Pharisees and bible cults

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Pharisees and Bible based Cults

A useful way to frame **Pharisees and Bible-based cults** is this:

They are not the same thing, but they often operate by the **same pattern**.

The Pharisees were a real Jewish sect in Second Temple Judaism. In the Gospels, Jesus rebukes many of them not because they cared about Scripture, but because they **used Scripture, tradition, status, and religious authority in a distorted way**—often binding others while not submitting to the weightier matters themselves. Matthew 23 is the clearest concentrated example of that pattern. They "say, and do not," bind "heavy burdens," love public religious honor, and cleanse outward appearance while inwardly being corrupt. John 5 and John 8 also show the deeper issue: they searched the Scriptures, yet would not come to the One to whom the Scriptures pointed; and they could weaponize religious claims while resisting truth itself.

A **Bible-based cult** usually does something similar, but in a more totalized form. It uses the Bible, often constantly, but in a closed control system. Scripture is not allowed to stand over the group; instead, the group's leader, framework, revelation-claims, or interpretive key stand over Scripture. That produces several recurring marks:
exclusive truth-claims, manipulation of context, control through fear or shame, outsider/insider pressure, selective enforcement, and loyalty to the system being treated as loyalty to God. These are common warning signs identified by Christian counter-cult ministries and pastoral resources.

So the connection is this:

Pharisee-pattern = religious hypocrisy, authority-protection, Scripture-handling without true submission, burdening others, outward purity with inward corruption.

Bible-based cult-pattern = that same basic distortion, but hardened into an organized control structure that uses the Bible as legitimizing language while shifting functional authority to the group or leader.

In that sense, many Bible-based cults are **Pharisaical in mechanism** even if they are not historically Pharisees.

A clean contrast:

- **Healthy biblical faith**: Scripture governs the teacher.
- **Pharisaical religion**: the teacher/class system filters Scripture and burdens the people.
- **Bible-based cult**: the leader/system effectively replaces Scripture while still quoting it.

The key danger is not “using lots of Bible.” The danger is **using the Bible inside a self-sealing authority system**.

Christ’s rebukes help identify that pattern:
they strain at externals while missing justice, mercy, and faithfulness; they elevate human tradition over God’s command; they shut up the kingdom against others; and they build religious status through control. That is why Pharisee study can be very useful when analyzing cult dynamics.

A concise peg:

Pharisees show the pattern; Bible-based cults systematize it.

And another:

The issue is not Bible language, but Bible language under corrupted authority.

Your uploaded file is also relevant to the broader pattern of selective enforcement and perceived legitimacy, because it distinguishes between what appears administratively valid and what is actually grounded in rightful authority. That same distinction can help when evaluating religious systems that claim biblical legitimacy while operating by coercion or double standards.

If you want, I can build this next as a **node-style comparison chart**:
Pharisees / legalism / sectarian control / Bible-based cults / marks of healthy biblical authority.

The Pharisees based their religious "system" on the pentatuch, and some sects included the Psalms, Proverbs, Prophets, and historical books. Jesus quotes the old testament regularly, and in Luke 24, Jesus says the old testament scriptures were about him.

Yes. And that is exactly why the issue was **not** that the Pharisees lacked Scripture.

The issue was that they had the Scriptures, read the Scriptures, taught from the Scriptures, appealed to the Scriptures, and yet did not arrive at the right end of the Scriptures.

That is the sharp point.

The Pharisees were not “non-biblical” in the simple sense. Their system was **Bible-based**, at least in source appeal. They grounded themselves especially in Moses, and more broadly within Israel’s Scriptures. Jesus also constantly quoted those same Scriptures. So the conflict was not:

Bible vs no Bible

but rather:

right reading of Scripture vs corrupted reading of Scripture
Scripture as witness to Christ vs Scripture used to sustain a religious system

That is why Luke 24 matters so much. Jesus says that "Moses, and the prophets, and the psalms" spoke concerning him. That means the Old Testament was never an end in itself. It was witness, preparation, pattern, promise, prophecy, and testimony unto Christ. So if a group can quote Moses but miss Christ, then the mere use of biblical text does not prove that the system is sound.

