

# Characteristics of Pharisees - 2

by Zac Poonen

---

*The sermon emphasizes the dangers of Phariseeism and the importance of living out what we preach, rather than just knowing it intellectually.*

**Duration:** 1:03:17

**Topics:** "Hypocrisy", "Humility"

---

## Description

This sermon highlights the characteristics of Pharisees, focusing on their external cleanliness while neglecting internal issues like greed and selfishness. It emphasizes the importance of mercy, justice, and faithfulness over minor details, and warns against being hypocritical and judgmental. The sermon also addresses the tendency to seek honor, control others, and persecute prophets, urging self-reflection and humility in following the true teachings of Jesus.

---

## Transcript

Heavenly Father, we thank you for opening our eyes to see your glory, something of it. To be able to worship you a little bit like the angels in heaven. To turn our eyes away from all the wretched, miserable things of earth, to see the beauty of Jesus, to see your glory and to be drawn to you, Heavenly Father.

To prepare a throne for you, a throne of praises. We have no complaints this morning. We have no complaints against anybody, anywhere on the face of this earth.

We have no complaint about anything that's ever happened to us or anything that anyone has ever done to us because you are the blessed controller of all things and you have arranged everything for our spiritual education that we might partake of your nature and become more like Jesus. We pray, Lord, that you will open the heavens over us at this time as we come around your word. Grant us an anointing from heaven as we speak and as we hear.

Let the Holy Spirit be upon us throughout this meeting. Oh God, confirm your word with signs following, that your name be glorified. We don't depend on ourselves.

We cast away all confidence in ourselves. We depend only on the Holy Spirit and we pray that Jesus Christ will be glorified in our midst. His name will be lifted up.

We'll be drawn to you and our lives will be changed. Thank you, Father. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Please be seated. Okay, we're going to continue our study in the characteristics of Pharisees. So, 16 of them, I'm not going to repeat them, but we're going to go on to number 17 and we'll consider another 17 of them today and the remaining 17 to total up 50 tomorrow, God willing.

Now, this is not a comprehensive list. If you look into your own life, you may discover another 50 more which are not written in the Bible. Please remember that.

This is just to, you know, like an appetizer. It's not the main meal. It's sort of to help you to see areas of Phariseeism in your life, in my life, because the spirit of the Pharisee is against the Holy Spirit.

The spirit of the Pharisee is against the spirit of Jesus Christ. Please remember that. That's why it's so serious.

That's why I said yesterday that Jesus' main conflict throughout his ministry was with the Pharisees. And when I see that, I say, Lord, just like I don't want even an atom of the spirit of hell in me, I don't want even an atom of the spirit of the Pharisee in me. And I have sought, particularly in the last few years, to discover the Pharisee in me.

And what I'm telling you is what I've discovered is I've studied the scriptures and many things I found in myself. I'm sure in the days to come, I have to discover more. But life is a, it's wonderful to have life, to get light on yourself.

I believe the mark of God's blessing is that God gives you light on yourself. If you're not getting light on yourself, God's not blessing you. Let me tell you without any hesitation, if you are not getting light on the un-Christ likeness in your life, God is not blessing you.

Even if you earn one lakh rupees a month, even if you have the grandest car in town, and even if you have the biggest house, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera, I'm sorry to say God is not blessing you. For many years, I've been convinced now the mark of God's blessing upon my life is he shows me un-Christ likeness in my life from which I can cleanse myself from that filthiness of my spirit and flesh so that I can partake of his nature and the Holy Spirit can permeate and invade one more area of my life and another area, another area. Gradually, my life gets brighter, my family life gets brighter, my ministry gets brighter, I can do more for God, I'm not going to be bound by the narrow, petty rules of men, and I become like the eagle in the sky.

So many of us are earthbound, earthbound. That's because we don't ask God to show us, Lord, show me the Pharisee in me. Pray that prayer in 2005, and you'll see that you'll become a completely different person.

So number 17, we're turning now to Matthew chapter 23. This is the great chapter on Phariseeism in the entire Bible, and so all of the 17 points we're going to look at are all found in this chapter. That's a pretty good chapter.

If you're serious about being free from Phariseeism, I would say study and meditate Matthew chapter 23. It's one of those great chapters in the Bible, like 1 Corinthians 13 and Matthew chapter 23. They're opposites.

Love is the opposite of law. To be led by the Spirit is to be led in love, that's 1 Corinthians 13. If you want to know what you're to be led out of, read Matthew chapter 23.

So in Matthew chapter 23, the first thing, number 17, that we're going to look at is Matthew 23 and verse 3, and there are two things I want to say from there. First of all, Jesus said about the Pharisees, they sit in the seat chair of Moses, therefore all that they, verse 3, tell you to do, observe, but don't do according to their deeds. They say things, but don't do them.

They sit in the chair of Moses. That means they have a lot of knowledge. You can't sit in the chair of Moses, you know, the chair of authority, unless you've gone to a Bible school and got a degree and probably got a doctorate.

