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"I found the book compelling and challenging. The author's passion comes through as he shares about his spiritual journey as a believer. The book will make you think."

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"...It is harder to look in the mirror and see the Pharisee looking back at us. Wayne shares with us his journey to a deeply biblical and authentic look at his own life, and exposes the spiritual realities of Phariseeism. The reality of being an authentic follower of Christ is worth the challenge this book presents."

— **Jim Jeffery**, D.D., President, Baptist Bible College and Seminary

"Looking at ourselves in a mirror is seldom satisfying. But the purpose of the reflection is to motivate change, and that's what this book is all about... The included study guide and journal will bring your thoughts into order and action. This is a must read for those of us who consider ourselves the remnant of orthodox, passionate, sincere conservatives."

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"[His] writing style is engaging, [his] insight into traditional church is profound... The Lord has challenged my heart attitude through Wayne's humble spirit as he writes this convicting book, *The Pharisee within Me...* Today's church needs this reminder! I highly recommend that you prayerfully read this timely book on a timeless topic."

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Adjunct Professor, Liberty University and Davis College  
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"Thanks, Wayne, for explaining the problem and helping me realize that I need to allow God to turn the mirror and spotlight on myself if I am going to move beyond legalism to Grace."

— **Brent Carl**, Vice President, Training Operations, Youth Ministry International

"Wayne... [shows us] that, as we back away from legalism and Phariseeism in the lives of others, we must exercise caution not to become cynical and back right into a new Phariseeism."

— **Terry L. Mann**, D.Min., Pastor / Director of TWOgether Pittsburgh, PA

"Wayne Hobbes... shows how the spirit of Phariseeism cripples our spiritual lives and distorts our witness. Its message is as relevant today as it was in Jesus' day."

— **Hollis Haff**, Senior & Founding Pastor, New Community Church, Wexford, PA.

"...very informative and practical... I discovered the areas in my life of which I need to repent. I highly recommend it to all who struggle with the line between law and grace."

— **Danny Miller**, Director of Student Ministries, Houston Baptist University

"Loaded with Scriptures that substantiate his case, Wayne challenges the church to make some much needed course corrections. Learn why you need them and how to make them, and set yourself free to love people and the church like love is meant to be!"

— **Scott McCabe**, Pastor of Community Life, North Way Christian Community, Wexford, PA

"...helped me to appreciate once again the importance of grace and the need to follow God and not a set of rules... I hope that many believers will have the opportunity to read this book..."

— **Roy Jones**, Missionary to Madrid, Spain, ABWE

"...an intriguing study... The author's clear and practical treatment will prove helpful in leading his readers through the haze of American churchianity into the clear light of more godly living and loving."

— **Richard Tyson**, Rev., Retired Pastor

"Wayne... humbly exposes his own heart to the searchlight of the Gospel and in the process brings that light to bear on the dark corners of the reader's heart. I recommend this book as required reading for every believer."

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"This book came at a very pivotal time in my life... The chapters on God's loyal love were particularly refreshing.... I am now able to freely and fully worship and serve Christ..."

— **James W. Kramer**, Rev., M.Div., retired Methodist pastor

"An enlightening, refreshing book explaining how and why our churches today often miss the seemingly obvious."

— **Anne W. Kramer**, B.A. Human Services (wife of pastor above)

# **The PHARISEE within me**

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**My Journey  
from Legalism to Grace**

by Wayne R. Hobbes

*The Pharisee within Me: My Journey from Legalism to Grace*  
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ISBN 1-4392-2953-8

Library of Congress Control Number: 2009902210  
Printed in the United States of America

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## Introduction

# The Pharisee within Me

*I get along with God just fine;  
it's His fan clubs I can't stand.*

— Anonymous

Tom returned with the lift truck and moved it into position for the next stack of boxes. Then he jumped down from his seat into the boxcar to help me stack another load. He coughed as he stepped through the cloud of dust swirling under the glaring work lights.

“Well,” he continued his story. “Like I was saying, I grew up in that church. My dad was the pastor there. But I quit going to church after high school. I just couldn’t stand all the inconsistencies.”

I wasn’t sure what to say. I was a summer hire working at the warehouse between semesters of Bible college. Because of my ministry studies, most of the guys on the work crew enjoyed teasing me about religion in front of each other. They had plenty of laughs at my expense. But whenever we were alone where no one else could listen, most of them had some serious thoughts to discuss about spiritual things.

I heaved another box from the back of the rail car. It landed squarely in the stack with a satisfying thump, the dust billowing up around it. I pulled one glove off and wiped the sweat from my forehead. I wasn’t quite sure what to say.

Finally I asked, “Well, what do you mean by inconsistencies?”

“Oh boy,” he replied. He stopped stacking and looked me in the eye. “Let me tell you. Some of those people are so judgmental, and they’re hypocrites.

“Inconsistencies? Well, they’re so worried about how we should act and how we should dress for church, and they’re always harping about rules, but most of their rules aren’t even in the Bible. And here’s another one: they want my dad to preach against smoking and drinking and tattoos, but then they’re so critical and unloving. They overeat and

gossip, and they think nothing of it.

“I know the Bible says gossip is sin, and so is overeating—and Christians are supposed to be loving! Besides, some of my friends that smoke and drink are a lot more caring than the people in that church. They’re so quick to judge, but my friends stand by me when I mess up.

“And then the worst thing—one time, one of my friends came to church with me, and an usher told him he wasn’t welcome until he got his hair cut. Well, he never came back, and neither did I. *That’s* what I mean by inconsistencies!” He slammed a box down on the floor of the boxcar with a loud bang.

I breathed a silent prayer for wisdom. What could I say to that?

Finally, I offered, “Look, Tom, I don’t know how to say this, but somehow I think Jesus would agree with you. He didn’t like hypocrisy either. In His day, the Pharisees were the hypocrites, and He confronted them a lot for their hypocrisy and double standards. Jesus was real and godly without all the fake stuff and inconsistencies. I agree that your church and some Christians have let you down, but Jesus won’t. I really believe you’ll find the answers if you look at Jesus and not at the church. And when I become a pastor, I intend to make sure that our churches become more like Jesus.”

We talked a lot more that night, mostly about other things. However, that conversation really made me start thinking. Over the next few years of preparing for ministry I encountered many more people who were turned off by churches, and that fanned my dream into an intense passion. I was determined to stop churches from being like that. Little did I realize what I was up against.

A few years later, I finally had the opportunity to start carrying out my plan to help a church become like Jesus instead of like the Pharisees. My first full-time ministry was a youth pastorate in a church that had a history of putting a lot of focus on rules and standards. I knew the senior pastor was trying to get people to look more deeply into their heart issues, so I started out my first week teaching a Bible study about how Jesus challenged heart attitudes more than outward behavior. I told the students that the focus of my ministry would be on our hearts, because God looks at the inside of a person, not the outside. The students responded with some very openhearted discussion, and I could see that some of them were really thinking. It was exciting.

