

Jesus's conflict with the Pharisees

Matthew 23

19 October 2025





What did Jesus think of the Pharisees?

Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, “The teachers of religious law and the Pharisees are the official interpreters of the law of Moses. So, practice and obey whatever they tell you, ...

What did Jesus think of the Pharisees?

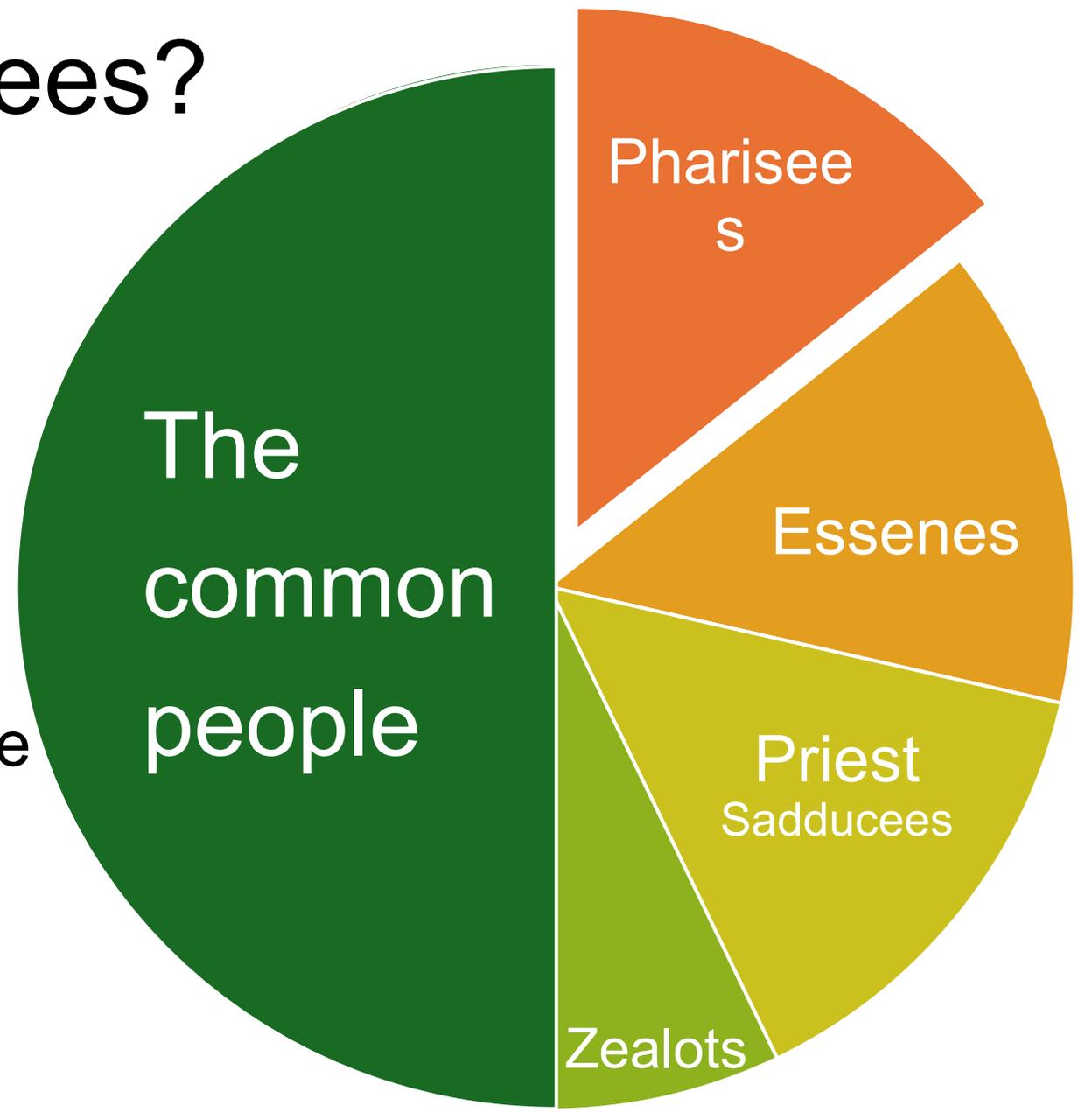
...but don't follow their example. For they don't practice what they teach. They crush people with unbearable religious demands and never lift a finger to ease the burden...
What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! (23:13, also 15, 16, 23, 25, 27, 29) For you shut the door of the Kingdom of Heaven in people's faces. You won't go in yourselves, and you don't let others enter either.



Who are the Pharisees?

