

## Casuistry And Fanaticism

The Pharisees' Justifications

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Jesus reserved His sharpest criticism for the religious extremists of His day—the Pharisees and the Sadducees. We might call one the super-conservatives. We might call the other the super-liberals. Both groups were unbalanced in their doctrine and the lifestyles they attached to their beliefs. Both groups were guilty of self-righteousness and both groups were also guilty of hypocrisy.

This seems to me to be especially true of the Pharisees. The general public seemed to have favored the Pharisees, but perhaps this was because they appeared on the surface to live their religion. But of the two, I believe that the Pharisees received the most and the strongest of Jesus' criticisms. In fact, almost the entirety of Matthew 23 is devoted to His criticisms of them, this most conservative of the religious groups.

A number of years ago, a commentary I was reading labeled the Pharisees as casuists. At that time, I had no idea what a casuist was. Well, my *Reader's Digest Oxford Complete Word Finder Dictionary* says this regarding casuists: "A casuist is a person especially a theologian, who resolves problems of conscience, duty, and so forth, often with clever but false reasoning." They are persons drawn to extremes to justify themselves and to make a point in an argument. That is what a casuist is. He's drawn to extremes to justify himself and to make a point in an argument.

It is the idea of being drawn toward an extreme that I am interested in. Jesus, on one occasion, said that they were guilty of straining at gnats and swallowing camels. Today we might say they made much ado about nothing.

I particularly like Richard Plache's definition of a Pharisee. He was the second-year Bible teacher at Ambassador College, and I had him for one year. He said, "A Pharisee is a person who digs deeply into twigs, until the twig becomes more important than the tree that produced it."

Casuistry concerns the making of strenuous arguments with much energy over a minor point, while ignoring the larger issues that really do matter. The dangerous element in this is that, carnally, we slide into this frame of mind quickly and easily when making justification.

This subject came to mind as I was listening to a news broadcast over Charlotte's largest and most important radio station. What was the announcer talking about? He was talking about LeBron James' return to Cleveland, Ohio, to play in a basketball game. Now, it was not the sports announcer that was giving this news. It was the national and international news reporter, and here he was talking in such a manner that this was really big news, when in reality, it was only a fragment of news pertaining only to sports.

The specific subject concerned the reaction of the Cleveland basketball fans to this event. Every time that James touched the ball, either to dribble, to pass, or to shoot, he was *booed*. Can you feel the heat in their minds over this minor event? Why did they do this? Because LeBron James formerly played professionally for the Cleveland Cavaliers, but when his contract expired, he negotiated a new contract to play for the Miami team. LeBron did nothing illegal; he simply did what he believed was in his best interest, both in terms of money and his personal impact on the sport of basketball. But what he did, the Cleveland fans believed, was insult them personally and the city for abandoning them for Miami.

Now, what I'm getting at is this: How important is basketball or, for that matter, any sport, to life? While we were living in Colombia, I heard a man in a commentary say, "In the department store of Life, sports is the toy department." That is, it is not essential compared to food and clothing even. How important is it that a man can throw a ball through a steel hoop 10 feet off the ground? How important is it that the pride of the city of Cleveland needs to be defended by booing somebody or some other team or city?

Politicians are the most obvious experts at casuistry. They are well known to the public as people who excel at saying a great deal without saying anything of substance, in support of whatever it is that they are in support of at that given time. But how much truth that is really important do we hear from these people, especially from the Federal government in Washington? Instead what we hear is some arcane detail that means little or nothing to us, and the literal truth is more than likely avoided.

Yesterday, Rush Limbaugh made a salient comment by picking up on a statement by President Obama, made regarding the present unemployment figure. President Obama said, "We are going to have to get accustomed to a high unemployment figure because it is now the new normal." It was the "new normal" statement that Rush Limbaugh jumped on, because whether he spotted or not, here is casuistry. Here is justification. He basically stated that the Obama administration is following the pattern of doing the same thing in every avenue of life in the United States. Obama was stating that we are just going to have to accept lower standards in everything. "New normal" is Obama's

catchphrase, Obama's justification. "New normal" is President Obama's casuistry & work.

What is the "new normal" regarding morality? What is the "new normal" regarding multiculturalism? What is the "new normal" regarding marriage? What is the "new normal" regarding homosexuality? What is the "new normal" regarding political correctness? What is the "new normal" regarding worshipping the God that they are kicking out of American life? The anti-God crowd, the liberal academicians, the politicians, the corporate figures, and the theologians that Obama owes his political life to have strained at gnats produce new evil, immoral normacy in America, and now they want us to accept it and follow it.