The next day the church board called an emergency meeting, and one of the deacons confronted me, pounding on the table. I can still see his clenched fist and the veins standing out in his neck as he was yelling at me, “You’re supposed to be preaching standards to our kids! How can you be a youth pastor and not teach them how to dress? And I want my

sons to hear you telling them they need short haircuts!”

I argued that I could not succeed in helping these students with the important issues in their lives if I focused on external issues. I wanted to add that it was no wonder all of his sons were disinterested in church, but I figured he wouldn't listen. However, his superficiality profoundly disturbed me.

Nevertheless, I pressed on, determined to make a difference as I moved on through three more pastorates over the next twenty years. Even in those earliest years of ministry, I began finding that this “Pharisee” problem was all too common.

Don had been excommunicated from the church for living with his girlfriend, Sandy, a few years before I arrived at the same church. In his case, he ended up bringing Sandy (now his wife) back to that church a few years later, in spite of the fact that he felt the church had treated them harshly and coldly. I apologized to them on behalf of the church, and shared my vision for a church that would still stand for what is right, but do it in a spirit of love. After I shared that, Don and Sandy decided to join the church. I was amazed that this young couple could forgive and move on in spite of the lack of grace among the seasoned members of the congregation. I also saw great irony in the fact that many in the church assumed that those older believers were much more godly than this young couple. In reality, Don and Sandy were being a lot more like Jesus.

These were just a few of the many people I encountered over the next few years who were disillusioned with churches and Christians they have known. Most of them turned away from church and never went back. It broke my heart to hear their stories, and I always did my best to try to help them reconnect with Jesus and, if possible, with the church. I also worked hard to try to reform the Pharisees that were in the church so that this problem would stop. But little did I realize that there would be one Pharisee in particular who would prove to be the hardest to change.

### **A Troubling Discovery**

After my youth ministry, I became the pastor of a wonderful rural congregation in upstate New York. The people there loved to hear God's Word, and I loved studying it and preaching it. My second year there, I started a sermon series through the Gospel of Luke. At first, I was really enjoying the study. I was excited to read about the young Jesus who amazed the scribes with His perceptive questions, and later healed the blind and the lame. I was filled with awe at His insightful teachings.

My favorite passages were the ones telling how Jesus confronted the Pharisees. They tried repeatedly to corner Jesus with their trick

questions, hoping to embarrass Him in front of the crowds. But every time they came to Jesus with a set-up, He turned the confrontation back against the Pharisees. He pushed aside their superficial focus on outward issues and challenged them instead with issues of the heart. Every time, He showed how misguided their teachings really were, for all the crowds to see and hear (Matthew 19:3; 22:15-22).

That was what I loved best about my studies in the book of Luke. I cheered Jesus on. I despised those wicked Pharisees—hypocrites! After all, they were the bad guys, and of course, I was one of the good guys, a committed follower of Jesus. I really enjoyed reading about Him stopping those fools in their tracks. Give ‘em what they’ve got coming! How I loved it!

However, as time went by, I began to squirm a little when I was reading those passages. Eventually, I figured out what was making me uncomfortable—I was beginning to realize that, when Jesus was talking about the Pharisees and their problems, He was also talking about me! He was refuting some ideas and attitudes that were part of my own life and beliefs. When He was rebuking those wayward Pharisees, He was also rebuking me! When He was confronting their hearts, I was beginning to cringe. Finally, this vague sense of discomfort broke through my self-righteous bubble with the crushing realization that I, too, had some of the ways of the Pharisees in my own life.

Imagine that! I was a pastor in a Bible-believing church. I was solid in my doctrine and faith, careful about my life and actions, and fully committed to following God with all my being. And yet, Jesus’ words were beginning to sting my own heart! I was beginning the painful process of facing the Pharisee within me.

It was unsettling. It was disgusting. It was maddening. How could I, with my cherished notions of Christian orthodoxy, have fallen into the same camp with *those* guys? I couldn't be a Pharisee, could I? I grew up in a Christian home and began following Christ from an early age. While I was still in high school, I began reading my Bible, praying every day, and genuinely trying to live by God’s Word. I carried my Bible to school, and often shared my faith with my friends. I sensed God’s call to ministry and headed off to Bible college to begin preparing. Now, a few years later, here I was in the ministry of the pastorate, the sacred calling of God—a solid, dyed-in-the-wool, Bible-believing, conservative, orthodox, sanctified, card-carrying Baptist!

But now the Lord was showing me that I had some of the same heart problems and some of the same tragic errors as the Pharisees. It was unthinkable! It was appalling! But I knew deep inside me that it was true. I was so concerned about reforming the Pharisees I saw in our churches that I never thought to take a look in the mirror. It was time for

me to swallow my pride and face the Pharisee within me.

### A Growing Awareness

That realization struck me over twenty years ago, early in my ministry as a pastor, and it has never ceased to amaze me in the years since. Up until then, I thought of the Pharisees as extreme religious zealots who were absurdly hypocritical, self-righteous, and judgmental. Whenever I came across them in a passage of Scripture, I just thought, “Oh, yeah, those awful Pharisees. I’m glad I’m not like them” – and then I would read on. I simply dismissed them as having no relevance to my own life. But now, I could see that there was a lot more to these Pharisees and their problems. Jesus was exposing a whole series of subtle spiritual errors, and these were the parts that were beginning to trouble me personally.

As I have pursued this study of the Pharisees over the past twenty-plus years, I have found that the same problems of Phariseeism that I uncovered in my own life are actually common throughout much of Christianity today. That discovery has troubled me greatly. But the Spirit of God has used it to compel me on this quest to uncover the Pharisee within me, and to share what I have been learning with others.

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## Study Guide Questions – Introduction

1. Have you ever realized you had a problem with a specific issue that bothered you when you saw it in others? What was the problem, and how did you discover it?
2. Have you ever been offended by self-righteousness and judgmentalism in a church or among Christians you knew? If so, briefly describe the issue and what happened. How did it make you feel?
3. If you had been in the boxcar that night, what might you have said to Tom?

## Chapter 1

# Who Were the Pharisees?

*Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to.*

— Jesus (Matthew 23:13)

Before we can fully recognize and overcome pharisaic tendencies in our own lives, we need to understand three foundational issues: (1) who the Pharisees actually were in Jesus' time, (2) how they came to be that way, and (3) how they affected the people around them. These first three chapters will address these areas, and then we will explore the specific errors and tendencies of the Pharisees, one at a time.

