

Don't Want To Be A Pharisee by Jeff Strite

John 8:1-8:11

About the worst thing you can call somebody in Church is to say they are a "Pharisee". The Pharisees were THE "bad guys" in scripture and seemed to always be the main group that Jesus singled out as examples of who His followers were NOT to be like.

I don't want to be a Pharisee.

How many of you would not want to be a Pharisee? (Ask for a show of hands)

But apparently we could become like them if we are not careful.

Someone put together a list of danger signs to know whether or not you've become a modern day Pharisee:

YOU MIGHT BE A PHARISEE IF...

Your official title is longer than your given name.

You're willing to be merciful – once.

You have two dogs named "Faithful" and "True"... and they're both killer pit bulls.

Everyone outside your immediate circle, and most within it, are wrong.

God's still small voice... sounds exactly like you.

You know the Word of God, but not the God of the Word.

Back in the days of Jesus the Pharisees were the bad guys and Jesus was always giving them a hard time. So I don't want to be a Pharisee. I don't want to make Jesus mad.

I want to be a Christ follower. I want to pick up my cross daily and follow Him. I want Jesus to look at me on the Day of Judgment and say "Well done, good and faithful servant."

In fact we used to have a song about that at Church Camp.

"Don't want to be a Pharisee

Don't want to be a Pharisee

Cause they're not Fair you see

Don't want to be a Pharisee"

(From the song "I wanna be a Sheep, Baa Baa")

Now why sing the song?

Because there are people who end up being Pharisees.

You see, the Pharisees of Jesus day had started out wanting TO PLEASE God. They began in a day when Israel was deeply tainted with immorality and unrighteousness and somebody needed to stand in the gap. And the Pharisees stepped up to fill that need. And in an era where many Jews had abandoned the rules and laws of God, the Pharisees became like prophets to their people pointing people back to the Law of Moses and obedience to God's Will.

They wanted to obey every one of God's commands, and if God wasn't clear enough on

what He wanted they created a whole bunch of new commands so that they'd make sure they didn't miss anything.

They were the equivalent of modern day church goers who seriously want to please Jesus. These Pharisees were THE religious people of the day and they took their "faith" seriously.

Any time people take their faith seriously, they can step over the line from pleasing God to disobeying Him by becoming like the Pharisees of Jesus day. So we want to be careful WE don't do that too.

I want to stress here: the Pharisees didn't set out to try to make God angry. They didn't wake up every morning thinking: "I'm going to make God mad today!"

But they had made Him angry

Why? What had they gotten so wrong that they actually did make God furious with them?

Well, our text this morning points out 3 of the traps that warped the Pharisees thinking:

1. Rules became more important than people.
2. THEIR agenda became God's agenda (at least in their thinking)
3. They believed their personal sins could be covered up as long as they kept their rules.

So we're going to take these one at a time:

1st The Pharisees saw their RULES as really important. And people became Unimportant.

When the Pharisees brought this adulterous woman to Jesus... they didn't care about her. A rule had been broken. She needed to be exposed. And, in reality they had no intention of stoning her... she was just a prop.

In fact, they couldn't stone her. Only Rome could do that.

You see, once Rome conquered Judah, Judah became a Roman territory, and under Roman law, only the Roman governors had the authority to condemn people to death. You only have to look at the Crucifixion of Jesus to see that truth.

Do you remember who's approval the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law needed to have Jesus executed? That's right – Pilate. He was the Roman Governor at the time.

So when the Pharisees brought this woman to Jesus... she was only a tool. She was the object lesson they wanted to use to get at Jesus. Because they really hated Jesus.

In verses 3-5 we're told they "... brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group and said to Jesus, 'Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do YOU say?'"

And verse 6 says

"They were using this question AS A TRAP, in order to have a basis for accusing him." John 8:6

You see, the Pharisees were right in their accusation.

This woman HAD been caught in adultery and the law decreed that she should die. Every Jewish Rabbi would have known that.

But like I said earlier - when the Roman Empire conquered Judah they took the power to execute wrong doers away from the Jewish leaders. In order to punish sinners, Jews needed to get permission from the Roman Governor.

1. So, IF Jesus said the woman should be stoned, the Pharisees would have reported Him to the Roman authorities and had Him arrested for undermining Roman laws, because only the Romans had the authority to declare a death sentence.

