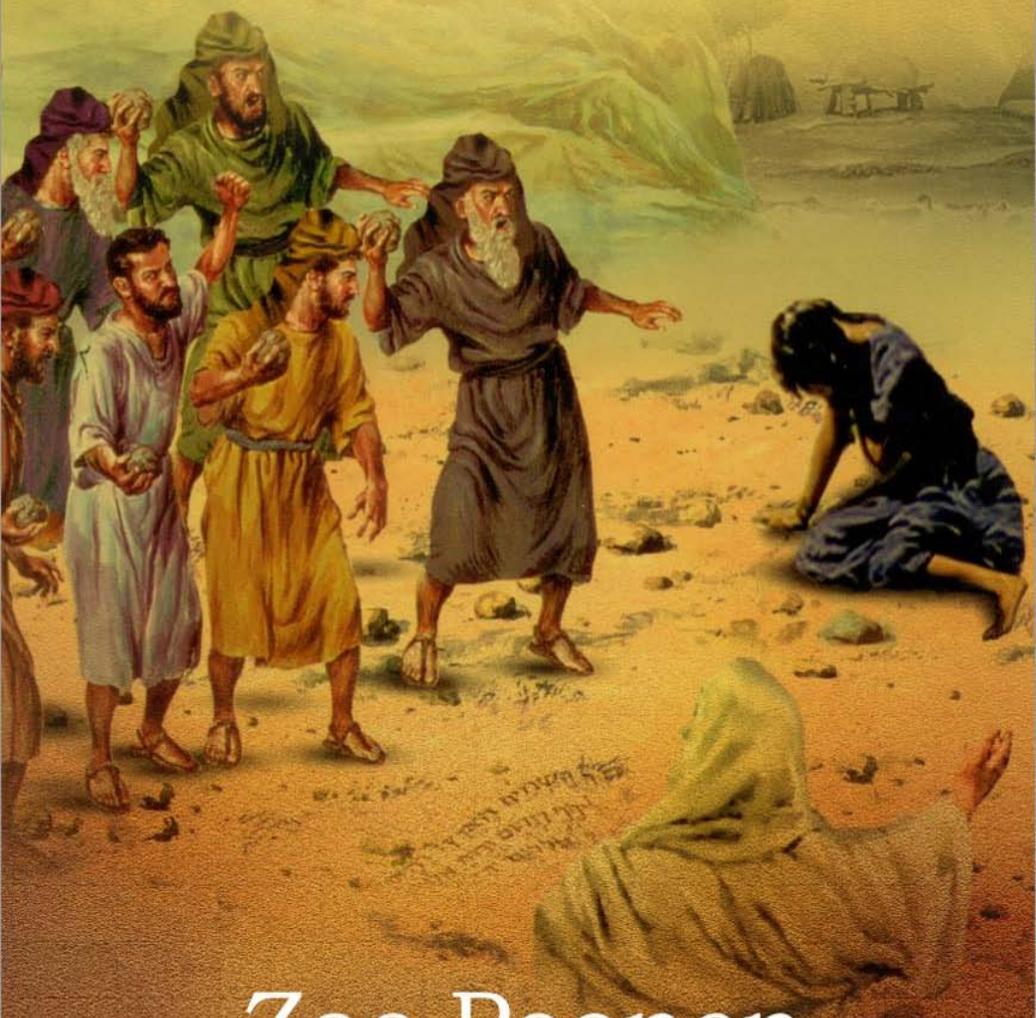


Fifty Marks *of* Pharisees



Zac Poonen

FIFTY MARKS OF PHARISEES

by

Zac Poonen

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About the Book

Introduction

In the gospels we read of three leavens that Jesus warned people against:

1. The leaven of Herod (*Mark 8:15*)
2. The leaven of the Sadducees (*Matthew 16:6*)
3. The leaven of the Pharisees (*Matthew 16:6*)

These represent three types of Christians.

The leaven of King *Herod* was worldliness. In *Mark 6:20*, we read that Herod enjoyed listening to John the Baptist. But two verses later, we read that he also enjoyed watching Salome dance (who was probably scantily dressed and dancing in a sexually provocative way). There are Christians like that today, who can enjoy listening to a powerful sermon on Sunday morning and then enjoy watching a filthy movie the same afternoon. Herod enjoyed listening to John the Baptist because John was a fiery preacher unlike the boring Pharisees. But enjoying listening to a fiery prophet doesn't mean that one is spiritually minded. Worldly Christians are *not* usually hypocrites like the Pharisees. They enjoy worldly entertainment and don't hide the fact that they enjoy it.

The leaven of the *Sadducees* was false doctrine. They were liberal in their beliefs. They did not believe in angels, or miracles or the resurrection or the spirit

world. There are Christians like that today who are “*cessationists*”. They don’t believe that God does any miracles today and they don’t believe that the supernatural gifts of the Holy Spirit are available to Christians today.

The leaven of the *Pharisees* was primarily hypocrisy. They were doctrinal fundamentalists and they were righteous in their external lives. Jesus Himself gave them a certificate in these two areas (*Matthew 23:3, 25*). They tithed, prayed and fasted regularly, and kept the external commandments of the Law and even engaged in missionary work. There are Christians today who do all these things but who are still like those *Pharisees*.

Some Christians could have a mixture of all of these three leavens.

From the above description, one would imagine that Jesus’ greatest conflict would have been with the followers of Herod or the Sadducees. But it was not so. His greatest conflict was with the fundamentalist Pharisees who preached holiness! And it was the Pharisees of all people, who were most eager and determined to crucify Jesus.

Today in Christendom, the Sadducees and Herodians are not as dangerous as the Pharisees. A Herodian may be going to hell. But he cannot lead others astray, for it is obvious to everyone that he is a worldly person. As for the liberal Sadducee, no-one is likely to be deceived into imagining that he is spiritual, when he does not believe in miracles or even in the resurrection from the dead.

The most dangerous person in today’s Christendom (as in Jesus’ time) is the Pharisee, who has all his

doctrines right, and who preaches “*holiness*”. But his “*holiness*” is a legalistic holiness produced by laws and rules. And his “*righteousness*” lacks the “*the joy and peace of the Holy Spirit*” (*Romans 14:17*). Such a man is dangerous because he can mislead Christians into a false holiness.

It is important therefore, for us to understand the characteristics of Pharisees. Not much is written about the characteristics of Herod’s followers or of the Sadducees apart from what I have already mentioned. But when it comes to the Pharisees, a great deal is written about them in the gospels. So God must be wanting us to study their characteristics.

All believers whose doctrines are fundamental and who are pursuing after holiness are in danger of becoming Pharisees – without even knowing it. Since most of us fall into that category, let us approach this study with deep humility.

There are at least *fifty characteristics* of Pharisees that I have discovered in the gospels. If even one of them fits us, then we are Pharisees, even if we don’t have the other 49 characteristics. This is not a comprehensive list. If you look into your own life, you may discover some other characteristics that are not mentioned in the Bible.

The spirit of the Pharisee is diametrically opposed to the Spirit of Christ. That is why it is so serious. Just as we would not want an atom of the spirit of hell in us, we should not want an atom of the spirit of the Pharisee in us either.

One primary mark of God’s blessing is that the Holy Spirit gives us light on ourselves. If we do not progressively get light on the un-Christlike areas

in our life, we are not really being blessed by God. Health and wealth are *not* the marks of God's blessing, because many unbelievers have both of these – even more than most believers.

When God shows us areas of un-Christlikeness in our lives, He wants us to cleanse ourselves from them (*2 Corinthians 7:1*), so that we can partake of His Divine nature. Thus our personal life, family life and church life will become brighter and brighter. We will then be liberated from legalism and only then will be able to fly like the eagles in the sky. We will remain earth-bound if we do not see “*the Pharisee within us*”.

God gives us His word so that we can have light on *ourselves* – and not for us to see Phariseeism *in others*. It is only when we see Phariseeism within ourselves and cleanse ourselves from it, that we can be useful to God in His work.

CHARACTERISTIC 1

Pharisees glory in their connection to godly men

“Do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham for our father’” (Matthew 3:9).

A Pharisee knows he is not godly himself, and so he seeks to be associated with “Brother X”, who has a reputation as a godly man, so that he can claim godliness by association. There are many carnal Christians today who glory that they are members of a church that is led by a man who has a reputation for godliness. They live off that reputation, even though they have zero holiness themselves. Pharisees mingle with godly people and imagine that they are holy too.

You can be part of a very good church and yet go to hell, if there is un-repented sin in your life, or if you have a grudge against another. If you imagine that God will condone and ignore all your backbiting and evil speaking, just because you are a part of a good church, you are mistaken. You will get a big surprise in the day of judgement. Maybe you were saved once upon a time. But you are probably lost today. So don't ever glory in your connection with godly people.

CHARACTERISTIC 2

Pharisees glory in external righteousness

Jesus said, "Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5:20)

What did Jesus mean here? Do we have to fast, pray and tithe more than the Pharisees did?

Jesus was not talking about *quantity* at all – but *quality*. He was saying that the quality of our righteousness must be far superior to that of the Pharisees if we want to enter God's kingdom. And He went on to explain this in the remaining verses of the chapter. The righteousness of the Pharisees was only *external*. They gloried in their obedience to the laws of God *on the outside*. But Jesus said that it was inward righteousness that God looked for – not just avoiding external murder, but avoiding inward anger as well; not just avoiding external adultery, but avoiding inward lusting after women as well.

Jesus said that anger and sinful sexual lust were so serious that a person could go to hell for these sins (*Matthew 5:22, 29, 30*). Most Christians do not take these inward sins seriously – because they are Pharisees. They glory in their *external* testimony

before men. There could be other areas too, where your righteousness is only on the outside. “*Man looks on the outside, but God looks at the heart*” (1 Samuel 16:7). What other believers think of your spirituality has no value before God. He looks at your thoughts, motives and attitudes. Don’t glory in your reputation before people, if your heart is unclean.

CHARACTERISTIC 3

Pharisees do not mingle with sinful people

The Pharisees said to Jesus disciples, “Why is your Teacher eating with sinners?” (Matthew 9:11).

Pharisees will mingle only with their own crowd of “*holy*” Pharisees. They criticised even Jesus for mingling with sinners. Is your holiness one that prevents you from mingling with your unconverted relatives? It is true that we can find *fellowship* only with God’s children. But we can be *friendly* with all. Jesus was known as the “*Friend of sinners*”. If you want to be like Jesus, you must be a friend of sinners.

A Pharisee will not attend the wedding reception of an unconverted relative, because he feels he will be polluted thereby. Jesus however would have gladly attended an unconverted relative’s wedding reception. He went to the homes of sinners, where they probably had dancing and drinking going on. He would share the gospel with those sinners. Contact with them didn’t defile Him because His righteousness was *inward*. It is true that He spent most of His time with His disciples. But He spent a lot of time talking to sinful people. How can we win sinners to the Lord if we are not friendly with them?