So, who were the Pharisees in the time of Christ? They were only one of a number of sects of Judaism. They were a relatively small sect, numbering only about six thousand members, yet they were the most influential of all the sects in the religious life and thought of Israel.<sup>1</sup>

The Pharisees took great pride in trying to be as orthodox and faithful as they could possibly be. They added their own man-made rules to those already found in Scripture, and ended up with a much stricter version of Judaism than had ever existed in Old Testament times. These additional rules tended to get off the point and actually take a different direction on some of the commandments than what God had originally intended. In fact, the Pharisees added so many man-made ideas that their teachings often ended up going against what the Scriptures taught. At one point, Jesus challenged them in one of His rebukes, "Thus you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition. You hypocrites!" (Matthew 15:6-7, NIV).

For example, the Pharisees took the God-given gift of the Sabbath and distorted it. God designed the Sabbath to give Israel a day of rest (Exodus 20:8-11). It's pretty obvious that He intended for His people to enjoy some relaxation, thoughtful reflection, and time together with

family and friends. This was a day not only to worship God but also to enjoy what He had made. It gave people time to refresh their focus on the things that really matter—especially connecting with God, but also with people. It was a commandment for Israel, but it was focused on much more than rules and duty. It was about delighting in God and His gifts (Mark 2:27).

However, in trying to enforce the restriction against working on the Sabbath, the Pharisees got so carried away that they caused people to be distracted and inconvenienced by all their extra rules and limitations. These restrictions were so extensive that they turned the God-given gift of the Sabbath into a day when people could not even do simple acts of kindness and helpfulness to others without being judged for working and breaking the Sabbath (Matthew 12:1-14).

### The Big Three

Many Christians today tend to think of only a few problems when we think of the Pharisees—if we know anything about them at all. We might think of them as being too legalistic with their man-made rules. We might know that they were self-righteous, hypocritical and judgmental. In fact, in my experience, these three sins—hypocrisy, judgmentalism, and self-righteous pride, are the most common sins that Christians think of when the Pharisees are mentioned. I call these problems “the Big Three.” Entire books have been written about each of them, and they deserve that attention. These are ugly traits that we all despise. We can spot them a mile away, and so it’s no wonder that many of us don’t like the Pharisees. No wonder I wrote them off (as we all do)—until the Lord made me look in the mirror.

My own discovery of pharisaic tendencies in my life actually began with the Big Three. It started with the realization that, though I was less judgmental than the Pharisees, I was still *somewhat* judgmental. Though I may have been less self-righteous than they were, I still had quite a bit of self-righteousness in me. These were the more obvious errors of the Pharisees. I knew about the Big Three, but now I was confronting them in my own life.

Over time, I began noticing other errors that were less obvious. The Pharisees actually developed quite a number of additional errors that were far more subtle, but just as serious. Here are just a few of the more subtle errors I have found:

- The Pharisees added man-made rules to the commands God had given. This was foundational to all the others errors, and it was also a serious error on its own.
- They used their peer influence to form a closed circle of mutual

affirmation, using approval and disapproval to keep people in line. It was their own version of “group-think.” This prevented people from maturing and developing spiritual discernment for themselves.

- Because God was outside their neat, tidy “box” of categorical thinking, they ended up judging God’s own Son as a false teacher in the light of their man-made system of teachings.
- They distorted the biblical meaning of holiness, as well as other biblical teachings. This led people away from God’s original meaning and intent, resulting in many practical problems.
- They approached the Scriptures in such a way that they totally avoided the overwhelming biblical focus on matters of the heart, and so they became superficial instead.
- In addition to their emphasis on man-made rules, the Pharisees placed great emphasis on performance and human effort. This self-reliance prevented them from fully understanding and accepting God’s grace.
- They completely missed the overall biblical emphasis on relationships.

This is just a short list of some of the Pharisees’ many subtle and dangerous errors. We will look more closely at these and others as our journey unfolds, and we will also look at biblical and practical solutions for each one.

### **Distorting Orthodoxy**

These more subtle traits of Phariseeism—more subtle than the Big Three—are actually more dangerous and have caused even more harm in distorting Christianity. This is because these traits can appear to be very spiritual among faithful believers. In fact, *those of us who are the most passionate about being sincerely orthodox may be the most vulnerable to some of Phariseeism's most dangerous errors!*

I consider myself to be an orthodox Christian. In all my studies over the years, I have never found good reason (intellectual, historical, philosophical, scientific, or otherwise) to waver from believing in the Bible as my foundation for faith and life. I never found Jesus rebuking the Pharisees for following the Scriptures and adhering to them as truth. Rather, He affirmed the Scriptures as His basis for truth while rebuking the Pharisees for distorting the Scripture from its original intent. Here are a few of His many statements affirming the Scriptures:

- “And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.” (Luke 24:27)
- “Jesus replied, ‘Are you not in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God?’” (Mark 12:24)
- “But the Scriptures must be fulfilled.” (Mark 14:49)
- “These are the Scriptures that testify about me.” (John 5:39)
- “The Scripture cannot be broken.” (John 10:35)
- “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.” (Matthew 5:17-18)

While He was rebuking the Pharisees, Jesus upheld the Scriptures and pointed to them as trustworthy, as the truth-source to be believed and followed. In fact, the more I study the Bible, the more I am amazed at its consistency, its unity, its savvy, and its insight into real people and real life even in the twenty-first century. So I want to affirm that, in my understanding, the pharisaic problems we will discover in orthodox, Bible-believing Christianity are *not* because Christianity is orthodox, Bible-believing or literal (in its approach to the Bible). Rather, these pharisaic problems are caused by adding man-made rules to the Bible and its teachings until the resulting system of beliefs becomes something that it was never intended to be.

In short, the errors of the Pharisees are not vivid departures from orthodoxy, but are more subtle and indirect. Instead of directly violating

**...orthodoxy can become misguided. This is what happened to the Pharisees, and it has also happened to Christianity throughout the centuries.**

the Scriptures, they simply distort various passages of Scripture from their original context and intent. These pharisaic errors operate within the bounds of orthodoxy. As I said earlier, these errors seem to flourish best among those of us who passionately hold to orthodox doctrine. That does not make orthodoxy wrong, but simply indicates that orthodoxy can become misguided. This is what happened to the Pharisees, and it has also happened to Christianity throughout the centuries.

There are subtle ways in which we tend to depart from the original intent of the Bible like the Pharisees did, and those departures are

disguised as orthodox and biblical ideas, even spiritual and pious. If anything, it is our conservative passion (a good thing in my opinion) that makes us more vulnerable to Phariseeism, because its errors feed on the earnestness of those who strive to be sincerely faithful. Phariseeism is, by its very nature, a distortion of orthodox faith.

**[Phariseeism's] errors feed on the earnestness of those who strive to be sincerely faithful. Phariseeism is, by its very nature, a distortion of orthodox faith.**

### Causing Many to Stumble

The Pharisees led many sincere Jews astray through their erroneous teachings. These people (who were led astray) fit into two categories.