2. BUT, if Jesus said that she couldn't be stoned because of the Roman law, then the Pharisees would have accused him of being an agent of Rome (and everybody hated the Romans). And, since He was a teacher of God's Law, they could have condemned Him for ignoring the plain teachings of the Law of Moses regarding adultery and stoning.

It was a perfect trap.

They didn't care about the woman. And they didn't care about Jesus. In their minds both of them had broken their rules... and both needed to be destroyed.

When you begin to love rules more than people you risk becoming a Pharisee.

And I've seen Churches where that's happened

But that's not a problem here, because your Elders understand that while there are rules and those rules are important... people are important too.

ILLUS: I remember them confronting a person who was caught up in a certain sin. They sat down with this person and explained that what they were doing was wrong... but they'd help them get counseling. They'd work with them to get them out of that sin.

In other words - there was a rule. What had been done was sinful and would destroy this person. BUT they were important TOO. Their lives and their eternal soul was too important to just condemn and throw away.

And this is really one of the lessons that God teaches us:

"The Lord ...is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." 2 Peter 3:9

So that was the first thing that tripped up the Pharisees was that they loved their rules more than they loved people. Rules were important. People weren't.

The 2nd issue that tripped them was that THEIR agendas became God's agenda (at least in their minds).

You need to understand, these Pharisees saw Jesus as an enemy of THEIR god. Their god was on THEIR side... and so anyone who opposed them was opposing God.

ILLUS: I once knew an Elder in another church who was thought like this.

He loved Jesus. But he'd developed the opinion that whatever HE decided was right was

right. If he saw something as moral or true... God did too.

How did he end up with this way?

Well years before I met him - he'd been seriously burned in a fire. I forget what % of his body was damaged but he recalled that it was so bad that the nurses at the hospital despaired that he would ever recover. They told him that no one had ever been burned over that much of their body and survived.

But HE did.

And he believed God had spared him from death, so that he could do great things in the church for Him.

Now, that's a great story... and I really liked this Elder. But I gotta tell you - he was a real pain. He believed that whatever decision HE MADE must be God's decision, because - after all - God had saved him from a certain death so God must have wanted his will to prevail.

Now the thing is... this can happen to anybody (Preachers/Elders/Deacons/SS teachers)

You can end up making Jesus your enemy by substituting your agenda for His. And if you're not careful... you'll not even know you've done it.

BUT there is one symptom of this dangerous attitude. It should be like a road sign saying "Don't go there."

And what is that symptom of becoming like the Pharisees?

When you get mad.

People aren't listening to you. Your opinion is being ignored. Things aren't going YOUR way (read "God's way) at church, or at work or in the family... and so you get really angry that others aren't listening to you.

YOUR agenda is obviously right.

The others have to be wrong... and it makes you mad

If that happens pay attention. It's a sign that you're in danger of becoming like the Pharisees.

So the first trap that warped the Pharisees was that their rules were more important than people.

The 2nd trap was that THEIR agenda (in their minds) was God's agenda.

And the 3rd trap was that Pharisees believed their sins could be covered up as long as they kept the rules. They felt that keeping enough rules that would make them "look good" even if they weren't good.

Jesus condemned them by saying "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness." Matthew 23:27-28

The Pharisees had convinced themselves that if they could "look" good on the outside, that was as good as "being good" on the inside.

In magic it's called the art of "misdirection".

A good magician will fool you by getting you to look at his right hand (hold your hand way up high and wiggle the fingers) while he palms a coin with his left (hold the left hand down by your side and wiggle those fingers). Essentially they fool you by getting you to think one hand (dramatically wave the right hand) is more important than the other (discreetly wave the left hand down by your side).

And that's what happens to people who become like the Pharisees. They fool themselves into thinking that obeying certain rules that this can be just as good as being righteous before God.

- I've heard of churches where the church goers do what a lot of other worshipers do after church – they go out to eat. But often times, once they get to the restaurant they are rude and selfish to the waitresses. Why would they do that? Well, because they've been to church and the waitresses haven't. They've kept the rules (right hand in the air) so they can justify being inconsiderate and unchristian (left hand by your side). Their rule keeping offsets their sinfulness and they feel justified in their actions.

- Or I've heard of churches where the church people absolutely hate each other. I've even heard of congregations where some of the members sit on one side and the other sit on the other... and they refuse to have anything to do with each other. But guess what they do each Sunday. Why, they'll take of communion.

It's OK to be filled in with bitterness and hatred (in their minds) because they've kept the rules. They've obeyed Jesus by taking of the Lord's Supper. Keeping the rules (right hand) draws God's attention and obtains His blessings while their sinful behavior (left hand) is done on the side where He can't see it.