A good question you can ask yourself is this: How many people in your church were brought to the Lord by you? Even though you may have been in your church for 20 years, you may not have brought a single person to Christ. Don't you think this indicates something about your life? Many elders too have not brought a single person to Christ in many, many years. The reason could be that they are Pharisees. If you honestly acknowledge your Phariseeism in this area, God can use you to bring others to Him.

CHARACTERISTIC 4

Pharisees are ascetics

*“Why do the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?”
(Matthew 9:14).*

Pharisees forced people to fast and pray. They emphasised bodily disciplines like fasting *as a means of becoming spiritual* and they boasted about it. Jesus fasted even more than the Pharisees. But He did not fast *in order to be holy*. He fasted *because He was holy*. And Jesus did not boast about His fasting like the Pharisees. Neither did He ever force people to fast – not when He was on earth and not today. Fasting has value before God only when it is totally voluntary. Otherwise it becomes a dead work.

People of all religions practise some forms of asceticism, like fasting. Some even stop having sexual relations with their wives in order to be holy. But that is not the way for a Christian to be holy. The mark of a perfect man is not that he disciplines himself in matters of food and sex, but that he can control his tongue (*James 3:2*). Then we must control our thoughts and our eyes.

Jesus could enjoy a good meal. They called Him “*a gluttonous man*” (*Luke 7:34*). His very first miracle

was making extra wine at a wedding! That looked like one of the most unnecessary miracles that Jesus ever did. Those guests had already drunk so much wine; and Jesus made 600 litres of wine for a wedding party of perhaps 200 guests – which would mean that He made 3 litres of wine per person!! What was the need to make so much wine for them? We would have thought that Jesus' first miracle should have been a more "*spiritual*" miracle like raising the dead! One reason why He did this miracle was because He came to demolish a religion of externals that taught, "Don't touch this. Don't taste that", etc.

I have met Christians (in certain denominations especially), who subtly mention their periods of fasting in their conversation. They say words like, "I just want to share with you a precious word the Lord gave me when I was on a 21-day fast recently". Their main point there is to impress you with the fact that they fasted for 21 days. All their other words are secondary. Jesus however told us never to let anyone know when we fasted. But Pharisees boast about their asceticism.

There is certainly an important place for discipline in eating and sleeping and sexual matters in the Christian life. But this is definitely not a matter that we should tell others about or glory in.

CHARACTERISTIC 5

Pharisees are very critical of others in small matters

"The Pharisees said to Jesus, 'Look, Your disciples do what is not lawful to do on a Sabbath.'" (Matthew 12:2)

The Pharisees knew that the Law permitted the Israelites to pluck grain to eat, when they walked through anyone's field. But what they questioned here was why the disciples were doing this "*work*" on a Sabbath day. Pharisees are very critical of people in small matters. In *Matthew 15:2*, they asked Jesus why His disciples didn't wash their hands ritually, as taught by the traditions of the elders. Pharisees are always watching other believers for some small thing to find fault with.

If you are an elder brother and you are like that, then it is likely that your church too is full of Pharisees – because the majority of people in any church usually develop the habits of their elder. We see that in *Revelation chapters 2 & 3*. If however the elder brother is free from Phariseeism, then the chances are that most of the people in his church will also be free from Phariseeism.

I would say therefore to every believer: Do not follow your church-elder if he is a legalist and a Pharisee. Submission to an elder is required only in church matters and not in personal matters. By that I mean that if he announces that the Sunday meetings will start at 10 am, then obey him and go at 10 am. In the meeting, when he announces Song No. 45, obey him and join with the others and sing Song No. 45. When he asks the congregation to stand, you also stand. And when he tells everyone to sit, you also sit down. That is all that “*submission to an elder*” means. But you don’t have to follow his example in his life, if he is not a worthy example to follow. Otherwise, you will destroy yourself too. Follow Jesus Himself and never follow a legalistic, Pharisaical elder – whoever he may be – even if he is the senior most elder in your fellowship. You must submit to an elder in other areas of your life, *only* if you have full confidence in him as a man of God.

CHARACTERISTIC 6

Pharisees live by rules

“And a man was there whose hand was withered. And they questioned Jesus, asking, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?” – so that they might accuse Him” (Matthew 12:10).

Pharisees live by rules. They don’t live by the life of Jesus. Their ridiculous rules taught that a sick man must not seek for healing on the Sabbath day. Many leaders of churches today also have made ridiculous rules that make life difficult for their flock. Those Pharisees had asked Jesus this question only “*so that they might accuse him*”. The same is true of many church leaders today, who also are quick to accuse anyone who violates some small rule that they have made. God is the only Lawgiver (or Maker of rules) in the universe. If you make rules for others in a church, that Almighty God Himself has not made, then you will be acting as if you are God – and that is “*the spirit of the antichrist*” (See *2 Thessalonians 2:4*). Then like those Pharisees, you will end up joining hands with Satan, the “*accuser of the brethren*” (*Revelation 12:10*).

As an example, take the matter of women veiling their heads. The Bible says that women should veil

their heads when they pray or prophesy (*1 Corinthians 11:5*). But some church-leaders teach that women must veil their heads *always* (24 hours every day) because they should be “*praying always*”. But their inconsistency is seen in the fact that they don’t insist (by the same principle of “*praying always*”) that men must therefore keep their heads *uncovered* always (and never wear a cap or a hat). Their inconsistency is also seen in the fact that they permit the sisters to veil just 15% of their heads (just the back part of their hair, because it is inconvenient to cover the entire head during the heat of the day!!). Pharisees are thoroughly inconsistent, but are blissfully unaware of their inconsistency. The only ladies I have seen who cover their heads *fully* are some Roman Catholic nuns like the late Mother Teresa. I have found almost all the others who *emphasise* this as a law (and judge others for not obeying it) to be inconsistent. They are hypocrites and Pharisees. God intended the veiling of the woman’s head to be a symbol and not a rule. So I personally don’t waste any of my time checking up whether every sister has veiled 100% of her head and whether any strand of hair is visible under the veiling!!

Pharisaical elders are also lenient to their own family members in many matters like this, but strict with others. That’s why Jesus told those Pharisees, “*If your donkey falls into a pit on the Sabbath day, what will you do?*” They cared for their own donkeys, but not for a sick man. Church-leaders need to be very careful that they don’t exempt their own family members from the rules they make for others.

CHARACTERISTIC 7

Pharisees are motivated by jealousy and hatred

“The Pharisees went out and conspired against Jesus, as to how they might destroy Him” (Matthew 12:14).

Your jealousy of someone may not reach the point where you kill him. But you must remember that jealousy and hatred are the first steps to murder. This was how Cain progressed: Jealousy...hatred...murder.

The Pharisees were jealous of Jesus because He could do many things they could not do and therefore was more popular with the people than they were. Even Pilate (who knew very little about Jesus) could see that the Pharisees wanted Jesus crucified only because they were jealous of Him (*Matthew 27:18*). When you are jealous of someone, it will be very obvious in your speech and your conduct.

You can be jealous of someone who can preach better than you, or who has wealth or spiritual gifts that you don’t have. Then you will find it very easy to look for some small fault in him in order to criticise

him. And you will long to see him fall in some way. The religion of the Pharisees is the religion of Cain.

The history of the human race begins with two streams – one *spiritual* (Abel) and the other *religious* (Cain). Cain's primary sin was jealousy of Abel. These two streams finally end in Jerusalem (the true church) and the false church (Babylon). If we follow the religious and jealousy-filled stream of Cain, we will ultimately end up as a part of Babylon – even if all our doctrines are evangelical.

CHARACTERISTIC 8

Pharisees are suspicious and assume the worst about other people

“The Pharisees said, “This man casts out demons only by Beelzebul the ruler of the demons.” (Matthew 12:24).

When Jesus cast out a demon, the crowds said, *“This must be the Son of David (the promised Messiah)” (Matthew 12:23)*. But the Pharisees were disturbed by the fact that Jesus did something they themselves could not do. And so they assumed the worst.

Even when someone does something good that blesses others, Pharisees will attribute an evil motive for that deed. If, however their own children had done the same thing, they would have boasted about it and attributed the best of motives – because Pharisees are partial towards their own family members, but very critical of others. Pharisees are very suspicious of others and cannot believe that anyone would do anything with a selfless motive – because they themselves are so selfish. If you are a Pharisee, you will find yourself attributing wrong motives for the good that others do and being critical of those whom others appreciate.

CHARACTERISTIC 9

Pharisees are very careless in their speech

The Pharisees said, "This man casts out demons only by Beelzebul the ruler of the demons" (Matthew 12:24).

Pharisees speak rude and hurtful words about others carelessly and pass judgement on others in their speech. Imagine calling the Son of God, the "*head of the demons*"!

How did Jesus respond to that evil criticism by the Pharisees? Jesus replied saying,

"You have spoken against me, an ordinary man. You are forgiven. But make sure you don't speak against the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 12:32).

Jesus forgave those Pharisees (as a Man). But God in heaven did not forgive them.

When we sin against anyone, there are two elements to such a sin –

1. a horizontal element – against the other person; and
2. a vertical element – against God.

That person must forgive you; and God must also forgive you, if your sin is to be blotted out. But before God forgives anyone, that person has to repent first. So even if a human being forgives you the horizontal element of your sin, you will still face the judgement of God for the vertical element, until you repent and ask for His forgiveness. If one of those Pharisees had gone to Jesus later and said, “Lord I am sorry for calling you Beelzebul. Please forgive me”, and then asked God to forgive him, then only would his sin have been blotted out, not otherwise. Jesus warned us that we would be condemned *by the words we spoke*, at the final judgement (*Matthew 12:37*).

Do you have a sickness that is not being healed, despite all your prayers and medical treatment? Is it possible that you have disobeyed God’s command in *Psalm 105:15* “*Do not touch my anointed, and don’t do any harm to my prophets?*” Have you spoken something carelessly about a godly brother? Maybe that is why your sickness is not being healed. Perhaps you have carelessly judged men who are ten thousand times holier than you are and who have done ten thousand times more for God than you have done. Repentance and an apology to that person alone will bring your healing.

CHARACTERISTIC 10

Pharisees neglect their family responsibilities in the name of religion

“Why do you transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? For God said, ‘Honor your father and mother’...But you say, ‘Whoever says to his father or mother, ‘Whatever I have that would help you has been given to God,’ he is not to honor his father or his mother’” (*Matthew 15:1-9*).

The Pharisees invalidated God’s commandment to honour parents by saying that a person need not support his needy parents if he had given his money in the temple treasury box. Let the poor father be sick and die, because his “*holy*” son has given his money for missionary work!!

