers of Pharisees approved the message of Jesus.

The Sadducees

The third major party in the period between the Testaments was the Sadducees. (It should be made clear that there were a number of other parties as well, but limitations of space will not allow discussion of these.)

This party was the high priestly party. Its characteristics were

- these:
1. They supported the attitude of the high priests, who said that the religion should adapt itself to the Greek civilization. In modern terminology, we might say they supported the "appeasers."
 2. The Sadducees were the upper class economically, and the Pharisees were middle class.
 3. The Sadducees believed that the high priest was the final authority in interpreting the

law, whereas the Pharisees followed their own inclinations. The religious beliefs of the Sadducees may be contrasted with those of the Pharisees:

1. The Sadducees denied that God had a design in world events and believed every individual should work out his own destiny.
2. Their belief in the afterlife did not provide for rewards or punishments as did the Pharisees' belief. It was still the be-

lief in Sheol, a shadowy existence after death.

3. The Sadducees denied the belief in angels.
4. They rejected the belief in the re-establishment of David's kingdom at some future date.
5. The belief in a Messiah had declined among the Sadducees.

Among the religious Jews of the period between the Testaments, the most significant

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