First, there were people who were led astray by being *drawn in* to this pious system of false teachings. The Pharisees thought they were leading people in the ways of God, but Jesus said they were literally leading many *away* from God:

“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are.”  
(Matthew 23:15)

How incredible is it that these Pharisees, with all their orthodox doctrine, were actually leading their followers further away from God? There were people who were choosing the self-reliance of the Pharisees instead of relying on God and His mercy (a prevalent teaching in the Old Testament—the Jewish Scriptures), and thus being led blindly into Hell (Luke 18:9-14). But that is not all.

The Pharisees were also leading people astray in another way. This second category (of people that they led astray) consisted of those in Israel who were *disillusioned* with the Pharisees' hypocrisy and superficiality. They were not *drawn in* to the Pharisees' system. Rather, they turned *away* from Phariseeism as well as from God—in the proverbial sense of throwing out the baby with the bath water.

These people turned away from Phariseeism for at least two reasons. On the one hand, there were some who looked upon the Pharisees' ways and felt hopeless to measure up, feeling they wanted to be acceptable to God but could never make it because of their problems and sins. They could never attain that level of righteousness.

On the other hand, there were others who simply thought the Pharisees were ridiculous and did not care to measure up to a religion

that was so absurd in their eyes. The one group was disillusioned and hopeless, while the other was disillusioned and cynical.

Neither of these two disillusioned groups is clearly identified in the Gospel accounts, yet each is there in the background. We can observe them in the ways people responded to Jesus in contrast to the ways people responded to the Pharisees.

### **The Disillusioned and Hopeless**

The entire population of Israel was quite familiar with the Pharisees' teachings. The vast majority of the people assumed that the Pharisees were the truly faithful ones who really spoke for God.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, the very fact that there were many people in the land who were in the category of "sinners" (spiritually outcast and not practicing the religious observances) implies a sense of hopelessness among that outcast group. Zacchaeus and Matthew were both spiritual outcasts because they were tax collectors. The accounts of both of their conversions seem to imply surprise when Jesus actually showed an interest in them (Luke 19:1-10; Matthew 9:9-13). The sense of both stories is that, until Jesus reached out to them, these men had no hope of ever attaining favor with God, given only their previous experience with the Pharisees (Matthew 9:9-13; Mark 2:13-17; Luke 5:27-32).

The unnamed woman (probably a repentant prostitute) who washed Jesus' feet with her tears and dried them with her hair is another example of a spiritual outcast (Luke 7:36-50). Simon the Pharisee, in whose home this event occurred, expressed disgust and disapproval that Jesus would have any contact with her. Let's think about the implications of that. If I were her, before meeting Christ, and living under the assumption that the Pharisees represented the true orthodox faith, I would be completely hopeless about ever attaining God's favor, forgiveness, or eternal life. I would keep my distance from church (or synagogue) and avoid the religious crowd because of feeling so judged and rejected, and I would have no hope of ever being accepted by them or by the God they serve. I would look for other spiritually outcast people to be my friends, and that would be the end of my spiritual aspirations. But Jesus repeatedly broke through the hopelessness of these disillusioned people by demonstrating a special understanding, compassion and concern for them.

What a tragedy it is that many of the people who are most addicted to habits of sin have lost hope of ever finding acceptance with the God of the Christians and Christian churches they have known! The expected level of righteousness or goodness seems unattainable. Something is terribly wrong with this picture! We have failed to display the true nature of the God Who, in His grace, accepts any sinner "just as I am." I

have met many of these people over the years, hopelessly disillusioned with churches and Christians and, therefore, with God. We must address this vast need that is all around us.

There is something to be said for having spiritual outcasts as friends. Because they have all experienced the pain of spiritual rejection, many of them tend to be very accepting of one another. When Christ-followers offer this kind of unconditional, accepting love to people, it becomes a powerful attraction to our faith. In fact, that is the way God intended us to represent Him, as modeled by Jesus Himself, but we will come back to that.

### **The Disillusioned and Cynical**

I mentioned that there were two groups of spiritual outcasts from the Pharisees. The first group, which we just described, consisted of those who felt hopeless to attain the righteousness of the Pharisees. The second group consisted of those who looked at the silly—sometimes even absurd—rules of the Pharisees and thought they were ridiculous. These people seemed to make a logical jump to the next step, perhaps without realizing it. They thought the Pharisees were ridiculous, yet they assumed the Pharisees really represented God, and so they gave up on following the God of Israel because of the Pharisees. These people may not have felt a sense of hopelessness, like those we just considered, but probably more of a sense of cynicism.

This seems to be the attitude of both King Herod and the Roman governor, Pilate. It seems that they tended to accommodate the customs and beliefs of the Jews only because they had to in their positions of authority, although they apparently did so with the idea that these customs and beliefs were ridiculous. Their staffs, as well as the body of Roman soldiers in the province, probably shared these attitudes.

Jesus was thinking of all these groups—all the people turned off to the faith because of the Pharisees—when He said to them:

“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men’s faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to.” (Matthew 23:13)

No wonder these spiritual outcasts, both the hopeless and the cynical, felt there was nothing for them in Judaism. And no wonder my co-worker Tom had quit going to church.

### **Avoiding the Same Mistakes**

I believe God is moving powerfully in Christian thought today by

bringing a greater appreciation of grace in all its fullness. I think Charles Swindoll is right when he writes that God is calling us from legalism to a “grace awakening.”<sup>3</sup> However, the errors of the Pharisees work

**Many of us have been living with a stifled form of grace in our lives and in our churches, while being completely unaware that we are missing anything at all.**

completely against the teachings of grace. Most believers seem very unaware that we who are passionate about following God faithfully are the most vulnerable to these errors. For example, in all the abundant Christian discipleship curricula available today, there is a strong emphasis on striving to serve God faithfully, but these materials never warn us of how this spiritual passion can become so easily misguided. This leaves us more vulnerable than ever to pharisaic

errors. And so, many of us have been living with a stifled form of grace in our lives and in our churches, while being completely unaware that we are missing anything at all.

The Pharisees let their orthodox doctrine become distorted into spiritually unhealthy extremes. The Bible tells us that Satan likes to mix his errors subtly with the truth in order to mislead even the faithful (2 Corinthians 11:13-15). Just as he used this method to turn the Pharisees away from God’s heart, he has also used this same approach over the last two thousand years to turn many well-meaning Christ-followers far from the heart of God.

When we fall into the same problems as the Pharisees, it hinders our journey into grace and intimacy with Christ. It robs us of joy and forces us to be superficial in our faith. It causes unbelievers around us to draw back and distrust us, and ultimately to question the faith we proclaim. The credibility of the Gospel itself is at stake here. Therefore, it is imperative that we learn to recognize these tendencies and overcome them.