A modern-day equivalent would be something like this: The Pharisee would say to his wife, “I have to go for the church-meeting this evening. So I cannot help you with the work at home.” Or he could be sitting with his Bible in the morning studying the tabernacle (in *Exodus 25*), asking God to speak to him, while his wife is struggling to get the children ready for school, preparing breakfast for them, and looking after a crying baby. The Lord will be trying

to tell this Pharisee, “Shut your Bible, forget about your ‘tabernacle-study’ and go help your wife in the kitchen”! But he cannot hear God, because his Pharisaical ears have become deaf to God’s voice.

A major part of our being spiritual is to take responsibility for any work that needs to be done at home. *“If a man does not care for his family needs, he is worse than an unbeliever” (1 Timothy 5:8).*

CHARACTERISTIC 11

Pharisees are easily offended

“The disciples came and said to Jesus, ‘Do You know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this statement?’ Jesus said, ‘Leave them alone.’” (Matthew 15:12-14).

When Jesus corrected the Pharisees for teaching people to dishonour their parents (as we saw above), they were offended. Pharisees are easily offended by any word of rebuke or correction that the Lord may give through an elder brother. One of the *kindergarten* lessons in the Christian life is to get victory over *“getting offended”*. There is no hope that you will ever be delivered from Phariseeism if you don’t seek to be totally free from getting offended when corrected.

I know people who were once in our church who were so offended by some correction they received, that they left the church altogether. They are wandering in the wilderness today and there is every possibility that they will be lost eternally. I can assure you that like the Pharisees, you could be on your way to hell too, if you have been offended by some correction you received.

Jesus told His disciples to “*leave them alone*”. We are not to go after offended Pharisees trying to bring them back to the church. We must obey the Lord and leave them alone. If they repent, then they can come back to the Lord and to the church. Not otherwise.

CHARACTERISTIC 12

Pharisees are spiritually blind

Jesus said, “They are blind guides of the blind. And if a blind man guides a blind man, both will fall into a pit” (Matthew 15:14).

Pharisees are great scholars of the Bible. But they are spiritually blind and so they don't have any revelation on spiritual realities. And when these blind leaders lead other blind people, Jesus said “*they will fall into the pit (of hell) themselves and those who follow them will also fall into the same pit*” (15:14).

Never follow a blind man, Make sure your leader/elder is a man of spiritual vision, who loves God's people. Lack of love is what causes spiritual blindness and it leads to preachers preaching in a way that *condemns* people. A man who loves Jesus sees the Lord so clearly that he can lift Jesus up in His sermon and show Him to you. It is such a leader that you should follow and whom you should long to be like.

CHARACTERISTIC 13

Pharisees are hypocrites

*“Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees which is hypocrisy”
(Luke 12:1).*

The word “*hypocrite*” is actually a Greek word that has been imported into the English language and means “*actor*”. If you went to Greece in the first century and asked people where all the hypocrites were, they would have replied, “At the theatre”. The hypocrites come on the stage there and practise their hypocrisy (acting) for a couple of hours and then go home to live their normal lives.

In a Hollywood movie, a man may play the part of John the Baptist and act very holy for a short while, because he is an expert actor. But in real life he may be a drunkard and an adulterer.

Today most hypocrites are found in churches, where they also act their part for a couple of hours on Sunday mornings. They do a great act of praising the Lord at that time, every Sunday. But if you were to go to their homes during the week however, you will soon discover that they were only acting a part on Sunday mornings. In their normal lives at home,

they are *not* praising God, but complaining, grumbling, gossiping and quarrelling with one another.

Are you like that – acting a part for others to see in the church meetings, but quite a different person in your office and in your home?

CHARACTERISTIC 14

Pharisees seek to catch others in their words

Some Pharisees came to Jesus, testing Him and asking, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason at all?” (Matthew 19:3).

Pharisees seek to catch people in something they say in order to accuse them before others.

They may even ask you questions to try and trip you up. We read in *Matthew 22:15* that “*the Pharisees plotted together how they might trap Him in what He said*”. (See *Luke 11:54* also).

I have had similar experiences too. At times, believers from some churches (who are convicted by what I preach and who want to accuse me of preaching heresy) have visited me and asked me questions in order to catch me in some word that I may say. They are not interested in being free from sin in their lives but only in finding some fault in others. This is exactly how the Pharisees were. They would take Jesus’ words out of context and accuse Him of heresy. Modern-day Pharisees have twisted my words too in a similar fashion..

If we love someone, we will always place the best construction on anything he says. We will say,

“Perhaps I misunderstood what he said. Perhaps he was joking”, etc., A Pharisee however will never make such an allowance for anyone. It is written of Jesus that “*He would not judge by what His ears heard or by what His eyes saw*” (Isaiah 11:3). This is the example that every godly man will follow.

CHARACTERISTIC 15

Pharisees are hard-hearted

“This people honour Me with their lips, but their heart is far away from Me.” (Matthew 15:8).

The heart of a Pharisee is hard, because it is *far from God*. If you place butter close to a fire, it will melt immediately. But if you put it in the freezer, it will become hard. It can even become as hard as a rock, so that you will need a chisel to cut it. The heart of a Pharisee is like that. God is a fire, and if you live close to Him your heart will always be soft. Even rocks will melt in the presence of God.

If you are hard towards others, you can be certain that you are living far, far away from God. The Pharisees were hard on others because they were millions of miles away from God. Pharisees honour God with their lips and sing beautiful songs of praise, “*O Lord, Thou art worthy*”, etc. But they do not judge themselves. A person who listens to God will judge himself always and never judge others – that is one mark of a man who has a soft heart.

I have observed however that even though Pharisees are very hard on people, many of them are very tender towards their own family members. They

make rules for others but will not impose those rules on their own family members. They are full of partiality and hypocrisy.

We must have convictions. I have my own convictions as to what I permit myself to possess or to do. But I do not impose my convictions on others, in matters where Scripture is silent. I don't tell people whether or not to have a TV set. I think a computer connected to the Internet is far more dangerous than any TV set. I warn people of the dangers of both of these gadgets. But I do not make rules for others, like the Pharisees do. I know Pharisees who told others never to possess these gadgets, but who had to eat their words later on, when they themselves bought computers out of necessity.

CHARACTERISTIC 16

Pharisees cannot appreciate loud praise in public

*“When the chief priests and the scribes saw the children shouting, “Hosanna to the Son of David,” they became indignant”
(Matthew 21:15).*

Pharisees are disturbed when people raise their voice to praise God. They believe that reverence for God demands that His people be silent in His presence or at least subdued in their praise. Jesus however was delighted when He heard the children shouting praises to God because it reminded Him of heaven! Heaven is a place where there is loud and continuous praise – at times as loud as thunder (*Revelation 19:6*). We haven't attained to that decibel-level as yet, in our praise meetings. But that is our goal. Pharisees would even be disturbed if someone said an “Amen” or a “Hallelujah” in response to something they heard in a message!! They would look around to see who said it. They feel that such words should not be uttered in a church-meeting! They feel that everyone should sit through church-meetings as though they were in a funeral-service. Watching them while they sing, one would think that they had not yet heard that Jesus has risen from the dead!!!

CHARACTERISTIC 17

Pharisees have knowledge without obedience

Jesus said, "The Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses; therefore all that they tell you, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds; for they say things and do not do them" (Matthew 23:2, 3).

In *Matthew 23*, Jesus exposes more characteristics of the Pharisees than we find in any other chapter in the Bible. *Matthew 23* is a chapter that is the very opposite of *1 Corinthians 13*. To be led by Law is the opposite of being led by Divine Love through the Holy Spirit. So if we want to be led out of Phariseeism and legalism into a life of Divine love, we must study *Matthew 23* carefully.

The Pharisees sat in the chair of Moses, which meant that they had gone to Bible colleges and got their doctorate degrees and had a lot of accurate knowledge. Jesus even told His disciples to do *all* that the Pharisees taught. So what the Pharisees taught must have been right. But they did not obey what they knew to be right.

Knowledge is a very useful thing, but it can also be very dangerous. Knowledge coupled with obedience alone will bring spiritual life. Knowledge without

obedience however brings spiritual death. It is better *not* to have any knowledge at all, than to have knowledge and not obey. Knowledge can be compared to the food we eat and the digestive process to obedience. It is when food is digested that it becomes part of our body. Rice and curry are turned into flesh and bones – a miracle that is no less than water being turned into wine. And our bodies perform this miracle every day!!

But if the food we eat is not digested, then that food can kill us – because undigested food will rot inside our stomachs and make us sick. Have you noticed when you vomit, that the food that comes out of your stomach stinks and tastes rotten? It may have been tasty chicken curry when you ate it. But it had a very different taste when you vomited it out. That's also what happens when we accumulate knowledge and do not obey. And that is why many Christians stink spiritually. The ones who stink the most are the ones who have the maximum amount of knowledge and the least amount of obedience. Pharisees are like that. But the sad part is that they themselves do not realize that they are stinking. A spiritual person however can smell that stink very quickly. A godly man can discern a Pharisee in five minutes of conversation with him. Their eyes are either haughty or full of adultery (*Proverbs 6:17*; *2 Peter 2:14*). Many women who lived a flirtatious life in their unconverted days do not cleanse their spirit fully after their conversion. The result is that even 20 years after their conversion, their eyes are still flirtatious. I say to all young men: Stay clear of such sisters.

CHARACTERISTIC 18

Pharisees do not practise what they preach

“Pharisees say things and do not do them” (Matthew 23:3).

This verse is the opposite of *Acts 1:1* where it is written about Jesus that He “*did (first) and (then) taught*”. The Pharisees taught but did not do. They did not practise what they preached. Jesus however did first and then preached only what He had already done!! These are two opposite spirits. Those with the spirit of the Pharisees will build the harlot church Babylon. And those with the Spirit of Christ will build the bridal church Jerusalem.

Jesus never preached what he had not first done. How long do you think Jesus took to prepare *the Sermon on the Mount* – (*Matthew Chapters 5, 6 and 7*) – the finest sermon that anyone has ever preached? It took Him 30 years to prepare that sermon. It came out of His life and not just from His mind.

When you preach a sermon that you heard from someone else, that only comes out of your head. It is mere knowledge. There is neither life nor anointing in it. If you want to preach as Jesus preached, then you must first live the Word and then preach it. Some people have asked me. “Brother Zac, can

I preach your sermons in my ministry?” And I have told them, “Yes, if you live them out first and are honest to admit where you got them from.” God says,

“Have any of these preachers bothered to meet with Me and listened to Me and then lived out my Word?... I never sent these preachers, I never spoke to them, but they preached anyway”
(Jeremiah 23:17, 18, 21 - MSG).

When you preach someone else’s sermon, without living it out yourself or telling people where you got it from, you are just seeking honour for yourself. That is a dangerous habit and can result in spiritual death for you, because God has said,

“I am against the preachers who get all their sermons secondhand from others and who say, ‘This message is from God’” (Jeremiah 23:30, 31 - MSG & TLB).