I Corinthians 13 talks about this Pharisaical symptom.

"If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing. I Corinthians 13:1-3

(I picked up a tambourine and began walking out into the audience, continually shaking it with my left hand as I recited the following chant).

If I can speak with the tongues of angels but have no love in my heart... what am I?

(NOTHING)

If I go to church every Sunday but don't show love... what am I? (NOTHING)

If I give all my money to the poor but I really don't love folks... what am I? (NOTHING)

If I teach Sunday School or work in the Sound Booth or work in the pantry but have not love... what am I? (NOTHING)

Did that tambourine annoy you? Me too.

It has the annoying sound like that of a resounding gong or clanging bell.

That's what Paul trying to get across to us: if you get EVERYTHING else right - if you have all your Christian ducks in a row - but don't have love for others... YOU ANNOY GOD!

People who try to live by the rules think that can get God's attention by the keeping of rules

(waving the right hand wildly). But they don't realize that God can hear the rattle of sin they try to hide (rattle tambourine gently in left hand – has a sound like snake's rattle).

The Pharisees got most of the rules right.
But they had no love for others... and they really annoyed God.

Now there's one last point I want to make here.
There are people who hate the concept of Pharisees so badly, they go off the track in the other direction. They hate the "morals police" idea. It offends them that anyone would take a stand for morality and make them feel uncomfortable in their sins. Usually they get upset when a Christian tries to explain why abortion or homosexuality is wrong.

So they'll quote Jesus.
They'll say: "Judge not, lest you be judged".
Or they'll quote Jesus from the passage we read this morning:
"Let him that is without sin cast the first stone"

They're trying to imply that Jesus taught us never to judge sin. That we're never to take a stand against immorality in this world. They hate the idea of a "morals police."

But if you look back in the Old Testament, that's exactly what the prophets were.
Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea, Malachi – they were all telling the people what their sins were and warning to escape the judgment of God.

But unlike the Pharisees, the Prophets of old really took no pleasure in confronting people's sins and declaring God's judgment. Jeremiah was called the "weeping prophet" because it hurt him so much to face people with their sins.
Jeremiah and the other prophets repeatedly warned Israel of God's coming wrath, but they took no pleasure in it.

By contrast, the Pharisee would tell you you were going to hell. And you could tell they were glad that you were going.

ILLUS: I read the true story of a woman who was walking out of the church with her 4 year old son. Her son said: "Mom, I'm not going to sin anymore."
"Well, that's nice," she said. "Why have you decided to not sin?"
And he answered: "Jesus said if you don't sin, you can throw the first stone and I want to throw the first stone."

That little boy wanted to take pleasure in casting stones.
But Jesus didn't.

Notice what He says to this woman in our story:
"Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"
"No one, sir," she said.
"Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin." John

8:10-11

Jesus said "I will not condemn you."

Jesus didn't come to condemn anyone.

You remember John 3:16? "For God so loved the world..."

The next verse says: "For God did not send his Son into the world to CONDEMN the world, but to save the world through him." John 3:17

Jesus didn't come into the world to condemn us for our sins.

He came to stand in the gap. To take our place on the cross. To die in pay the price with His blood. Because our sins had already condemned us.

There was a rule.

The sinful must die.

We had sinned and someone had to die.

And so He died in our place.

It's the oddest thing about this story. It seems to be the only place in the Gospels where Jesus did not tell someone their sins were forgiven. Usually He would say "Go in peace, your sins are forgiven."

But not this time.

This time He tells this woman "Leave your life of sin."

She hadn't come to Him for forgiveness

She was dragged there against her will.

In her heart she was still an adulteress... and she would still go to hell.

"Leave your life of sin"

"Repent of what you have been doing. Stop doing it!"

Because the day will come when Jesus will come again, and He will condemn all who live lives of sin.

CLOSE: Here's the deal. We are called to pick up our cross daily and follow Him.

That means is that we must die to our sins

That's what Romans 6 points out:

"Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?"

By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life."

Unless we come to Jesus wanting to die to our past, we can't be forgiven.

Without repentance there is no forgiveness.

That doesn't mean you're not going to sin anymore. The closer you walk with God the less you'll sin. And that will happen because you've made up your mind to die to sin, to not let it

rule over your life anymore. It will happen because you've set your heart toward God and you've turned away from your past.