The Bible tells us that the Scripture is God’s truth, and that His truth will transform us and set us free (John 17:17; 8:32, 36). Therefore, we will explore the New Testament accounts of Jesus’ encounters with the Pharisees in order to learn where these subtle errors occurred and how they have affected our own thinking in Christianity today. My prayer is that God will help us unravel any of these errors that may have crept into our faith, and discover together the freedom and spiritual vitality that await us. May we fall in love with our Savior all over again, as we learn to let our love relationship with Him be foremost in our spiritual passion (Deuteronomy 6:4, John 14:15; 15:15; 2 Corinthians 5:14; 1 Timothy 1:3-5; 1 John 4:15-21).

In order to begin this journey, we need to discover how the Pharisees got started. How did such a misguided system of teachings arise out of such a rich heritage of faith? How did a passion to be completely faithful to God take them so far from God that they failed to recognize Him when He came down in human form and met with them? How did they become so lost by the time they encountered Jesus? And most important of all, how can we avoid this same spiritual deterioration in our lives and in our churches today?

**AUTHOR'S ASIDE:**

There are many good questions that people raise about the Bible and Christian faith from the perspectives of history, science, philosophy, and other disciplines. I call them “tough questions of faith,” and I enjoy discussing them (more on this in Chapters 3, 6, and Appendix B). But in my experience, after researching both sides of any question thoroughly, I have always found that there are good answers that are more than satisfactory in supporting the trustworthiness of the Bible (sometimes they are not presented very intelligently, but that is not the Scripture’s fault). But that deserves another book—and for any readers who are struggling with those questions, I would encourage you to read other good works on that subject from both sides of the issue, and to contact me through my website at [www.waynehobbes.com](http://www.waynehobbes.com).

## Study Guide – Chapter 1

### Key points from this Chapter:

- The “Big Three” pharisaic errors—well known to many Christians—are hypocrisy, judgmentalism, and self-righteous pride. But they had many other, more subtle errors.
- These more subtle pharisaic errors grow most easily among those of us who are passionate about serving God faithfully and upholding orthodoxy. Phariseeism is actually a distortion of a good thing (spiritual faithfulness).
- Phariseeism causes many people to be led astray from God:
  1. Those who follow pharisaic teachings of self-righteousness and miss God’s mercy.
  2. Those who are disillusioned by Phariseeism while assuming that it represents God. This second category includes two groups:
    - a. The disillusioned and hopeless.
    - b. The disillusioned and cynical.
- If we fail to understand and identify the subtle errors of Phariseeism, then we are likely to fall into them ourselves and perpetuate them.

### Questions for Study and Discussion:

1. List a few man-made rules that you know of, that some churches add to biblical teachings.
2. How do these rules affect church members? Visitors? People in the community who do not attend the church but who hear about these rules?
3. Have you heard of the Pharisees before? If so, what was your impression of them?

4. The author wrote: “These pharisaic errors... seem to flourish best among those of us who passionately hold to orthodox doctrine. That does not make orthodoxy wrong, but simply indicates that orthodoxy can become misguided.” How does this make you feel? What can a person do about this?
5. Have you ever felt discouraged or disillusioned because of religious leaders and what they taught? If so, describe the experience.
6. With which of the following categories do you identify the most (and tell why)?
  - The Disillusioned and Hopeless
  - The Disillusioned and Cynical
  - The devout Pharisees
  - Others?
7. Have you ever known a Christian who truly made people feel accepted and valued as they are, without having to measure up? Describe them and how they treated you, and how that made you feel.
8. What does the word *grace* mean to you? (We will study it later!)

### **For Further Study:**

Read the following passages and just imagine you are in the crowd hearing Jesus speak. What would you think of His statements? How would you react? What would you think if you were one of the Pharisees, vs. if you were a spiritual outcast hearing Jesus' words?

Luke 18:9-14

Luke 15

Matthew 23

*Also note Paul's words:*

Acts 26:1-6

Philippians 3:4-7



## Chapter 2

# How the Pharisees Got Started

*The Lord says:*

*"These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men."*

— The Prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 29:13)

In my quest to unravel the Phariseeism in my own heart, I began to wonder: how did the Pharisees become what they were in Jesus' time? Were they always like we find them in the New Testament? Were they always so misguided? Were they always an arrogant group of self-righteous, judgmental hypocrites? (Matthew 23:13-39). Were they always a "den of snakes," as the prophet John called them? (Matthew 3:7, my paraphrase).

If the Pharisees were not always like this (as we will see, they were not), then how did they fall so low? Did they suddenly plunge into false teaching like some of the modern cults, or did they slip into error gradually without realizing it?

### **How Did The Pharisees Become So Misguided?**

I began to suspect that, if we could understand how the Pharisees got started and how they deteriorated, it might help us understand how Christians today can become so misguided. In fact, as I have studied the Pharisees over the years since then, it has confirmed my suspicion. I found that gaining an understanding of how the Pharisees went wrong back then can help us untangle the web of pharisaic notions that have affected our Christian faith today.

The early history of the Pharisees is rather obscure. There are some things we simply do not know, but we can be very certain of one foundational point: We do know that early Phariseeism actually grew out of a passionate desire among the Jews to turn to God from idolatry.

This earnestness started during and after the Babylonian captivity, but it changed into a legalistic regime over the next four hundred years leading up to the time of Christ. In order to understand how this movement of earnest revival ended up as the legalistic Pharisees, we need to take a brief look almost a thousand years further back into Old Testament history.

### **A Warning and a Promise**

Over fourteen hundred years before Christ, God used Moses to lead the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt and into the “Promised Land” – the land that God had promised to their forefathers (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob). Shortly before Moses died, and shortly before Joshua led the people into that land from the wilderness, the Lord had Moses assemble the people of Israel on the plains of Moab, just outside of the Promised Land. There He addressed the people with final challenges to keep God’s law faithfully. This series of addresses that God gave the people through Moses is known to us as the book of Deuteronomy. In this book, God gave His people a very clear warning in the form of what we call the *Palestinian Covenant* (Deuteronomy 28-30).

In the Palestinian Covenant, the Lord promised the people that they would continue to live in the Promised Land as long as they continued to serve God, keep His law, and not follow other gods like the nations around them did. He also warned them that if they did not follow His Law, then He would send foreign invaders to take them out of the land, and they would no longer be able to live there. However, He also promised that in that time of “captivity” or exile, if they would repent and turn back to God from idols, He would restore them to the land of promise once again.

Moses died soon after that, and the Lord raised up Joshua to lead the people into the land. It was a time of great spiritual revival, which God blessed with military victory. However, after Joshua died, the people began to wander from God and serve idols. The next few centuries were very dismal times spiritually, during the era of the judges and the kings. These included times of great spiritual triumph and faithfulness under leaders like Elijah, David, and Josiah, and many more times of spiritual compromise and idolatry under leaders like Solomon (1 Kings 11:1-13), Ahab, Manasseh, and many others.