Lay people committed to

- Service of YHWHY
- Faithfulness to Torah
- Oral traditions
- Purity rules
- God will act, but so must we
- Holiness of priests
- Waiting for God's Kingdom





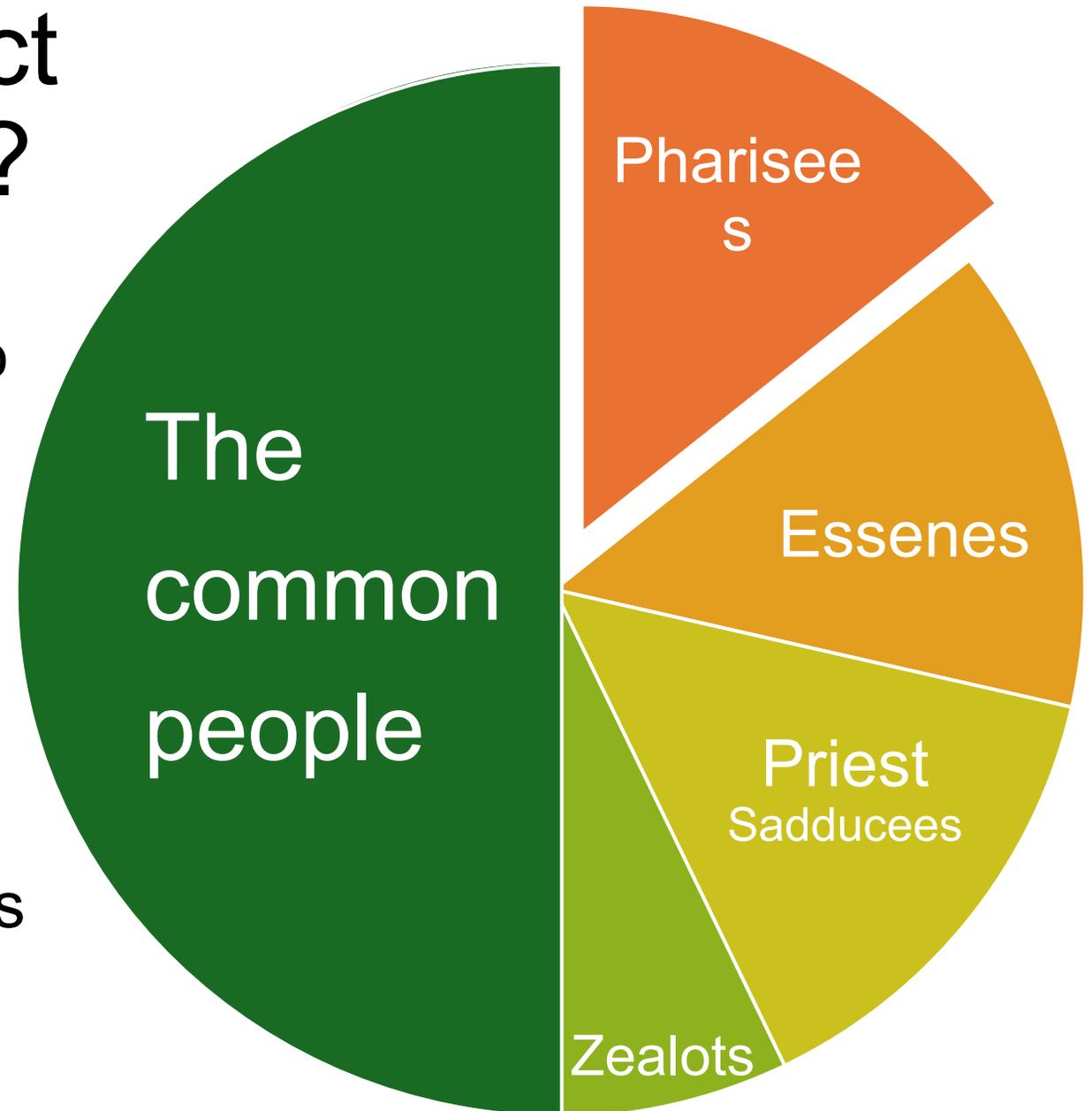
Why Jesus's conflict with the Pharisees?

Sadducees in Jerusalem trying to manage Rome

Essenes in the desert waiting for God to smite the Romans

Zealots wanted to murder Romans

Pharisees in the towns and villages seeking to influence God's people towards God's ways