For some 30 years now, I have tried my best to ensure that I preach only what I have first practised in my life. Let me give you one example: I have never preached anywhere, urging people to go as missionaries to North India. Why haven’t I done that, when many hundreds of missionaries are needed in North India. Only because I have never lived in North India as a missionary myself.

Now listen to what I am going to say and see if it is not true: *Almost every leader of evangelical missionary societies in India lives in the comfort of South India and challenges others to go as missionaries to*

North India. These leaders send their own children to good schools and colleges in South India. But they tell their missionaries who are in remote villages in North India (where there are no schools) to send their children to some distant boarding schools. I am not here to judge these leaders, for God is their judge. But I do say this that I will never follow their example. I would be a Pharisee if I preached as they did, because I would be asking others to do what I am not doing myself. Only someone who has lived in North India and brought up his children in the difficult circumstances there, has the right to tell others to do the same thing. All the rest are Pharisees. This principle applies in many other areas too.

Don’t ever preach on anything that you have not done yourself. Don’t try to advise parents who have teenage children how to bring them up their teenagers, if you yourself have never brought up teenage children aright yourself. That would be as foolish as a bachelor telling parents how to bring up their children. Many a time, we can bless others by just praying for them and keeping our mouths shut as far as any advice is concerned.

Can you teach Chemistry without studying Chemistry first? No. If your college-degree is in English, you can only teach English. That is such a simple truth that every teacher knows. But Pharisees do not understand something as simple as that.

CHARACTERISTIC 19

Pharisees bind heavy burdens on others

“They tie up heavy burdens and lay them on men’s shoulders, but they themselves are unwilling to move them with so much as a finger” (Matthew 23:4).

Pharisees try to appear spiritual by preaching high standards for others to follow but do not follow those standards themselves.

I remember a youth camp many years ago, at which I was one of two speakers. The other speaker preached saying that everyone must give 10% of their *time* to God (just like tithing money), meaning that everyone should spend 2 hours 24 minutes every day in Bible-reading and prayer. During the question time that followed, one of the young men asked me whether I agreed with this teaching. I told them that I did not agree; and then I asked the other speaker openly, “Brother, do you spend 2 hours 24 minutes everyday in Bible reading and prayer?” He sheepishly said, “No”. Everyone then saw that he was a hypocritical Pharisee who was tying heavy burdens on others that he did not lift himself. That is just one example.

There are people who urge others to give 10% of their money to God, who do not give 10% of their own gross income. They are hypocritical Pharisees. The Christian world is full of Pharisaical preachers who place impossible standards before others that they do not live up to themselves. These are the preachers who build Babylon and who destroy the work of God. They use God's Word to burden people instead of blessing them.

I love the Message translation of *Matthew 23:4* that reads thus:

“Instead of giving you God’s Word as food and drink by which you can banquet on God, they package it in bundles of rules, loading you down like pack animals. They take pleasure in watching you stagger under these loads, and wouldn’t think of lifting a finger to help.”

Such preachers treat God's children as donkeys who are to carry heavy loads. The same message from the Bible can be preached in two ways – as a *burden* or as a *blessing*. It all depends on the preacher.

It is because of Pharisaical preachers that many young people are fed up of attending church meetings. Jesus preached from the same Old Testament that the Pharisees preached from. But He liberated people with those Scriptures, whereas the Pharisees bound them with greater chains with the same Scriptures. The same thing happens when Pharisees preach today

CHARACTERISTIC 20

Pharisees seek honour from men

*“The Pharisees do all their deeds to be noticed by men”
(Matthew 23:5).*

Jesus said that the Pharisees would pray standing in the street-corners and pray loudly (*Matthew 6:1*). Jesus was obviously exaggerating here – but with a purpose. He was a great master at exaggeration whenever He wanted to highlight an important point. He spoke of people having a log in their eye and of those who swallowed camels! I have also sought to follow Jesus' example in this matter of exaggerating a point in order to drive it home. We should certainly not exaggerate *when giving a report*. We should not say, “200 people came to my meeting when only 150 people came”! But the type of exaggeration that Jesus used to drive home a point is very valuable.

Jesus spoke once about Pharisees who pray in order to get honour from people. Haven't we all prayed publicly to get honour from others? We have often listened while praying, to hear if anyone would say a “*Hallelujah*” or an “*Amen*” to our prayer. This is Phariseeism, for we have then prayed to people and

not to God. We need to cleanse ourselves from this sin.

Preachers can preach to get honour? I judge myself after every sermon I preach to see if I have sought to please God or man and to see where I can improve the quality of my preaching. Every cook wants to improve the quality of his cooking. But unfortunately very few preachers seek to improve the quality of their preaching. This is why most preachers are always boring to listen to. They are conceited enough to imagine that they are delivering powerful, anointed sermons. They don't even ask their wives what they think of their preaching. Through these past many years, I have sought to improve continually in my preaching, because I want to preach in the same gripping way that Jesus preached and with the same fire and passion that He had.

There are other areas too where we are tempted to seek honour from people. You may be writing reports of your work, not to glorify God but to impress others with what you are doing for God. In our churches, from the time we started in 1975, we have never sent a report or photograph of our work to anyone, anywhere in the world. We felt it was sufficient if God knew what we were doing.

Seeking honour from people is one of the sins that are never spoken of in most churches. Seeking honour is what makes a person a Pharisee. And Pharisees will only build *Babylon*.

To build the true church of our Lord Jesus Christ, we must cleanse ourselves from all seeking of honour from people.

CHARACTERISTIC 21

Pharisees think that holiness is in the style of one's clothes

“The Pharisees broaden their phylacteries (small cases containing Scripture texts worn on the forehead) and lengthen the tassels of their garments” (Matthew 23:5).

Another characteristic of Pharisees is to glory in the “holiness” of their clothes!!

God had told the Israelites to attach tassels (a bunch of loose threads bound at one end and hanging free at the other) to the hems of their clothes with a blue cord – to remind them every time they saw those tassels of God's commandments that came from heaven (*Numbers 15:38*).

The Pharisees would make their tassels a little longer than those of others. They could then glory that while the tassels of others were only 3 inches long, theirs were 6 inches long – proving that they were holier!!

There are many Pharisees today too who glory in the “holy” clothes that they wear!! Someone once gave me a very colourful Hawaiian shirt. What would you think of me if you saw me wearing that shirt?

It would shock some Christians. That would reveal their Phariseeism to them. We have so many ideas that are completely contrary to Christ's – because we don't meditate sufficiently on the Scriptures. We are afraid of what people will think of us if we wear a certain colour of shirt. But Jesus' holiness was not in His clothes.

Pharisees observe others carefully to see what they are wearing – clothes, shoes, earrings, etc., – in order to find something to criticise. They have eyes like an eagle for such matters.

Jesus spoke against men wearing “effeminate (*malako* – Greek) clothing” (*Matthew 11:8*). And the Holy Spirit exhorts women to dress “modestly, discreetly and simply” (*1 Timothy 2:9; 1 Peter 3:3*). Other than that, holiness is not found in the clothes we wear. Holiness is primarily inward.

CHARACTERISTIC 22

Pharisees love positions and titles of honour

They love to sit at the head table at church dinners, basking in the most prominent positions, preening in the radiance of public flattery, receiving honorary degrees, and getting called 'Doctor' and 'Reverend'. Don't let people do that to you, put you on a pedestal like that (Matthew 23:6-8 - MSG).

Pharisees love the honour of becoming elders in a church. And Pharisaical wives of elders are also proud of the honour their husband has. If you have the tiniest bit of pride that you are an elder in a church or that your husband is an elder, you are certainly a Pharisee of the first order. Such elders can only build Babylon. There is no difference between the Pharisees of those days who loved to be called “Rabbi” and the Pharisees of today who love to be called, “Pastor, “Reverend, “Right Reverend”, “Father”, and all the other ridiculous titles that Christian leaders have taken to themselves. You can have that spirit even if you call yourself a “Brother” – but with a capital “B”. Such Pharisees love to sit on platforms at all public functions to be recognised as “Pastors”.

I got a letter some years ago from a Bible Seminary in USA offering me an honorary doctorate, because of

my Internet ministry and all the books I had written. They asked me just to fill up a form and return it. I never replied. Would Jesus have been interested in getting an honorary doctorate? Certainly not.

The above passage goes on to say,

“Don’t let people put you on a pedestal. You all have a single Teacher, and you are all classmates. Don’t set people up as experts over your life, letting them tell you what to do. Save that authority for God; let him tell you what to do. No one else should carry the title of ‘Father’. You have only one Father, and He’s in heaven. And don’t let people maneuver you into taking charge of them. There is only one Life-Leader for you and them — Christ. Do you want to stand out? Then step down. Be a servant. If you puff yourself up, you’ll get the wind knocked out of you. But if you’re content to simply be yourself, your life will count for plenty”
(Matthew 23:8–12 - MSG).

Many believers in our churches have tried to get me to take charge of their lives. They ask me to tell them what they should do. I refuse to tell them. I give them my suggestions and then tell them, “Now go and ask God first whether you should do as I say. If He doesn’t give you peace about it, then throw away my advice and do what God tells you to do. Your only leader must be Christ”.

There are many church-leaders who do not follow Christ’s teaching in this area but who love to tell people how to run their private lives. Such elders are Pharisees who are building Babylon. They are under

the law themselves and they bring their flock under the law too. They do not know the freedom of the Spirit, because they love titles, position and honour.

CHARACTERISTIC 23

Pharisees corrupt others

“Woe to you, Pharisees, because you shut off the kingdom of heaven from people; for you do not enter in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in” (Matthew 23:13).

Sincere, young people who become believers are corrupted by Pharisaical leaders. These young people may have had great zeal to overcome sin and to live for God when they were first converted. But then they see their leaders standing on big platforms like film-actors and preaching and collecting plenty of money “*in Jesus’ Name*” from people, and using that money to live like film-actors in their private lives. Thus these young people, who started out wanting to follow Jesus and to live like He did, now end up wanting to live like these famous preachers. And they imagine that if they are faithful, then one day they too will become famous and be able to live like film-actors. Thus these Pharisaical leaders corrupt them and hinder them from following Jesus and entering the kingdom of God.

Young people today lack good role models whom they can follow. Unfortunately, hardly any preacher today can say like Paul did, “*Follow me as I follow*

Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1; Philippians 3:17). So I say to young people: Look at Jesus and follow His Example. And if you find someone who is following hard after Jesus, then look at him and follow his example as well.

CHARACTERISTIC 24

Pharisees take advantage of poor people

*“Woe to you, Pharisees, because you devour widows’ houses”
(Matthew 23:14).*

We don’t know how exactly the Pharisees “*devoured*” the houses of these widows. They may have urged those poor widows to give their property for “*the work of the Lord*”, telling them that God would bless them for it – and then taken possession of their property and enjoyed it themselves . Thus they would “*even rob the widows*”, as Israel’s unjust judges had done 700 years earlier (*Isaiah 10:2*).