For eight hundred years from Joshua to Jeremiah, there were many spiritual ups and downs. There were times of disobedience and apostasy (turning away to false teachings) as well as times of repentance and purity. Sadly, as time went on, there were far more spiritual failures than victories. This digression continued in spite of God’s repeated warnings through Moses and all the other prophets. This spiritual decline was

## Chapter 6

# Pleasing Our Peers

*Everything they do is done for men to see.*

— Jesus (Matthew 23:5)

*Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ.*

— The Apostle Paul (Galatians 1:10)

Levi was a tax collector in first century Palestine. That meant he was a Jew who had “sold his soul” to the hated Roman occupation government. It meant that he got rich by taxing his fellow Jews and charging them outrageously marked up fees at his own discretion, which they were forced to pay. No wonder most of the Jews saw tax collectors as traitors. No wonder the Pharisees and other religious leaders considered them to be as the scum of the earth, right along with the worst of unrepentant sinners.<sup>33</sup>

It wasn't that tax collectors didn't have friends, but those friends were more likely to be others who were equally rejected by the Jews. These would include Roman soldiers, any other Gentiles who might be in town, and “sinners” (Jews who were spiritually outcast because of sinful lifestyles, such as thieves, adulterers, prostitutes, and so forth). There is something about being rejected that can bring people together, somewhat like a bunch of kids whose parents neglect them, or a group of students all serving detention together. Here among their “sinner” peers, they were not judged for their behavior, their choices, or their attitudes. There was a certain camaraderie, a deep-down acceptance of people as they really are, and no need to impress people with a spiritual facade. Sure, they were rejected by the Pharisees and most of their fellow Jews, but not by their spiritually outcast friends.

When Levi decided to follow Jesus, he was so excited that he wanted all his friends to meet Jesus, too. He had a party at his house and invited

all his outcast friends as well as Jesus and His disciples. As with many dinners and parties among the affluent in their culture, it was evidently held in a courtyard, and so the public was free to come and go, and observe the party.<sup>34</sup> Luke gives us an interesting account of the interaction between the Pharisees, who came to watch this “sinful” gathering, and Jesus, Who was the guest of honor:

After this, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector by the name of Levi sitting at his tax booth. “Follow me,” Jesus said to him, and Levi got up, left everything and followed him.

Then Levi held a great banquet for Jesus at his house, and a large crowd of tax collectors and others were eating with them. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who belonged to their sect complained to his disciples, “Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and ‘sinners’?”

Jesus answered them, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” (Luke 5:27-32)

The Pharisees used a number of manipulative tactics here. Let’s list them first and then we will look at them more closely:

- The Pharisees clearly communicated their disapproval of Jesus and His behavior.
- The Pharisees were pigeonholing Levi and his friends into stereotypes, and using this to judge the behavior and lifestyles of people who did not follow the Pharisees’ rules (or God’s either, in many cases).
- They called for physical and social separation from “sinners.”
- By voicing their disapproval, they were exerting pressure on Jesus to stop what He was doing.
- They also tried to affect the disciples’ opinion of Jesus (manipulation and group politics).
- Jesus completely resisted their efforts, and explained that the needs of ministry were more important than pleasing the Pharisees (we’ll save the ministry part of that for Chapter 12).

In short, the Pharisees were using manipulative tactics to try to pressure Jesus to conform to their ways. Obviously, the Pharisees thought that all this pressuring influence was godly and spiritual. Yet Jesus was not interested in satisfying their concerns. Instead, He rebuked

## Chapter 8

# Overlooking the Heart

*The LORD does not look at the things man looks at.  
Man looks at the outward appearance,  
but the LORD looks at the heart.*

— 1 Samuel 16:7

We have seen that the Pharisees lived under constant peer pressure. We learned that this peer pressure focused on outwardly visible behavior, which was usually based on man-made rules that were added to the commands God had already given in Scripture. This effort to control observable behavior tends to distract us from paying much attention to our attitudes, motives, and other heart issues.

In the beginning of our journey together, I mentioned a problem with legalism in my first week as a youth pastor. One of the dads was especially emphatic about his Christian rules with his adolescent sons. From the day I met this family, I learned that these sons were angry with their dad and that, because of their anger at his strictness and religious rules (and those of previous pastors), they also resented God and the church. They did attend church, because their dad made them, but it was obvious they resented being there. They were withdrawn, indifferent, and sometimes disruptive in our youth meetings.

These boys were not the only students in the church who had problems with legalistic authority. There were others who showed varying degrees of indifference, distrust, and resentment. Because the church had a history of legalistic pastors, the present pastor and I had an understanding that we had our work cut out for us to try to help the church get past legalism and understand grace.

I knew I had to try to help these boys (and other students with similar issues) to understand that God was not like the legalistic parents and pastors they had known. In order for them to get that message clearly from me, I had to be able to win their trust. I could not be associated with the legalism they instinctively distrusted.<sup>59</sup> I had to be

able to show them that I was not like that. They would never be attracted to Christ—or face their own heart rebellion—until I could help them distinguish between the God who loved them unconditionally and the legalistic authority figures who judged them constantly. I had to get past that thick, protective shell of forced “obedience” and get to see what was in their hearts myself if I was going to get close to them, earn their trust, and shepherd them toward Christ. In fact, I knew that even *they* could not begin to face their own spiritual issues until I gave them permission to let their inner attitudes be expressed and accepted. Then I could begin to help them grow spiritually.

So, from my very first week in that youth ministry, I simply did not emphasize any of the rules governing outward appearance or behavior

**I knew that the past over-emphasis on outward behavior had been distracting them from the biblical emphasis on heart attitudes.**

that the students were used to hearing. I knew that the past over-emphasis on outward behavior had been distracting them from the biblical emphasis on heart attitudes. My first lesson covered Jesus’ focus on what is in our hearts. I also taught them that God accepts us as we are no matter what our behavior has been, if we come to Him humbly. That was the lesson I mentioned in the

introduction to this book—the lesson that got me into trouble with the church board! But I did not back away from what I understood to be a biblical approach. From that week on, as I began communicating this change of focus, more and more of the students—including some of the more rebellious ones—began opening up to me. Hearts and lives began to change, and we began to build momentum in our ministry there. I was not surprised when it started working, because this very emphasis is something that Jesus stressed to the Pharisees quite vividly.

### **Ignoring the Heart**

As we saw in the previous chapter, the Pharisees and scribes thought that the way to keep themselves from spiritual contamination was to avoid physical contact with sin and “sinners.” However, because it was almost unavoidable that they would inadvertently brush against Gentiles and other “sinners” through the course of a day in public places, they devised elaborate washing rituals for their eating utensils, tables and so forth (as we saw earlier). They actually believed that this would stop any spiritual contamination (picked up throughout the day) from passing into their bodies and corrupting their hearts! This was not a washing for health and hygiene, but a washing that would supposedly remove evil spiritual influences.