The Pharisee's Agenda for Israel

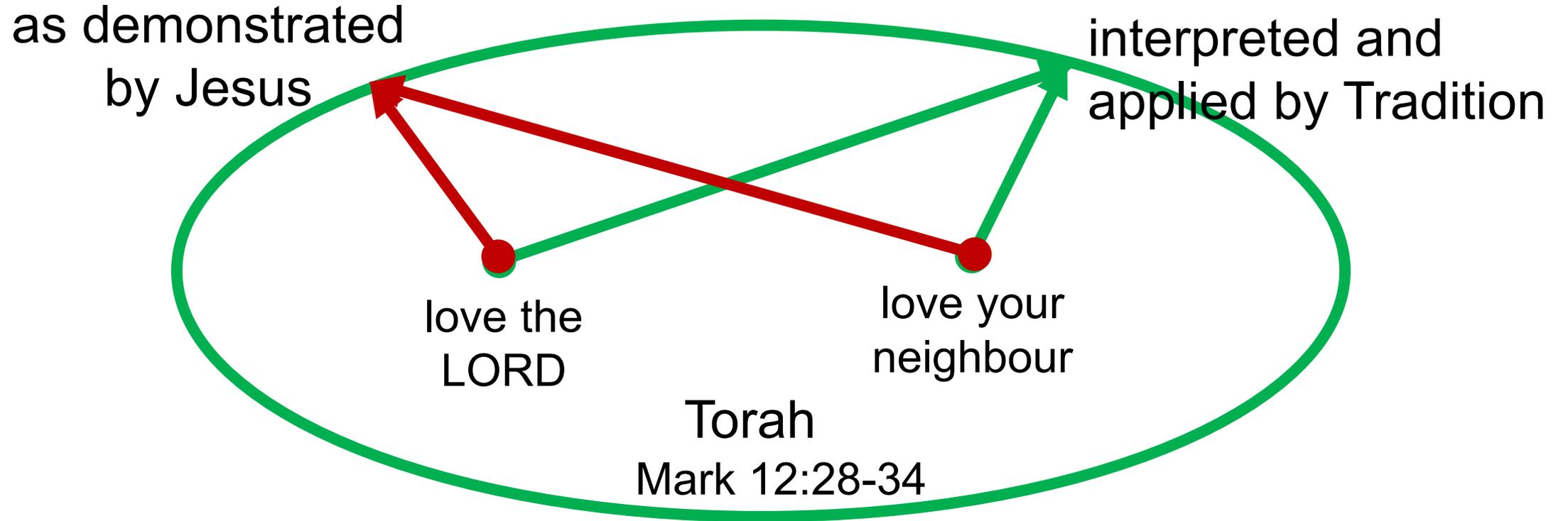
if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples... but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the Israelites.

(Exodus 19:5-6)

The Pharisees are “a Jewish renewal movement, seeking to draw Israel towards the condition that would hasten its restoration before God and its elevation over the surrounding nations.” (NT Wright)

IF all of Israel would keep all of the Torah for just one day [Sabbath]
THEN the Lord would come. (Rabbinic Proverb)

The Pharisees problem with Jesus

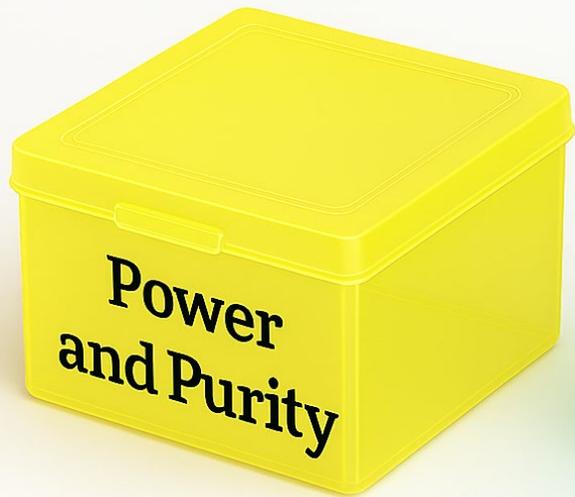


And I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit in you.

Ezekiel 36:26-27

The Pharisees problem with Jesus

The problem was not that a Messiah had arrived, it was that the wrong sort of Messiah had arrived.



Fundamentally, their problem was that they could not recognise God in the teachings and actions of Jesus.

- Power for another
- Shared Purity
- Inclusion





Beware the yeast of the Pharisees

It is NOT that we love God more than the Pharisees did. It is NOT that the Pharisees believed their legalism would save them or that they were overcommitted to living lives of holiness. It is NOT that the Pharisees were religious hypocrites and we're not.

IT IS that **the Pharisees did not recognise God in the teaching and actions of Jesus**. Their God had got locked in a box of traditional interpretations and practices and Jesus and his kingdom was too unexpected for them.

Beware the yeast of the Pharisees

What makes a church a church is faithfulness to Jesus, not holding rigidly to well intentioned tradition.

Revelation: Jesus is the visible image of the invisible God. (Col 1:15)

Discipleship: Holiness is being and living like Jesus. (Rom 8:29)

Church: an open table for the marginalized and excluded. (Luke 14:15-24)

The only real test of a church is,
would Jesus – or the Pharisees – make a better member of this church?