This very same exploitation of poor people is going on in the 21st century too. Christian TV preachers are notorious for getting poor widows and pensioners to give them large sums of money by assuring them, “*God will bless you and heal you of your sicknesses, if you give money to my ministry*”. Since most old widows and pensioners have many sicknesses and other problems, TV preachers know how to exploit this for their own benefit. They use every psychological trick and many emotional appeals and verses from the Bible to squeeze money from these poor people. The poor widows believe these greedy

deceivers and send their meagre savings to them. The preachers then use this money to live in grand style themselves – buying private jet planes and property, etc.

This pattern of swindling the poor started in America in recent times, but has now spread all over the world and is now found among many Indian preachers too. Such Pharisees are daylight robbers and thieves.

What a testimony Paul had, that he could say towards the end of his life,

“We wronged no one, we corrupted no one, we took advantage of no one” (2 Corinthians 7:2).

That should be the testimony of every servant of God at the end of his life.

It is evil and Satanic to take advantage of poor believers – *in any way*.

CHARACTERISTIC 25

Pharisees pray long, impressive prayers in public

“Woe to you, Pharisees, because for a pretence you make long prayers; therefore you will receive greater condemnation” (Matthew 23:14).

I have observed through the years, that those who pray the longest in public are those who are prayerless in private. They are all Pharisees. Next time you hear a man giving a long oration in public prayer, recognise that he is a Pharisee. In a time of public praise, if the leader asks everyone to limit their praising to one or two minutes each, everyone must do that. But Pharisees will not listen or obey. They feel their prayers must be longer than that of others. The only reason for that is their arrogance, their pride and their fantastically high opinion of themselves!

The Bible commands preachers to *“prophesy according to the proportion of their faith” (Romans 12:6)*. That means that the length of our sermons should be proportionate to the maturity of our life. But 90% of the church-leaders I have met preach long, boring sermons and disobey this command

every Sunday. Once again, the only reason for such disobedience is their fantastically high opinion of themselves!

CHARACTERISTIC 26

Pharisees do missionary work and make people twofold children of hell

*“Woe to you, Pharisees, because you travel around on sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves”
(Matthew 23:15).*

Pharisees may be missionary-minded, but their so-called “*converts*” go to hell, because they do not bring their converts to genuine repentance and faith.

Pharisees may engage in a lot of “religious work” (which is fundamentally different from doing God’s will) – and even with a lot of sacrifice. They may become “full-time Christian workers”, but their converts will be double the children of hell – because they do not preach repentance and they assure people who have never turned from their sinful ways that they are born again just because they “believe”. Likewise, they convince people that they are filled with the Holy Spirit (when they are not) just because they babbled some gibberish – which is totally different from the genuine gift of tongues. Thus they make people double the children of hell. They were already

living in sin, as children of hell, to begin with. But now they have been convinced by some Pharisaical preacher that they are “*eternally secure*”, because they repeated the “magic” words, “Lord Jesus come into my heart” – even though their attitude to sin has not changed. Now they are just told to make sure they pay their tithes regularly and a place in heaven is assured them. Thus they are insulated against the gospel. Because when they now hear a gospel message they don’t feel they need to respond to it because they are “*eternally secure*”. What a tremendous deception is going on today. I have told people in some of our own churches that they are not born again, even though they have been sitting in our midst for many years. Many Pharisaical elder brothers have zero discernment when it comes to assessing whether a person is born again or not. They allow all types of people to join their churches and these are the ones who cause them many problems later on.

Some Pharisaical elders are partial to *the poor*. They make *poor* people feel important in the church *just because they are poor*. And these elders think they are being like Jesus! (This is the opposite of those preachers who are partial towards the *rich* – *James 2:1–4*.) God knew that there could be this evil tendency among “*super-spiritual elders*”, and so He warned Israel’s leaders, “*You shall not be partial to a poor man*” (*Exodus 23:3*). By showing such partiality and making these poor people feel important in the church, just because of their poverty, they make these poor people twofold the children of hell. Jesus was not a Communist who came to equalize the poor with the rich. I am not a Communist either. I am a

Christian. I respect people *who are humble and God fearing, irrespective of whether they are rich or poor*. But many church-leaders confuse Christianity with Communism.

We can deceive ourselves as a church in two ways. One is by imagining that we are a wonderful church because we have many rich, educated and cultured people in high positions in our church (but most of whom are ungodly). The other way is by imagining that we are a wonderful church because we *don’t* have any rich, educated people, but only a bunch of poor, uneducated people (but most of whom are ungodly)! Both churches are Babylonian – with different colours. Don’t imagine that poor people are *all* spiritual or that rich people are *all* unspiritual. Poverty does not equal godliness. Don’t make people twofold the children of hell.

CHARACTERISTIC 27

Pharisees interpret Scripture without revelation from God

*“Woe to you, blind guides, who say, ‘Whoever swears by the temple, that is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple is obligated.’ You fools and blind men! Which is more important, the gold or the temple that sanctified the gold? And, ‘Whoever swears by the altar, that is nothing, but whoever swears by the offering on it, he is obligated.’ You blind men, which is more important, the offering, or the altar that sanctifies the offering? Therefore, whoever swears by the altar, swears both by the altar and by everything on it. And whoever swears by the temple, swears both by the temple and by Him who dwells within it. And whoever swears by heaven, swears both by the throne of God and by Him who sits upon it.”
(Matthew 23:16–22).*

The Pharisees interpreted Scripture with their minds, without any revelation from God. So they would modify God’s Word according to their own ideas and preach that as God’s law. There are Pharisaical preachers doing that today too. They don’t understand the *spirit* behind God’s Word, but preach it according to the *letter* – and “*the letter kills*”

(2 Corinthians 3:6). These preachers don't see their inconsistency either, when they disobey that same word in some other area.

Here is one example. Some church-leaders teach that the wearing of jewellery is a sinful luxury and look down on any sister who may be wearing even imitation jewellery (that costs just 400 rupees). But those same preachers may have spent more than a million rupees in building their own house with many luxurious fittings in it. But they don't see their inconsistency and hypocrisy there. They ease their conscience by saying that Scripture does not speak against the use of expensive marble flooring in a house, but only against jewellery (1 Timothy 2:9; 1 Peter 3:3)!! But Scripture actually urges us to avoid *all* unnecessary luxuries.

There are many other examples like this. Such church-leaders do not have the revelation of the Holy Spirit on the Word. Instead, they interpret Scripture to suit their own convenience and judge others.

CHARACTERISTIC 28

Pharisees are sticklers for the letter of the law

*“You Pharisees tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law”
(Matthew 23:23).*

Pharisees take some small aspect of a commandment in Scripture, and emphasise that. They “*major on minors*”. There is a lot of preaching like that today. Such preaching will make a church full of legalistic people who are proud of their obedience in minor matters but who are unconscious of their utter disobedience in major matters. Jesus did not tell the Pharisees *not to* tithe dill and cumin etc. What He did say was that the major matters in God's Law needed *more emphasis* than tithing.

I studied through the four gospels once and wrote down *all the subjects that Jesus emphasised*: He preached on repentance, poverty of spirit, gentleness, purity, mourning for sin, paying one's taxes, being born again, worshipping God in spirit, love, humility, marital faithfulness, breaking with human traditions, etc. But He never once spoke on how people should dress or whether women should wear

jewellery or veil their heads. He did speak however on living a simple lifestyle and on not loving money.

I then studied the epistles to see what subjects were emphasised *much* by the Holy Spirit, and what subjects were emphasised *very little*, or not mentioned at all.

Thus I discovered what I should emphasise most in my preaching and what I should give less importance to. If you study Scripture like that, you will be balanced in your teaching and you will avoid becoming a Pharisaical preacher.

CHARACTERISTIC 29

Pharisees have no justice, no mercy and no faithfulness

“You Pharisees have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done...” (Matthew 23:23).

The Pharisees were unjust and unfair in their dealings with people. They had no mercy towards those who had failed and they were not faithful in their private lives. But with all these lacks in their lives, they still considered themselves holy, because of their fastings and prayers and Bible knowledge, etc. They were like a bride going to her wedding whose bridal gown was all dirty and messy but who was only concerned that she should walk gracefully into the wedding. If there is selfishness, pride, unmerciful attitudes and unfaithfulness in our lives, then to glory in our religious activities is only to deceive ourselves that we are spiritual. We need to recognise what the weightier matters of the Christian life are – and concentrate on them first.

CHARACTERISTIC 30

Pharisees strain out mosquitoes and swallow camels

“You Pharisees, hypocrites and blind guides – who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!” (Matthew 23:24).

Pharisees are very careful in small unimportant matters (straining out dead mosquitoes). But they neglect to obey the commands in Scripture (swallowing dead camels). Jesus was not thereby telling the Pharisees that it was all right to swallow dead mosquitoes. He was showing them their inconsistency in neglecting more important matters.

Such Pharisees are careful in small matters such as wearing clean clothes when going to the church meetings, or in keeping their houses neat and tidy. These are good habits. But when it comes to more important matters such as seeking God earnestly to overcome anger and sexual lust, or helping in the practical work in the church, or travelling to the villages to bring people to Christ, they are not so keen – because these matters require the sacrifice of one’s convenience, time and money.

The *Message Translation* paraphrases this verse thus: “Do you have any idea how silly you look, writing a life story that’s wrong from start to finish, but nitpicking over commas and semicolons?”

There are Bible Memory competitions held in Bangalore that many Christians participate in to get a prize of a few hundred rupees. To win that prize, one has to write down not only all the words of the Scripture passage accurately, but also place all the commas and the semi-colons accurately!! Some believers spend weeks and weeks memorizing the correct places for these commas and semi-colons in order to win this prize. But all the while they live in disobedience to the Scriptures in their homes. But that does not disturb them. You can win the first prize in such Bible contests and still be a Pharisee of the first order.

Love is the ultimate end and goal of the gospel (*1 Timothy 1:5*) – to love God with all our heart, soul and strength and to love our fellow-believers as Christ loved us. If we pursue after this love, we will know instinctively what the most important things in the Christian life are.

CHARACTERISTIC 31

Pharisees concentrate on having a good testimony externally only

“You Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of robbery and self-indulgence. You blind Pharisee, first clean the inside of the cup and of the dish, so that the outside of it may become clean also” (Matthew 23:25, 26).

Pharisees clean the outside of their lives, but do not bother about the state of their hearts, which are full of self-indulgence and greed. They live with selfish motives, thinking only of getting more and more money and honour and comfort for themselves and their families. But outwardly they are pious and religious and even active in all sorts of “ministries” that other Christians can see. Thus they get a good reputation before people.