Again, Mark describes Jesus confronting the Pharisees over this practice:

The Pharisees and some of the teachers of the law who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus and saw some of his disciples eating food with hands that were “unclean,” that is, unwashed. (The Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they give their hands a ceremonial washing, holding to the tradition of the elders. When they come from the marketplace they do not eat unless they wash. And they observe many other traditions, such as the washing of cups, pitchers and kettles.)

So the Pharisees and teachers of the law asked Jesus, “Why don’t your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders instead of eating their food with ‘unclean’ hands?”

He replied, “Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written:

“These people honor me with their lips,  
but their hearts are far from me.

They worship me in vain;  
their teachings are but rules taught by men.’

“You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men.” (Mark 7:1-8)

Jesus went on to challenge some of their specific, man-made traditions, which we looked at in a previous chapter. Then He returned to the subject of spiritual uncleanness:

Again Jesus called the crowd to him and said, “Listen to me, everyone, and understand this. Nothing outside a man can make him ‘unclean’ by going into him. Rather, it is what comes out of a man that makes him ‘unclean.’ ”

....He went on: “What comes out of a man is what makes him ‘unclean.’ For from within, out of men’s hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and make a man ‘unclean.’ ” (Mark 7:14-16,20-23)

Jesus’ rebuke here shows us several key points. First of all, the Pharisees overlooked the heart in their efforts to avoid spiritual contamination. Second, they focused on outwardly visible behavior instead. And third, it was their focus on man-made rules that forced

Jesus replied: " 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." (Matthew 22:34-40)

I certainly had heard that before, but I thought it was just one more part of obeying God. But Jesus was actually making a major distinction between outward behavior and heart relationship. Clearly, His focus was upon the latter. Furthermore, Jesus was saying that loving God and

**It's about  
relationship!**

**That's the point.**

**That's the most  
important thing.**

loving our neighbor are the results that our faith should produce in our lives and in our ministries. So, as I pondered this in connection with Paul's command to Timothy, I finally began connecting the dots. It all points to loving God and loving our neighbor, so *it's about relationship!* That's the point. That's the most important thing. In fact, this is so important—and so opposite to the

Pharisees' direction—that we will develop this truth throughout the remainder of our study together.

### **It's About Relationship**

I began to understand that it's not just about accurate Bible teaching (even though that is still essential). It's not just about "trust and obey." It's not just about faithfulness and obedience—the main criteria by which I had been gauging my Christian life. Those are all good things, but the Christian life is not primarily *about* those things. Paul is saying that the whole point and purpose of why we need orthodox faith and practice is so that we can have a meaningful, deep, love relationship with God and with people. *It's about relationship!* And orthodoxy is simply the vehicle to get us there—to get us into a close, intimate relationship with God and then with people.

Paul continues his statement about love by telling us the source of this love. He says this deep, God-driven love "comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith" (verse 5). This love flows out of—finds its source in—these three things: a pure heart, a good conscience, and sincere faith. Notice that all three of these items have to do with my inner being (my heart), with the aspects of my Christian life that others don't see. If these three aspects of my life are unhealthy, then my love for God and people will be undeveloped. God wants my inner being to have the kind of spiritual health that will be able to receive His

## Chapter 11

# Growing a New Heart

*Because Your lovingkindness is better than life,  
My lips will praise You.*

— Psalm 63:3 (NASB)

We have journeyed together for a while now, exploring a full dozen pharisaic errors that are common among Christians today. As you can see, I have fallen into nearly every one of them myself at one time or another, so no one is throwing stones here. And so, only my fellow former Pharisees are welcome beyond this point! If you share my desire to live beyond Phariseeism, then please join me as we pull together all that we have learned, and take it a couple steps further in the remaining chapters.

First, let's review the twelve basic errors of the Pharisees that we have covered:

### PART I - UNDERSTANDING THE BASIC PROBLEM

1. **Adding to God's Commands.** The Pharisees added man-made rules to what God has commanded in the Scriptures. (*Remember? This was how the Pharisees got started. This was their most foundational error, and it led to all the others!*)
2. **Confusing Scripture with Tradition.** The Pharisees emphasized man-made rules and traditions so much that, in effect, they lifted man-made traditions above Scripture.

### PART II - UNCOVERING THE RESULTING ERRORS

3. **Assuming Stricter Is Better.** The Pharisees assumed that the strictest position on any issue is always the most spiritual.

relationship lifts me out of my pharisaic tendencies. It helps me overcome the Pharisee within me! And so this focus on relationship will weave through the remainder of our study as we consider *how to live beyond Phariseeism*.

In order to understand this relational focus more fully, we need to examine a challenge Jesus gave to the Pharisees, and to you and me as well. Matthew records it for us (we have read this before, but now let's take a closer look):

As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him.

While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and "sinners" came and ate with him and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and 'sinners'?"

On hearing this, Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners." (Matthew 9:9-13)

While correcting the Pharisees' misapplication of holiness, as well as their disdain for irreligious people, Jesus made an intriguing statement. He said, "Go and learn what this means." Here Jesus was essentially saying that this is a simple and foundational lesson that they should have understood already. Jesus was giving them a verbal slap on the hands. We could paraphrase His point like this:

*Here is something really important in the Scriptures, and though you claim to be experts in God's Law, you just don't get it. You'd better stop right here until you get it figured out. This issue is central to the heart of God, and it is wrapped up in everything I am doing. In fact, it's the very reason I came to Earth. You need to understand this before you can go any further. So, are you going to stop right now and figure this out, or not?*

The old saying fits here: "a word to the wise is sufficient." So, what about you and me? Do we understand what this means? If not, we are missing something really big! We should go no further in our Christian learning until we get a hold of what Jesus is saying here—which is exactly what we will do in this chapter and the next.

## Chapter 13 – Conclusion

# Overcoming the Pharisee within Me

*I decided to stop following my grandmother's religion  
and start following my grandmother's Jesus instead.*

— Anonymous

We started our journey together with my story of Tom in the railroad boxcar. Tom, and many others like him, were so hurt by Pharisees in our churches that I really did set out on a mission to stop Christians from being like that. But the Pharisee that would prove to be the hardest to change was the one I saw every day in the mirror. Nothing had prepared me to deal with that! And as you know by now, that startling realization eventually developed into an exciting and enriching journey for me, and it's a big part of who I am today.

Don't get me wrong; my journey out of Phariseeism has been painful at times. I was too comfortable with the Pharisee within me. It's what I was used to, and it's how I had learned to look at things. We can get comfortable in our errors, and I surely did. It's been a long, slow growing process, and it's still going on. Sometimes I have stumbled, and at times I have been really dense. I mean, I believe it's wise to be teachable and open to whatever God wants to show us (Proverbs 12:1). But like anyone else, I have had my blind spots.