That is one of the strongest lessons from the Pharisees.

They had:

- the text
- the language
- the categories
- the traditions of interpretation
- the authority structure
- the public reputation for religion

and yet Jesus says,
"Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me. And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life." John 5:39–40.
And in Luke 24, he opens the Scriptures to show that they spoke of him.
And in Matthew 23, he exposes the contradiction between scriptural profession and corrupted practice.

So the Pharisees become a very important pattern for understanding Bible-based error:

A system may be:

- text-heavy
- Scripture-quoting
- covenant-language using
- morally serious in appearance
- highly structured
- highly traditional

and still be wrong at the center.

Why?

Because the center can shift from:

- God's intent
- mercy
- truth

- faith
- the weightier matters
- the witness of Scripture to Christ

to:

- identity preservation
- status
- control
- selective enforcement
- outward markers
- interpretive monopoly

So yes, the Pharisees were Bible-based. That is what makes the warning so serious.

A false or corrupted religious system often does **not** reject Scripture outright. It more often:

- selects Scripture
- filters Scripture
- re-centers Scripture
- mis-aims Scripture
- uses Scripture in service of the system

That is closer to the Pharisee pattern.

A clean peg would be:

The Pharisees did not fail because they had too much Scripture, but because they misread Scripture's goal.

And another:

A Bible-based system is not safe merely because it is Bible-based; the question is whether Scripture is being allowed to testify to Christ, or being used to protect the system.

That is why your observation is important:
Jesus and the Pharisees both stood on the ground of the Old Testament Scriptures, but they did not stand there the same way.

Jesus read Moses, Psalms, and the Prophets as a unified witness to God's purpose fulfilled in him.
The Pharisaic system could read the same Scriptures and still convert them into a structure of burden, status, and resistance.

So the distinction is not:
uses the Bible / does not use the Bible

It is:
uses the Bible toward God's revealed end / uses the Bible to reinforce a corrupted religious order

That is one of the clearest bridges between Pharisees and later Bible-based cults or sectarian distortions.

Because the deception is stronger when the words are biblical but the governing center is wrong.

A concise form:

Pharisaic error is not the absence of Scripture, but Scripture handled under a misplaced center.

And the strongest form:

The same Scriptures that testify of Christ can be used by a religious system that refuses Christ.

That is a very sobering peg.

Paul references the "scriptures" as well. When the New Testament is the "scripture" then it leaves what Jesus and Paul are saying. The Scripture is "a writing, character, inscription; to write, or to cut". Later adopted as the sacred writings of the bible. However, whenever the religious system replaces the old testament with the new testament, that is the first test. Second test is to see if God receiving glory is the objective; even Jesus talked about all things being for the glory of God. Third test is promises and covenents, and the working of Ephesians 3:10. Then Psalms 110, the most quoted Psalm in the new testament. Then original sin, separation from first Adam, and life in 2nd Adam, Jesus, and then the response and accountability of each person to turn (Jesus told the story of a father waiting, who did not force his child to come back, but rather, the son had to make the decision to come back, and not on the sons terms, but the Fathers terms, and the father gladly recieves the repentant son. There is little more to the story, and if the doctrine strays from these points, then what was Jesus talking about, and why did Jesus tell a story that was unaplicable.

Yes. You are identifying a much stronger test than merely asking whether a group "uses the Bible."

Because many systems use the Bible.

The real question is whether they are aligned with the **scriptural frame Jesus and the apostles themselves were using**.

And your first point is very important:

When Jesus and Paul speak of "the scriptures," they are speaking about the sacred writings already recognized in their day—what we call the Old Testament. That does not diminish the New Testament; it clarifies the interpretive order. The New Testament is not meant to erase or replace the Old Testament, but to testify to fulfillment, unveiling, and realization of what was already written. Jesus says Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms speak of him in Luke 24. Paul says the gospel was promised beforehand in the holy Scriptures, and that the Scriptures were able to make one wise unto salvation.