God tests us to see whether we seek His approval or man’s. One who is careless about impurity in his heart but only concerned to have a good testimony before people proves thereby that he has no fear of God at all. He is a Pharisee. People look at us on the outside, but God looks at our hearts (*1 Samuel 16:7*). The primary mark of a godly man is that he seeks to keep his heart clean and pure before God.

CHARACTERISTIC 32

Pharisees say they would never have done the evil that others did

*“You Pharisees build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous, and say, ‘If we had been living in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partners with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.’”
(Matthew 23:29, 30).*

Pharisees look at the sins and failures of others and say, “We would never have done that. We would never dress like that. We would never have behaved like that. We would never have spoken like that”, etc.

We need to recognise, even as the best of Christians, that we have the same corrupt flesh that every child of Adam has. Pharisees do not recognise the corruption in their own flesh. A godly man would acknowledge that he is capable of committing any sin that anyone has ever committed. He will acknowledge that it is only God’s restraining grace that has kept him from committing many sins. An old saint of God, when he saw a criminal being led to his execution, said, *“There, but for the grace of God, go I”*. That saint recognised that he was capable of committing every

crime that the criminal had committed, if it were not for the restraining power of God's grace that he had opened his heart to receive. Every godly man will acknowledge that. But a Pharisee will never admit it.

CHARACTERISTIC 33

Pharisees persecute God's prophets

"I am sending you prophets...Some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues, and persecute from city to city, so that upon you may fall the guilt of all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar" (Matthew 23:34, 35).

Pharisees are offended when they hear the truth from a prophet. And so they will persecute such preachers in one way or the other. They like those preachers who flatter them, but hate those who rebuke them and correct them. The Old Testament prophets told Israel about their sin, straight to their faces – and all of them were persecuted and some of them were even killed. If you are offended by rebuke or correction from a godly man, it is very likely that you too are a Pharisee.

CHARACTERISTIC 34

Pharisees care much for the opinions of people

“The baptism of John was from what source, from heaven or from men?” And the Pharisees began reasoning among themselves, saying, “If we say, ‘From men,’ we fear the people; for they all regard John as a prophet.” And answering Jesus, they said, “We do not know.” (Matthew 21:25–27).

The Pharisees were always concerned what others would think about them if they took a stand on a particular matter. Their convictions were determined not by what God’s Word taught, but by what the people around them would think of them. They were not concerned about the opinions of the Romans or the Greeks. But they were concerned about the opinions of their fellow-Jews.

If you are more concerned about what people in your church think about you than to do the right thing according to your conscience, then you are a Pharisee. Many preachers do and say things in order to please some group of people in their church whose favour they desire. Many believers want their children to behave properly, not for the glory of God, but

because they want honour for themselves as parents. And so they make many silly rules for their children, and make them act like *“tin soldiers”*.

In 1987, my eldest son finished school and got admission to two colleges – to IIT in India and to a better college in the USA (with a scholarship as well). When he told me that he preferred to go to the U.S. college, I said “All right. I will send you there”. [*Today, numerous young people from our churches in India have gone to the USA. But in 1987, there was not even one such case in our churches. There was also a Pharisaical idea in the minds of many brothers that “spiritually-minded people in India will not go abroad or send their sons abroad – either to the Arabian Gulf or to the USA”.*] My son was therefore surprised when I agreed to send him and asked me, “What will people in our churches say when they hear that you have sent your son to the United States?” But I was not going to let my children live according to the rules that Pharisees had made. I wanted them to live in freedom in Christ. So I told him, “That will only test whether I am free from the opinions of others.”

Interestingly, some who were critical of my sending my son to America, a few years later sent *their own children* to America. Pharisees are like that: They preach very strict rules to others, but modify those rules when it comes to their own family members. It is extremely rare to find even elder brothers who are totally free from showing partiality to their family-members.

We can lose our children to the world, if we are concerned about the opinions of others. Don't ruin your children's future, by listening to the foolish,

legalistic rules that Pharisaical elders in your church make.

Paul said,

“I have been crucified to the world, and have been set free from the stifling atmosphere of pleasing others and fitting into the little patterns that they dictate” (Galatians 6:14 - MSG).

Seeking to please people is like living in a room filled with a foul smell. Get out and live in the fresh air of freedom in Christ.

CHARACTERISTIC 35

Pharisees love money

“The Pharisees were lovers of money” (Luke 16:14).

When we think of the Pharisees, we don't usually associate the love of money with them. But in actual fact this is one of the clearest marks of a Pharisee. Even if you do not have any of the other 49 characteristics of a Pharisee, but have just this one, you are still a Pharisee. Pharisees will nit-pick about small rules in the Law, but when it comes to money they love it immensely. Jesus had just said (*in Luke 16:13*) “You cannot love God and Mammon (material wealth)”. The Pharisees scoffed at that statement (*verse 14*), because they were lovers of money and felt that they loved God too. A believer can use material wealth as his servant (any amount of it) but the moment he begins to love it, he becomes a Pharisee.

God gave us material things to use and people to love. The devil has succeeded in reversing that in the human race and as a result people love *material things* and use *people* (for their own advantage). Jesus came to turn us right side up – so that we can love people and use material things (to bless people). Godly people deny themselves many material things

so that they can bless people with those things. That's how Jesus lived.

Many preachers who are sticklers for little rules that they impose on others are themselves great lovers of money. They even neglect their responsibilities in the church in order to make more money for themselves – because they are Pharisees and their minds are always on money.

CHARACTERISTIC 36

Pharisees imagine that they are better than others

“Jesus spoke this parable to some people who viewed others with contempt: Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee...who prayed to himself: ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other people’ (Luke 18:9-11).

In this parable we observe first of all that this Pharisee didn't pray to God. He prayed to *himself* (verse 11). He thanked God in his heart, that he was better than others. He didn't say that aloud, for then he would have lost his reputation for humility!!

Suppose one day, someone loses his temper at you and gets angry. But you control your temper and keep quiet. Then you secretly congratulate yourself and say, “Lord, I thank You that I am not like this person. I thank You that I have self-control”. You have, at that moment, prayed the same prayer that the Pharisee prayed. That other person fell into a 10-foot pit called “*anger*”. But you fell into a far deeper 1000-foot pit called “*spiritual pride*”. Which of you was worse? That person may be convicted later of his anger and repent and come back to the Lord.

But you may never see your self-righteousness – and thus never repent of your spiritual pride! Finally, in God’s eyes, that person ends up better than you.

Spiritual pride is like an onion. When you peel off one layer, you think you have finished with it. But there is another layer underneath – and another underneath that, and yet another underneath that – and so on. We will never eliminate spiritual pride completely from our lives on earth. But we can make the onion quite thin, if we judge ourselves faithfully – instead of judging others!!

Spiritual pride is also very subtle and can clothe itself in the garb of humility!! A Sunday-School teacher was teaching this story of the Pharisee and the tax-collector to her children. At the end she said (words that sounded exactly like the Pharisees’ words), “Children, thank God we are not like the Pharisee”!! We laugh at that and we say “Thank God we are not like the Sunday-School Teacher”!! Yes, spiritual pride is indeed like an onion!!

Pride and selfishness are two sins that we will never be totally free from, until Christ returns and we become like Him. These sins are like onions with innumerable layers. If we cleanse ourselves as soon as we see one layer of either of these, in us, we can gradually reduce the size of these onions. Our longing should be to make these “*onions*” as thin as possible, before Christ returns. If you are doing that, you are on the right track – and you will never be a Pharisee.

CHARACTERISTIC 37

Pharisees trust in their own righteousness

“He also told this parable to some people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous” (Luke 18:9).

There is a righteousness of faith, which is a gift from God. And there is a righteousness which we can produce ourselves. The way to find out which one you have is to ask yourself whether you are proud of your righteousness. If so, then you must have produced it yourself. If you had the righteousness of God which was received as a gift from Him, you would be thankful for it, but you could not be proud of it. Pharisees have a righteousness that they are proud of.

You can be proud of a book that you wrote. But you cannot be proud of a book that someone else wrote. So if you are proud of some good quality you have in your life – whether humility, or generosity, or prayerfulness, or whatever, you must have produced it yourself. If you are generous and hospitable, and you are proud of it, then those qualities may be just human qualities, and not the divine nature. Because if they were part of God’s nature that He had given you freely, how could you boast about them? To be

hospitable is a good virtue, but if you are proud of it, then your hospitality stinks before God.

This principle applies in other areas too – that have nothing to do with righteousness. Maybe you can sing better than others, or play an instrument better, or preach better. Or perhaps your church is larger than someone else’s church. Anything that you are proud of is the result of your own labour. If it was God’s work, you could not boast about it.

Many boast about the sacrifices they have made for the Lord. That makes it obvious that they have not seen the immensity of Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross for them. Can you see a single star when the sun is shining? No. When the sacrifice of Jesus on Calvary becomes as bright as the sun in our minds, all our petty sacrifices will disappear like the stars in the daytime – and we won’t even call them “*sacrifices*” any more. If you can remember all your sacrifices, then you must be in the darkness still – for it is only at night that we can see the stars!!

Come in faith and humility and receive the righteousness of God that he offers you in Christ – and give Him all the glory for it, all the days of your life. Then you will never be a Pharisee.

CHARACTERISTIC 38

Pharisees look down on others

“Jesus spoke this parable to some people who viewed others with contempt” (Luke 18:9).

There are various reasons why people view others with contempt. They may have been taught by their parents from childhood to look down on others who are inferior in social status, or wealth or education etc. Or if you are very intelligent and top your class in school, you can begin to view others in your class with contempt. If, in addition, you are unfortunate enough to have foolish parents who make you imagine that you are a genius, then matters could be even worse.

Let me plead with all parents: If your children are intelligent, please don’t ruin them by boasting about them. I made it a rule in my house that my sons were never to tell anyone about their rank in class or the prizes they got anywhere. I knew that if they became proud, they would lose the grace of God immediately. Then they would fall into sin and never be able to fellowship with ordinary brothers. I fear that many parents have ruined their children thus.

It is a common habit among children to make fun of someone who cannot speak English (or whatever their mother-tongue is) with a good accent. Beware of encouraging that in your home. Did any of us come out of our mother's wombs speaking with a good accent? We should thank God for any ability that we have. But we should never be proud of it. Do you know what accent they speak with in heaven? The accents of *humility* and *love*. Let us learn those accents clearly.

Perhaps you are a woman who keeps your house spotlessly clean, with everything in its proper place. Then you see someone else's home untidy and slipshod – and you despise her. You are then a Pharisee; while the person whose house is untidy may be a godly person.

Some brothers have very poor music sense and if they start singing a chorus in an open time of praise in the church, they will invariably sing totally off tune. Don't despise them, because God doesn't listen to the music. He listens to the words. And that brother singing the wrong tune may be more sincere than you are, who can sing the right tune. Personally, I have thanked God for such brothers, because they humble all the clever musicians in the church. It is Pharisee musicians who destroy the church, not the non-musical brothers. God loves non-musical brothers just as much as anyone else – but He rejects Pharisees. Many a surprise awaits such Pharisees when the Lord returns.