### **Many Other Errors**

Up until now, I have referred to a dozen subtle pharisaic errors in addition to the "Big Three" well-known ones (hypocrisy, judgmentalism, and self-righteous pride). Actually, I have found over two dozen pharisaic problems in total. For the sake of simplicity in this book, I lumped some of them together into sets to make one "error" in most of our chapters. But here I will list the whole catalog of errors that I've

## Thinking Biblically

The Pharisees assumed that their logical conclusions (deductions) were just as certain as their original facts, but this was a big mistake. There are many ways that this deductive reasoning can go wrong (as we showed in Chapter 5 with Brownie, the dog).

### Mistaken Assumptions

If we think about it, any deducted conclusion assumes several things. First, it assumes that we correctly understand the facts before us and that we have stated them accurately. Second, it assumes that we are not *missing* any pertinent facts that would affect our conclusions.

This is a huge problem with trying to use the deductive approach for spiritual topics. God has *not* revealed everything there is to know on any biblical subject. He holds some truths only to himself, and He withholds some truths from us until we are mature enough to receive them (Luke 8:9-10; 1 Corinthians 2:7-3:4; James 1:5). And there is *more* information that He is withholding from us until we get to heaven (Ephesians 2:1-7; see also Mark 13:32). So it really is absurd for us to operate on the assumption that we are not missing any theological information.

The third problem with deductive reasoning is that it assumes we have accurately “connected the dots” – that we have deducted correctly from the preceding facts. And fourth, it assumes that human reasoning can accurately extrapolate spiritual truth from what we know to what we do not know.

These truths about God – the ones that are beyond what is revealed to us in Scripture – cannot be figured out by human reasoning at all. The Holy Spirit has already revealed to us what He wants us to know in the Scriptures, and there is no reliable way to know more about God than that. To use man’s deductive reasoning to try to extrapolate truth beyond what God has revealed to us is crossing a boundary that I do not believe we were intended to cross. It’s like not being content with what God has said He wants us to know, so we are determined to figure it out anyway – and we are so foolish as to think we really can (1 Corinthians

## Appendix B

# Pat Answers

We mentioned that Nicodemus, a prominent Pharisee, reached a point where he was asking tough questions that were outside the box of approved pharisaic thought. The Pharisees exerted peer pressure and control to suppress these kinds of tough questions—which is why Nicodemus went to Jesus in secret.

As I am preparing this manuscript to go to the publisher, I just received an interesting text message from a college student regarding a “tough question of faith” that he raised. He texted:

if the plagues in egypt killed off all the animals, what was pulling the chariots when the egyptians pursued the jews? [sic]

I texted back a sensible and biblical explanation, expressing respect for the fact that he raised a good question and that it deserves a worthy answer. Then he wrote:

ok thanks... had a theology prof tell me that it couldn't be used to question the validity of the bible... kinda lost a little respect for that answer...[sic]

What? “Couldn’t be used to question the validity of the Bible”? That answer troubled me. This student’s earnest question *did*, in fact, call into question the validity of the Bible from an intellectually honest vantage point. His question deserved a valid, intelligent answer. If the Bible is true (and I am persuaded that it is), then such answers are possible and should be available to anyone who asks. We should never say, “Well, you just can’t question the Bible because of that.” Wrong—because of these intelligent but tough questions, people *are* questioning the Bible. Are we going to push them away or are we going to sit down, give them the respect they deserve, and answer thoughtfully and sensibly?

I replied to this student that I think Christian leaders should give thoughtful consideration to *all* tough questions, and never be afraid to

# Handling Disagreements in the Church

Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified  
the sinful nature with its passions and desires.

— Galatians 5:24

How should we handle our disagreements in churches and Christian ministries? Most Christians deal with these things in whatever way it seems good to them. But the Bible gives clear direction here. In this appendix, I will share (1) the practical impact of Paul’s description—how disagreements can go wrong in our churches, and then (2) biblical solutions that will prevent or resolve these problems. Then, for those interested, I will include (3) a summary of the biblical material from which I am basing my conclusions.

## 1. How Disagreements in Churches Can Go Wrong

How does a church disagreement develop, and how should it be handled? What is the place for disagreeing and pushing for what we believe is right? We don’t know what else to do, so we tend (in America, anyway) to bring our American political ideas and workplace ideas into the church and use them to address our problems, issues, and disagreements. But the church is God’s program, and He has very different ideas about how it should be run. In describing the works of the flesh in Galatians 5, Paul uses four very specific terms describing the *wrong* way to handle disagreements among believers.

These four problems (discord, selfish ambition, dissensions, and factions in the NIV) show a progression.<sup>i</sup> First there is *discord* over a

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<sup>i</sup> R. C. H. Lenski describes such a progression briefly, *The Interpretation of St. Paul’s Epistles to the Galatians, Ephesians, and Philippians* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1937), 287-8. The description I share here was partly prompted by Lenski’s

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Alfred Edersheim, *Sketches of Jewish Social Life: In the Days of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, n.d.), 226.

<sup>2</sup> Edersheim, *Jewish Social Life*, 213, 226.

<sup>3</sup> Charles R. Swindoll, *The Grace Awakening* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1996), xvii-xx.

<sup>4</sup> Actually, the exile seemed to begin and end in phases, so there are at least three different ways to count the seventy years, depending upon whether we count when the Temple was destroyed and rebuilt, or whether we count from other markers. This author is using the commonly recognized set of dates, c. 586-516 B.C., for the present discussion. In any case, the precise dates are not particularly relevant to the point herein presented.

<sup>5</sup> From historical records, we find no evidence of any significant return of descendants of the former Northern Kingdom (“Israel”) from the Assyrian exile. In any case, from this time on, the term “Israelites” is used of *any* Jews (a new term that arose out of the exile) – even though, as far as we know, they were all from the former Southern Kingdom (Judah). Therefore, references to the returned exiles in this chapter are assuming the Babylonian exile. For some examples of similar references in Scripture following the exile, see Ezra 10:1, Nehemiah 1:6, and Daniel 9:20.

<sup>6</sup> Robert H. Gundry, *A Survey of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970), 5-10. The ancient Hasidim evidently were not connected historically with the modern Hasidic movement among Judaism.

<sup>7</sup> Gundry, *Survey*, 9-10.

<sup>8</sup> Edersheim, *Jewish Social Life*, 225, 236-7.

<sup>9</sup> Gundry, *Survey*, 52.

<sup>10</sup> Everett F. Harrison, *Introduction to the New Testament*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 24.

<sup>11</sup> Edersheim, *Jewish Social Life*, 213-215, 219-222.

<sup>12</sup> Robert G. Gromacki, *New Testament Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1974), 52ff.; and Flavius Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews*, from *The Works of Josephus, Complete and Unabridged*, New Updated Edition, trans. William Whiston (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1987), 13.10.5, 18.1.2-6. Also Harrison, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 24.

<sup>13</sup> Jewish tradition says that the oral tradition expressed in the Mishnah