So your first test is sound in this sense:

A religious system is suspect when it functionally **detaches itself from the Old Testament witness** and acts as though the New Testament floats independently, because that breaks the frame Jesus and Paul used.

More precisely, I would phrase it this way:

The New Testament does not replace the Scriptures Jesus and Paul appealed to; it reveals their fulfillment and true center.

That keeps the order clear.

Your second test is also strong:
Is the glory of God the objective?

Because if a system is ultimately about:

- preserving itself
- proving its exclusivity
- exalting its teacher
- securing control
- creating identity through superiority
- rewarding human pride

then something is already off-center.

Jesus consistently spoke and acted toward the Father's glory, and the apostolic framework is doxological, not merely institutional. Ephesians 3 is especially important because it situates redemption in a cosmic purpose: that now unto principalities and powers might be made known by the church the manifold wisdom of God. That means doctrine is not merely about private correctness; it is bound to God's purpose, God's wisdom, God's glory, and the display of His counsel.

Your third test—**promises and covenants**—is also foundational.

Because once covenant is severed, Scripture gets flattened into:

- moral sayings
- proof texts
- institutional rules
- selective doctrines detached from redemptive structure

But Jesus and the apostles are constantly working from promise, fulfillment, oath, covenant, inheritance, seed, kingdom, priesthood, and Davidic enthronement. Psalm 110 becomes crucial here because it ties together lordship, enthronement, priesthood, enemies, rule, and divine appointment, which is why it is quoted so often in the New Testament.

Then your Adam-Christ axis is also central.

If a system gets fuzzy on:

- original sin
- death through Adam
- condemnation in Adam
- need for transfer from Adam to Christ
- life in the second Adam
- accountability of the hearer

then it is drifting away from a core apostolic structure. Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15 are not side issues; they are load-bearing.

And your point about response matters too.

The parable of the prodigal son does not depict forced return. The son comes to himself, arises, and returns to the father; and the father receives him. The story does not support autonomous self-definition, nor mechanical coercion. It presents return, confession, repentance, and reception within the father's household order. That makes it a very useful test against systems that either remove accountability or override response altogether.

So your framework could be stated like this:

A religious system should be tested by whether it preserves the scriptural order Jesus and Paul used:
the Old Testament as witness fulfilled in Christ; God's glory as the governing end; promises and covenants as the structural backbone; Ephesians 3:10 as the cosmic purpose; Psalm 110 as a key enthronement-priesthood text; Adam-to-Christ transfer as the anthropology and salvation axis; and personal response to the Father's call on the Father's terms, not man's. When a doctrine drifts from these anchors, it risks becoming a Bible-using system that has lost the governing frame of Scripture itself.

A tighter peg:

The test is not whether a system quotes the Bible, but whether it keeps the scriptural frame Jesus and Paul were actually using.

And another:

If the doctrine loses Moses, the Psalms, the Prophets, covenant, God's glory, Adam-to-Christ transfer, and accountable return to the Father, it has likely lost the center while retaining religious language.

Your uploaded file also fits your broader concern about distinguishing true grounding from mere system-recognition: a framework can appear administratively coherent while lacking rightful basis. That same distinction applies in religion when a system has internal consistency yet departs from the actual scriptural center.

The next story by Jesus is Luke 16:25, 29-31 25 But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. 29 Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. 30 And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. 31And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead. Each person is accountable for what they hear, know and do.

Yes. That passage strongly supports your point.

Luke 16 does several things at once.

First, it reinforces that **Moses and the prophets were sufficient witness** for accountability. Abraham does not say, "They need a new system," or "They need more spectacular proof," but, "They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them." That is very important. It means the issue is not lack of revelation, but refusal of revelation rightly heard.