I am not saying that you shouldn't come first in your class, or that you shouldn't keep your house tidy, or that you shouldn't sing in tune. Not at all. By

all means let us do all these. But let us be humble about them – and not despise anyone else who cannot do what we can.

There are many areas like this where we can despise others quite easily. It says in *Job 36:5* that “*God is almighty, but He doesn't despise anyone*”. The more we become like God, the more we will value people and never despise anyone – for anything.

So let us cleanse ourselves and learn to look at people as God looks at them.

“What do you have that you did not receive from God? How can you boast then about anything or despise anyone else?” (1 Corinthians 4:7).

CHARACTERISTIC 39

Pharisees exalt themselves over others

*“This tax-collector went to his house justified rather than the Pharisee – for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled”
(Luke 18:14).*

Pharisees cannot be justified by God because they exalt themselves. God humbles all those who exalt themselves over others.

There are many subtle ways in which we can exalt ourselves over others. We can behave in ways that make others feel small and inferior to us. Gifted people and musicians are in great danger here. You must not play a musical instrument in a church meeting in a way that makes people admire you. You are there to help people to worship God and not to get them to worship you!!

Sometimes married couples speak about the joys of married life in the presence of single sisters who are older and not married. They are exalting their marriage relationship when they speak like that, without any consideration for the feelings of those single sisters. We must not hurt others by such testimonies. Pharisees are totally inconsiderate about the feelings of others. That is why they cannot be

declared righteous (*justified*) by God, because God justifies only the humble.

There are many other ways in which we can exalt ourselves over others. We must ask the Holy Spirit to make us sensitive in this area.

CHARACTERISTIC 40

Pharisees boast about their accomplishments

*“God, I thank You that I am not a swindler, or unjust, or an adulterer. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get...”
(Luke 18:11, 12).*

We face a great danger whenever we give a report of what the Lord has done through us. We must give our testimony for the glory of God – but we have to be ever so careful that we are not boasting about our accomplishments like the Pharisees did. Preachers especially are in great danger here. Many reports of Christian work that are sent by Christian workers in India to Western countries often have a spirit of boasting. Those workers are trying to prove that they are doing a great work for God – and possibly even subtly implying that they are doing a greater work than some other mission is doing in India.

There must be zero boasting about what we are doing for the Lord, if we want to be free from Phariseeism.

We must keep our work for the Lord hidden for Him alone to see. We cannot receive grace from God if there is even a smell of boasting in our lives – for God gives His grace only to the humble.

CHARACTERISTIC 41

Pharisees accuse others

*“The Pharisees brought a woman caught in adultery, and having set her in the center of the court, they said to Him, ‘Teacher, this woman has been caught in adultery, in the very act. Now in the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women; what then do You say?’ They were saying this, testing Him, so that they might have grounds for accusing Him”
(John 8:3-6).*

The Pharisees had not understood the heart of God behind the law that stated that adulterous women must be stoned. God did not love to see women stoned to death, but He did want to put a severe deterrent in the way of adultery. The Pharisees were not actually interested in obeying the Law here. All they wanted was to find some grounds to accuse Jesus. They had already accused the sinful woman and now they wanted to accuse the sinless Son of God as well. That is how Pharisees are. They have no fear of God and would accuse the godliest men as much as they would accuse anyone else.

The Pharisees thought this was a “*Catch-22*” situation, where whatever Jesus said would give them grounds to accuse Him. If He said, “Stone her to

death”, they would accuse Him of lacking compassion; and if He said, “No. Don’t stone her to death”, then they could accuse Him of not keeping the Law of Moses. It was like tossing a coin and saying, “*Heads we win, tails you lose*”. We will win either way. But they didn’t win. They lost! Jesus did not reply immediately but sat down and waited for a word from His Father. As soon as He heard the Father’s reply, He told them, “*Let him who is without sin, cast the first stone*”. One sentence from the Father was enough to solve the problem.

If you listen to the Holy Spirit, you won’t have to preach a long sermon *in situations like this*. One sentence can shut the mouths of your enemies. God gives such words of wisdom even today to those who are not Pharisees and who do not accuse others. God’s promise to such people is

“I will give you the right words and such logic and wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to reply or refute!” (Luke 21:15 - NASB & TLB).

Was Jesus against adultery? Yes, He certainly was. But He was much more against legalism than He was against adultery. We see that very clearly here: The adulterous woman was on one side of Jesus and the legalistic Pharisees on the other. In the end we find only the adulterous woman at Jesus’ feet. The others were driven away by the word that Jesus spoke. Adultery was only a speck in the woman’s eye compared to the massive logs of legalism and hatred in the eyes of the Pharisees.

Now ask yourself how many times you have accused good brothers and sisters of things which are not even one-millionth as bad as adultery. Think of the things you have spoken about them behind their back, in your house and elsewhere. Every time you have indulged in such accusations, the log in your eye – your hard, judgemental, accusative attitude towards others – has become bigger and bigger and made you more and more blind to spiritual things. Who have you harmed ultimately? Yourself, more than anyone else.

Do you think that a man with a log in his eye can be an eye-doctor to remove specks from the eyes of others? You need to hear the word of the Lord saying to you, “Leave your brothers and sisters alone. They only have a few specks in their eyes. The log in your eye is much worse than all their specks put together.”

Why was Jesus so much against this spirit of accusation? Because, when He was in heaven, He had heard Satan (the “*Accuser of the brethren*”) accusing people “day and night” continually (*Revelation 12:10*). When Jesus came to earth and saw people having that same spirit, they reminded Him of Satan. Jesus hated this spirit of accusation then and He hates it even today. *Do you realise that when you accuse others you remind Jesus of Satan?* Most believers don’t see this – because the log in their eyes has blinded them.

If there is one message I have preached for 30 years it is this: *If you want to progress spiritually, stop judging others and start judging yourself*. Use your microscope on yourself and not on others. And after you have judged yourself, I’ll tell you what you

should do. Judge yourself some more. When should you stop? When you have become completely like Jesus Christ. The apostle John told believers at the end of his life,

“When Christ appears, we will be like Him ... and everyone who has this hope will purify himself, just as Christ is pure” (1 John 3:2, 3).

How then should a church-leader correct someone who is wrong? With mercy – with tremendous mercy, with as much mercy as the Lord has shown him. Jesus did not ignore the sin of adultery that this woman had committed. No. He first told her with great compassion, *“I don’t condemn you”*. Then He warned her strongly, *“Don’t ever commit this sin again”*. God’s grace doesn’t condone our sin! It *forgives* our sin first and then *warns* us not sin and then *helps* us not to sin.

Why did all the Pharisees go away? They should have come all to the Lord in brokenness saying, *“Lord, please forgive me. I have got light on my own hidden sins and my hard legalistic attitude now. I see now that I am much worse than this woman. Please have mercy on me.”* But not one of them came to Jesus like that.

What about you who have been finding fault with so many people for some fault or the other that you see in them? Will you let the Lord break you today?

When some people have come to me and apologised for something they said or did against me, I have sensed that they were not broken. This proved that they had not really repented of their sin. They were

just obeying a law to keep their conscience clean. I forgave them immediately. But I am certain that they will fall into those sins again, because they are legalistic. They had realised technically, that they had disobeyed *“Law Number 347 – Thou shalt not speak evil against an elder brother behind his back”* and needed now to apologize. So they go through the formality of an apology, in order to obey *“Law Number 9 – Thou shalt apologize to the one thou hast wronged”*!! But nothing has changed within them. They go on with their lives as before.

When God gives us light on our own sins, we will be so blinded by that light, that we will fall at Jesus’ feet like a dead man (*Revelation 1:17*) and we will consider ourselves to be *“the greatest sinners on earth”* (*1 Timothy 1:15*). Have you ever felt like that? Or do you just feel that you slipped up slightly? Then you are a Pharisee and it cannot go well with you until you repent of stoning poor people who have specks in their eyes. Let God to break your stubborn heart.

James 2:13 reminds us that *“God will be merciless in judging all who have not shown mercy to others”*. And church leaders are usually the Number One culprits in this area. Parents also need to be careful that they are not unmerciful to their children.

A church-leader who falls into adultery can never destroy a church, because every believer knows that adultery is a sin, and that leader will be removed from his position immediately. But if a church-leader is a legalist, he is a far greater danger – because he is preaching *“holiness”*. And those who don’t have light on legalism will follow him and become legalists themselves. As a blind Pharisee he will thus lead

others also into the deep pit of legalism into which he himself has fallen.

Have you actually seen that your attitude of judging and accusing others is worse than if you had fallen into adultery *ten times*? How would you repent if you had fallen into adultery ten times in the last one month? You must repent even more than that for having the spirit of accusation.

CHARACTERISTIC 42

Pharisees imagine that God is their Father when actually Satan is their father

Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love Me... You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father" (John 8:42, 44).

Jesus told the Pharisees to their faces that their father was the devil. Some preachers believe that no human being is a child of the devil. But Jesus stated otherwise; and He knew the truth about this better than any of us do. Those Pharisees imagined that God was their father, when in fact Satan was their father. It is the same with Pharisees today. Children manifest the nature of their father; and Pharisees are "*accusers of the brothers*", like their father the devil. It is simply amazing that so many "*Christians*" keep on accusing and condemning other believers and yet don't seem to realise that these are the characteristics of Satan. So he must be their father! How can such people imagine that their father is God? That is total blindness! The Pharisees in the first century didn't believe what Jesus told them. And today's Pharisees don't believe it either.

I have sometimes told people who have attended our church for many years that I did not feel that they knew the Lord, despite their having repeated the words, “Lord Jesus, come into my heart” at some time in the past – because I did not see any fruit in their lives that indicated that they knew the Lord. Many church leaders are not faithful (like Jesus was) to tell people the truth. They are more interested in their own reputation than in saving people from hell. Thus the blood of those unconverted people is on the hands of such leaders.

CHARACTERISTIC 43

Pharisees are liars and murderers

Jesus said, “You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies.” (John 8:44).

The Pharisees had a murderous desire towards the woman caught in adultery. But today’s Pharisees have become more civilised and murder people only with their tongues.

Have you murdered anyone’s reputation by spreading evil stories about him – even if the stories were true? When Satan accuses believers to God, he never tells any lies to God. He speaks the truth, because he knows that he can’t tell lies to God. He tells God the truth about your sins, but in a spirit of accusation. In the same way, it is possible to tell true stories about a believer with the spirit of the accuser in order to destroy his reputation. None of you would spread such tales about your own children. If your daughter fell into adultery, would you tell everybody in your church about it, or would you try your best to cover it up? Many of your sons and daughters have

done foolish things in the past. But you parents have lovingly covered them up and protected their reputations. Why don't you do the same when it concerns another brother's son or daughter? We must get rid of all "murderers" from the church.

