

Have you ever heard anyone call another person a “Pharisee?” Or maybe something like “you are being pharisaical?” I’ve heard that and I think I know what people usually mean – “you are being too much about the letter of the law but missing the big picture,” which the Pharisees often did. But upon closer examination, that may not be an exactly accurate picture of the first century Pharisee.

Pharisee actually means “separated” as to the Lord. They were very much wanting to serve God – initially. It seems their issues had less to do with how strictly they followed the law, but the attitude with which they did it.

Based on Jesus’ interaction with them, their largest issue seemed to connect to Hypocrisy (elevating themselves as higher than others).

Convinced they had attained the righteousness they sought, the Pharisees became prey to their own self-satisfaction, and unknowingly they rejected their only hope of righteousness. Jesus points out that even their good deeds were done for the wrong reasons.

Their case can show us the need to strike the proper balance between knowing and living truth and doing such for the right reasons and with the right heart.

Let’s take a closer look at some of their issues and how Jesus interacted with them.

1. The Pharisees – **Matthew 23:1-10**

a. **V. 3-4:** “*they say things and do not do them*”

a. **Verse 3** – “*What they tell you, do and observe...*” We see that Jesus wasn’t condemning what the Pharisees were teaching here, but Jesus warns people not to do as the Pharisees do “*for they say things and do not do them*”.

• **Matthew 23:25-28**

- a. Jesus uses their own practice against them. They were meticulous about “cleaning” the outside appearances that they completely missed the deeper meaning of having the inside “clean”. We all recognize this, don’t we? In ourselves or others?
- b. **V. 28:** Though they may appear godly on the outside, Jesus says they are “*inwardly full of hypocrisy and lawlessness*”.
- c. **Hypocrisy** – “claiming to have moral standards in which one’s actions do not conform” In **verses 13-34** Jesus calls them hypocrites 8 times and calls them blind 5 times. **Lawlessness** – “not regulated by or not restrained by law”
- d. For a group of people who focused so much on binding others to such strict traditions and ceremonies, this would be detrimental to their ego! Their own Pharisaic law prohibits hypocrisy (JT, Berakoth f. ix, 7; 13), it’s a paradox inside a paradox!
- e. **V.4** – I think we all need to be cautious of this, don’t you? This idea of knowing the truth and enforcing it, while somehow, someway, justifying not actually doing it or doing it consistently ourselves.

b. **V. 5:** “*they do their deeds to be noticed by men*”

a. **v. 5** - phylacteries are small box-shaped pouches with scripture on them. They would wear them on their forehead and arms as a reminder of what God had done. These extra-long tassels were supposed to be another reminder of how great God is. That’s a good thing! But not their attitude behind it. They would put on a “holier than thou” show – everyone who saw would understand how “deeply spiritual” the individual was and they would be praised.

• **Matthew 6:1-4**

- a. **V. 1:** “Jesus doesn’t beat around the bush”. He says with certainty and clarity that doing things to be noticed will give one “*no reward with your Father which is in Heaven*”.
- b. **V.2-4:** Jesus goes on to clarify some examples. When Jesus instructs about giving to the poor he uses the phrase “*as the hypocrites do in the synagogues...*”. While this doesn’t necessarily mean he is directly speaking of the Pharisees, based on some of the information as we introduced them, the Pharisees spent much of their time in the synagogues and was a central location for them.

- c. Jesus uses the phrases “noticed by men” and “honored by men” to reveal the true motivation behind their deeds. And Jesus says “they will have their reward in full”, alluding to **verse 1**. (This very well may mean that the most glory they will ever get is the applause of men. I don’t know about you, but I’m looking for the approval of God on the last day.)
- d. BUT, haven’t we done the same thing? Don’t we want people to see us doing good? Don’t we want other people to know we’re a good person? Sure we do, but their example should teach us to self-examine and make sure our godliness is about something and Someone greater.
- c. **V.6-10: “they love the place of honor”**
 - a. There’s no question about it, the Pharisees loved to receive honor and praise from men. They wanted to look as though they were in a high position and felt entitled to honor.
 - **Luke 18:9-14**
 - a. There is definite importance in the characters used in this parable. Pharisees were considered holy and tax collectors were viewed as the scum of the earth.
 - b. **V. 11:** This is really the Pharisee praising himself and telling God it is an honor for him to have the privilege of hearing him speak! How pretentious and irreverent!
 - c. This man was just going through the motions to check it off his list standing in the middle of the Temple and not giving one thought to who he was talking to. God ought to have higher esteem in our eyes than this!
 - d. This Pharisee has basically placed himself at the right hand of God. Just like Jesus says in **Matthew 23:6-10:** they love honor and to be addressed with honorary titles. But Jesus is clear that there is only one teacher and one father in heaven we should look up to. Not men.
 - e. It’s okay to call people “father” or “teacher” or “leader” so long as you don’t let it get to your head. Calling people these things when it takes glory away from God is wrong. Every bit of the glory belongs to God.

Now let’s talk about **complete contrast**.

2. Jesus – **Matthew 23:11-12**

- a. Says and Does for Others
 - **V. 11: “The greatest among you shall be your servant” James 4:6-10**
 - a. **John 13:5-17:** This is the messiah and God doing the work of the lowest of slaves. Jesus says he is truly the Lord and Teacher. He truly is the greatest among men. Jesus instructed and James affirmed it, but Jesus showed it.
- b. Does for the Glory of God
 - **V. 12: “Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled...” Luke 18:19**
 - a. **John 17:1-5** Jesus prays that God would glorify him so that he may glorify God! Jesus doesn’t look to raise himself – he seeks to raise God.
- c. Honor in Serving the Father
 - **V. 12: “...whoever humbles himself shall be exalted.” John 4:34**
 - a. Jesus takes it to the grave! **Luke 22:41-44**, Jesus is about to be turned over to be crucified and Jesus is in agony and had the power to escape. He wishes the cup could be passed from him. But what does he say? “...yet not my will, but Yours be done.”

We’re actually talking about ourselves. Which list do we fall under? How can we know? There are a couple ways we can know.

Prayer – Giving God the reverence he deserves in prayer and putting him first in our thoughts.

People – How we treat people – not looking down on them or trying to be greater than them.

Purpose – Not being hypocritical, doing things to be noticed, or wanting more honor. We can’t achieve it that way.

I’ll offer the invitation like this:

If Jesus were here today and said some words about you individually? Which of the two lists would you fit?