Second, it shows that **evidence by itself does not solve rebellion**. The rich man thinks a greater sign would produce repentance. Abraham says no: if they will not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead. So the problem is not merely informational deficiency. It is resistance at the level of heart, will, and response.

Third, yes, it supports your statement that **each person is accountable for what they hear, know, and do**. In the logic of the passage, the rich man's brothers are responsible because they already have witness. They are not being judged for lacking access, but for refusing what has been given.

That fits your earlier framework very well:

- **Test 1:** Do they hear Moses and the prophets?
- **Test 2:** Does the doctrine move toward God's glory rather than self-justifying religion?
- **Test 3:** Does it preserve covenant, promise, fulfillment, and accountability?

Luke 16 especially strengthens the accountability side.
It says, in effect:

Revelation received creates responsibility.
Hearing refused deepens guilt.
Signs do not cure a heart that rejects God's witness.

It also connects directly to the Pharisee issue, because in Luke 16 Jesus is speaking in a context where the Pharisees are present and are described as covetous. The problem is not that they had no Bible; the problem is that they heard selectively and justified themselves.

So a strong peg here would be:

Accountability is measured against received witness, not demanded spectacle.

And another:

If they hear not Moses and the prophets, the problem is not lack of proof, but resistance to the witness already given.

And a third:

Each person is accountable before God for how he responds to the light he has received.

That fits Luke 16 very cleanly.

These two stories do not mention inability, or deafness to spiritual things, or destiny, but rather, opportunity, and in that culture, they chose not to listen, investigate, or learn, unto rightstanding. Ezekiel 18 is known to the Israeli people, they know, and live as they chose.

Yes. Read at face value, those passages press **accountability in the presence of witness**, not inability as the main point.

In Luke 15, the prodigal is not portrayed as a puppet, nor as one constitutionally unable to return. He is wayward, wasteful, self-ruined, then "came to himself," arose, and returned. The father receives him, but the son still must come back on the father's terms.

In Luke 16, the brothers are not described as lacking access, lacking revelation, or being excluded from hearing. Abraham says, "They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them." The burden falls on refusal to hear, not on absence of capacity. And when the rich man asks for a greater sign, Abraham does not answer, "They cannot." He answers that they **will not be persuaded** if they do not hear Moses and the prophets. That points toward moral resistance, not lack of available witness.

Your Ezekiel 18 connection is strong here. That chapter repeatedly presses personal responsibility: the son is not condemned for the father's sins if he turns from them; the wicked

man who turns shall live; God says He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but calls for turning and living. The emphasis is on conduct, turning, refusal, and accountability before God's judgments.

So your synthesis can be stated like this:

These passages emphasize that people had witness, knew the covenantal framework, and were responsible for how they responded. The stress falls on hearing, refusing, turning, and living—not on an abstract doctrine of inability. In that culture, they had Moses, the prophets, covenant history, prophetic warnings, and categories like those in Ezekiel 18. Therefore the issue is not portrayed as lack of opportunity, but failure to listen, investigate, learn, and turn unto right standing before God.

A concise peg:

The stories emphasize refused witness, not missing capacity.

And another:

They were not depicted as lacking revelation, but as failing to heed revelation already given.

And Ezekiel 18 gives you a very clean reinforcement:

Turn, and live is the burden there, not "you were never addressed."

This is a core peg, God says He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked… the reasoning of a false doctrine, regarding this verse, might be, well if God is sovereign, then the wicked would not perish, however, this puts man's interpretation on what sovereign means, which is influenced by more incorrect doctrine, and ultimately the Bible then, in the false belief system roots from sovereign (or control); but if the Bible incorporates promise and covenant, then God can be sovereign AND allow free will by honoring covenant. This covenant honoring aligns with Gods very name, the I AM covenant God YHWH. Jesus was sent to cure the covenant problem, not through continued rebellion, but through being in Jesus, and living in love. To stay in rebellion, is to choose self sustaining life. To choose rule following alone, is to determine self rule on religious metrics; to be in Gods plan and promise, is eternal life with God.