Pharisees are also liars. I have observed one thing again and again through all these years: Whenever a believer backslides, he begins to tell lies immediately. It is almost as though Satan takes over his heart and tongue immediately. They will sugar-coat their lies and pretend as if they are being honest. They will beat around the bush and talk about everything except the truth. They will not look you straight in the face when they speak. The devil is the father of lies. But he needs a mother to produce those lies through. And it is only when you give your heart to the devil that he is able to produce a lie through you. Peter asked Ananias, "*Why has Satan filled your heart to tell a lie*" (Acts 5:3). A preacher who tells a lie has given his tongue to Satan at that moment. He cannot then expect God to use his tongue and anoint Him to preach, until he confesses his sin and repents and forsakes that habit.

We must hate lying as much as we hate murder.

CHARACTERISTIC 44

Pharisees persecute those who don't listen to them

"The Pharisees told him (the blind man who was healed), "You were born entirely in sins, and are you teaching us?" So they put him out (of the synagogue). (John 9:34).

The Pharisees could not heal that poor man who was born blind. But when Jesus healed him, they were upset and called him a sinner and put him out of the synagogue.

Pharisaical church-leaders threaten to put people out of the church if they won't obey the leader's orders. Pharisaical elders love to have authority over others and to control them. Jesus said that if a brother sins, we should go and speak to him and try and win him (*Matthew 18:15*). Excommunication should be the last option. Our goal must always be to try and win the brother who sinned.

Believers may fall into sin and do wrong things. When that happens, his church-leader has an option: To speak to him as Jesus would, or as a Pharisee would. Jesus would seek to win the brother. But the

devil will want to destroy him. Pharisees are in league with the devil and will harass and persecute those who do not listen to them, or who do not submit to their authority.

CHARACTERISTIC 45

Pharisees are jealous of those who can do miracles that they cannot do

“The Pharisees said, ‘What are we doing? For this man is performing many miracles’. From that day on they planned together to kill Him” (John 11:47, 53).

Here, in *John 11*, Jesus had just raised Lazarus from the dead. The Pharisees should have been excited about it. But they were not – because the Man who did the miracle *was not from their group!!* Jesus belonged to another denomination!! The Pharisees were green with jealousy over this. Jealousy is such an obvious thing, that even a worldly person like Pilate could recognise it in the Pharisees (*Matthew 27:18*). Beware of jealousy.

Pharisees are jealous of those who do miracles. I am not talking now about the counterfeit “*miracles*” being done by television evangelists today that fool many believers. We have all seen plenty of those. I am talking about real miracles that are taking place even today. But you don’t see those on television or at the so-called “healing crusades”. The real miracles taking place today (exactly as in the *Acts of the*

Apostles) are in places where the gospel is being preached *for the very first time* – for example, in some places in North India. Many don't realise the fact that in the *Acts of the Apostles*, the miracles God performed were in places where the gospel was going for the first time. The people through whom God is doing such miracles today are ordinary, unknown believers; and just like Jesus, they also do not advertise the miracles they have seen.

God is a God of miracles, and if you cannot trust Him to do a miracle for you, then you are a Pharisee. When you are sick you must pray to God for healing, and not just accept the sickness. We have some privileges as God's children that others do not have. We can "*taste the powers of the age to come*" (*Hebrews 6:5*). And if it is not God's will to heal you (for any reason), then you can ask Him to give you "*something better than healing*", as He gave Paul (*2 Corinthians 12:7-10*). If you are an elder in a church and some sick person comes to you for prayer, you must pray (with whatever faith you have) that God will heal him and draw him closer to Himself thereby. And when God answers your prayer, be careful to give Him the glory and not to boast about it – or else you will end up as a greater Pharisee.

CHARACTERISTIC 46

Pharisees judge godly people for not doing something that they do

The Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, because He does not keep the Sabbath" (John 9:16).

Pharisees assess people not by their godliness but by whether they observe some religious ritual or not. They were certain that Jesus could not be from God, because He did not keep the Sabbath *the way they kept it*. We too can have our own ideas as to how something should be done in the church; and if someone does not do it that way, we can write him off as ungodly. Prejudice is a powerful evil that can destroy fellowship.

The Salvation Army (founded by William Booth in the 19th century in England) does not have "*breaking of bread*" in their services. One reason they gave for that was that many of their converts were drunkards and were tempted to go back to their alcoholism, when they smelt the wine at the communion. They did not practise water-baptism either, because they said that many who were baptized had not really been converted. But William Booth was one of the

godliest men of his time; and he and his wife brought thousands to Christ from the dregs of society, all over the world. What would you think of such a man? Pharisees would reject him outright. But if I were living in England 150 years ago, I would have joined him in the work he was doing of bringing drunkards and prostitutes and thieves to Christ – a work that no-one else was doing. I don't agree with their doctrines in these two matters. But I would not assess a man's godliness by whether he agreed with me on baptism and the Lord's Table.

We have to be careful that we don't speak empty words of criticism against godly men like William Booth. It is true that Paul criticised Peter for a compromising stand that Peter took (*Galatians 2:11*). But Peter had recognised the grace that God had given Paul (*Galatians 2:9*). So when such a man as Paul criticises Peter, that is acceptable.

But who are the ones who are criticising godly men today? Invariably, those who have done nothing for the Lord themselves, and those whom God has *not* borne witness to in any way. Such foolish believers dare to criticise godly men whom God has used a thousand times more than them. That is Phariseeism.

CHARACTERISTIC 47

Pharisees test God by asking Him for signs

"The Pharisees said to Jesus, 'Teacher, we want to see a sign from You'" (Matthew 12:38).

Pharisees always want some sign or miracle to be assured of the truth. They cannot live by simple faith. And that is why religious charlatans are able to deceive such Pharisees with their false signs and wonders today. Don't ever imagine that asking God for a sign or a miracle is a mark of spirituality. It's the mark of a Pharisee. We find this statement repeated in *Matthew 16:1* as well.

CHARACTERISTIC 48

Pharisees have no concern for lost sinners

“The Pharisees said, ‘This crowd which does not know the Law is accursed’” (John 7:49).

Today’s Pharisees can have the same attitude towards those going to hell and say, “O these people who don’t accept Christ as their Saviour are going to hell.” That is true. But such a comment also exposes the speaker as a Pharisee who has no concern for the lost. If you have no concern for those who are going to hell, that would clearly prove that you are a Pharisee.

When we witness to others, our concern should be *their salvation* and *not* that their blood should no longer be on our hands. I have seen Christians distributing tracts indiscriminately to people and sticking tracts in people’s letter boxes and cars, and then being satisfied that they have done their part. *“God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved” (John 3:17).* But a lot of the tract-distribution being done today by many believers only results in condemning those unbelievers. It is done with the selfish motive of easing the believers’ conscience and not

with love and a burden to bring those lost people to the Saviour's feet. Many of these tract-distributors imagine that they have a concern for the lost. But they don't. They are Pharisees.

CHARACTERISTIC 49

Pharisees value their traditions more than God's Word

"Jesus said to the Pharisees, 'You are experts at setting aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition'"
(Mark 7:9).

All churches have traditions of some sort or the other. If those traditions have become more important to you than God's Word, then you are a Pharisee. Jesus told the Pharisees that by exalting their traditions above God's Word, they had progressively (1) "*neglected the Word of God*", (2) "*set it aside*" and finally (3) "*invalidated it*" altogether (*Mark 7:8-13*).

We all need to ask ourselves whether any of us have been guilty of the same sin. Are your traditions more important to you than loving God with all your heart and loving your fellow-believers (in every denomination) exactly as Jesus loved you? Do you reject a child of God just because he does not keep your church-traditions? If so, you are a Pharisee.

CHARACTERISTIC 50

Pharisees justify themselves

“Jesus said to the Pharisees, ‘You are those who justify yourselves in the sight of men, but God knows your hearts; for that which is highly esteemed among men is detestable in the sight of God’” (Luke 16:15).

A Pharisee justifies himself in every situation. He cannot humbly acknowledge his error and take the blame for his sins and his mistakes.

Adam could not take the blame for his sin. When God asked him “Did you eat of the tree?” there was only one answer that was right: “Yes Lord”. *But he didn’t say that.* He first blamed his wife for giving him the fruit and then blamed God for giving him such a wife!! (*Genesis 3:12*). This is what is meant by justifying oneself. As a result Adam was driven out of paradise.

The thief on the cross who was saved was totally different. He said, “*I deserve my punishment.*” (*Luke 23:41*). He did not blame his parents for bringing him up badly, or his friends for leading him astray, or the judge for being prejudiced or partial or too hard. He simply said, “I am totally deserving of this punishment.” As a result, he went with Jesus to paradise

that very day – for paradise is made for those who accept the blame for their own sins and who don't blame anyone else.

If you are one who blames your wife or God or any other person, in order to justify yourself, you are a Pharisee and you are on your way to hell.

Jesus' closing words to the Pharisees are fearful: *"You serpents, you brood of vipers, how will you escape the sentence of hell?"* (Matthew 23:33).

"Since we have a kingdom that nothing can destroy, let us please God by serving Him with thankful hearts and with holy fear and awe. For our God is a consuming fire. So continue to love each other with true brotherly love" (Hebrew 12:28 to 13:1).

Phariseeism is like the pus inside an infected boil on your skin. As you squeeze out the pus each day, you will find more and more pus there until it is completely cleansed. So we must squeeze out all the Phariseeism within us, until nothing is left.

May we honestly acknowledge,

"Lord, I am the guilty person. It's not my husband, or my wife, or my brother, or my sister, or anyone else, who is a Pharisee. It is me. Please have mercy on me and deliver me completely from my Phariseeism. Give me grace to be a godly man and a disciple of Yours. And help me to be merciful to others at all times, just as You have been merciful to me."

May the Lord help us walk this way all the days of our life, so that we can have an abundant entrance into His kingdom one day.

Amen and Amen.

About the Book

The Pharisees kept the external commandments of the Law and even engaged in missionary work. You can do these things and still be a Pharisee. Evangelical Christians who are pursuing after holiness are most in danger of becoming Pharisees – without even knowing it.

The spirit of the Pharisee is dangerous because it is opposed to the Spirit of Christ. Just as we would not want to have an atom of the spirit of hell in us, we should not have an atom of the spirit of the Pharisee in us either.

There are *fifty characteristics* of the Pharisees mentioned in the gospels, that Zac Poonen considers, in this book.

If you want to be free from Phariseeism, [read this book...](#)



Zac Poonen was formerly an officer in the Indian Navy. He has been engaged in a church-planting ministry in India and other countries since 1975. He ministers at deeper life conferences in many lands. He and his wife Annie, live in Bangalore, South India. They have four married sons, who, along with their wives, are also following the Lord.

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