Yes. That is a major peg.

The false system often makes **"sovereignty" the controlling starting point**, and then forces the rest of Scripture to fit that definition. But once that happens, the Bible is no longer being read from its own covenantal structure. It is being read from a philosophical control-grid.

So when God says He has **no pleasure in the death of the wicked**, a false doctrine may respond:

“If God is sovereign in the sense we define sovereignty, then whatever happens must be exactly what He positively wills in the same way, therefore the wicked perish because that is the direct desired outcome.”

But that response is not simply reading the verse. It is **overriding the verse with a prior system-definition**.

Ezekiel 18 does not sound like God is delighting in wicked destruction. It sounds like God is calling, warning, reasoning, and pressing toward turning:
“Repent, and turn yourselves… why will ye die?” and “I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth.” That is covenant language, judicial language, and relational language all at once.

So your distinction is important:

God can be sovereign **without** sovereignty meaning mechanical control of every moral response in the way some systems define it.

If Scripture is read through **promise and covenant**, then sovereignty includes:

- rightful authority
- faithfulness to His own word
- integrity in judgment
- real warning
- real promise
- real accountability
- real appeal
- real response

That is a much more biblical frame than flattening everything into control.

Your wording is strong:

God can be sovereign and allow free will by honoring covenant.

I would tighten it just a little:

God’s sovereignty does not require the cancellation of meaningful human response; it is fully consistent with His covenant faithfulness, righteous rule, and truthful dealing with man.

That preserves your point while staying close to the language of Scripture.

And yes, this aligns with the divine name and character.
YHWH is not presented merely as abstract force or naked control, but as the covenant God—faithful, self-consistent, promise-keeping, righteous, merciful, and true. His dealings with Israel are saturated with oath, covenant, warning, patience, appeal, and consequence.

So in your framework, the false doctrine does this:

- starts with an imposed definition of sovereignty
- reinterprets warnings as only apparent
- reinterprets appeals as non-genuine
- reinterprets covenant language through determinism
- reinterprets accountability through inability
- and then makes Scripture serve the system

Whereas your covenant frame does this:

- begins with God's revealed character
- honors promise and covenant
- takes warnings seriously
- takes invitations seriously
- takes accountability seriously
- keeps God truthful in what He says
- and lets sovereignty mean what Scripture shows, not merely what a system demands

Your Jesus statement also fits your center:

Jesus was sent to cure the covenant problem
not by endorsing rebellion,
not by validating self-life,
not by mere outward rule-keeping,
but by bringing people into life in Him.

That is strong.

Then your three-path contrast is very clean:

- **To stay in rebellion** is to choose self-sustaining life apart from God.
- **To choose rule-following alone** is to attempt self-rule by religious metrics.
- **To be in God's promise and plan** is eternal life with God in Christ.

That is a powerful triad.

A tightened version:

To remain in rebellion is to persist in self-life.
To rest in rule-following alone is to seek self-justification by religious measure.
To enter God's promise is to receive life in Christ through covenant fulfillment, love, and faithful union with Him.

A few strong pegs from this section:

False doctrine roots Scripture in control; true doctrine roots Scripture in covenant.

God's sovereignty is not threatened by covenant faithfulness.

"No pleasure in the death of the wicked" must be allowed to speak as written.

Jesus came to resolve the covenant problem, not to validate rebellion or sanctify self-rule.

Rebellion is self-life; religious self-rule is self-life refined; life in Christ is covenant life with God.

And perhaps the strongest single peg:

The Bible does not root in abstract control, but in the covenant faithfulness of YHWH.

Your uploaded file also parallels this distinction well: a system may claim authority or appear internally enforceable while lacking rightful grounding. That same danger appears when theology substitutes an imposed system-definition for God's own revealed covenant character.