They have a lot of knowledge, but they're not obeying what they, so that's another characteristic of a Pharisee. He has knowledge without obedience. It's a very dangerous thing.

Knowledge plus obedience equals life. Knowledge without obedience equals death. It's better not to have knowledge than to have knowledge without obedience.

To use an example, if you eat food, we can say that's knowledge. When that food gets digested in your stomach and digestive system, that's obedience. And when it gets digested, that rice and curry and potatoes and all, become blood and flesh and bones.

It's quite a miracle. It's turning, like turning water into wine, to turn potatoes into blood. And you know your body is doing the miracle all the time? Turning rice into bones, you turn rice into bones, your body is doing it every day.

Bones and flesh and blood. But therefore it becomes life. You become healthy and strong.

But if you eat and eat and eat and it stays in your stomach, I'm sure you know, you've had some experience of that sometimes, we vomit it out. It's called indigestion. And when you have indigestion, any doctor will tell you, give your stomach a rest, skip a meal.

That's what I've done. It's always healthy. If you have indigestion, skip a meal and you find your stomach repairs itself.

And I would say, if you keep on eating and eating and eating, and you're, if it doesn't vomit it out, if you're not, doesn't, food is not vomited out and just keep on filling your stomach. You know what that food will do to you? It'll kill you. Because if it doesn't get digested, it becomes rotten in your stomach.

Whenever you vomited, have you felt the taste of the food that comes out of your mouth when you vomit? It's not a lot like the taste of the food that went in. That's quite a difference. Because it's rotten.

It may have been a very tasty chicken when it went inside, but by the time it's there and it's dead, it's rotten when it comes out of your mouth. That's what happens to knowledge without obedience. And that's why a lot of Christians stink.

You know, you know why Christians stink? The people who stink the most are the ones who got maximum knowledge and minimum obedience. That's what it means to be a Pharisee. To have maximum knowledge and minimum obedience.

Knowledge without obedience is extremely dangerous. And that's why the Bible says you must meditate on God's word. There may be something God wants to tell you there.

Obeys it. If you don't obey what you hear in the meetings, for example, you just nod your head and say, boy, that was a great meeting. And you don't obey what you hear, I'm telling you, it's extremely dangerous.

Give you a little time for that and it'll become, you'll stink. And the more meetings and conferences you come to, the more you will stink. And I've seen people like that.

I've seen people in our churches, some people in CFC, who behave worse than unconverted atheists. In CFC, who've heard the message for 25 years. Why do they stink? They stink.

Spiritually, you've got to hold your nose when you go around them. Because they don't obey. They're not quick to obey.

But the sad part of this, they themselves don't realize they're stinking. Do you think a beggar who's never had a bath for a year, do you think he thinks he's stinking? No. He'll come cuddle up to you.

You want to stay away from him, but he thinks he smells pretty nice. And that's how a lot of Christians who keep on disobeying God's word think. They think they smell pretty nice.

A spiritual person smells that stink miles away. There are people, I tell you honestly, there are people whom I've seen, I can look in their face and I say, this guy's not right with God. I can see it from a distance.

This guy's not right with God. You can see it in their eyes. There are people whose eyes are not pure.

You know, for example, people who've lived a very flirtatious, sinful type of life in the old days, men and women, and they get converted and they've stopped their immoral ways and given up their flirtatious lifestyle, but they have not cleansed their spirit. And 20 years later, they still got that in their eyes and I can see it. And I steer clear of such people because they have not cleansed themselves.

Knowledge without obedience, cleanse yourself. Okay, we go to number 18, which is in the same verse, Matthew 23, verse 3 and 4. The religion scholars and Pharisees are competent teachers in God's law, but no, you won't go wrong in following their teachings, but be careful about following them. They don't live what they preach.

So this is the thing, the 18th point is from the same thing. They preach things without practicing it first. See, Matthew 23, verse 3 is the opposite of Acts 1, 1. Please remember these two opposites.

Matthew 23, they preach, but they don't do. Acts 1, 1, it says Jesus did and then preached. Do you get it? These are two opposites.

And with these two opposites, you find how to build Babylon, how to build Jerusalem. Babylon is the false counterfeit church and Babylon is built by a whole lot of preachers who live in Matthew 23, verse 3. They preach, but they don't do it in their life. They preach and they tell people all types of things, but they don't do it in their life.

Whereas Jesus, he did not preach and then practice. No. There's a saying, practice what you preach.

Sounds nice. Good. But Jesus did something better.

He preached what he had already practiced. He didn't first preach and then practice it later on. He practiced it first and then preached it.

He never preached what he had not practiced. How long do you think Jesus took to prepare the Sermon on the Mount? You know, people ask, how long does it take to prepare a good sermon? How long do you think the Matthew chapter 5, 6 and 7 is the finest sermon that anybody's ever preached? How long do you think Jesus took to prepare that sermon? Half an hour? One day? No. 30 years.

A good sermon takes 30 years to prepare. You can't just listen to a tape and preach a sermon. That's knowledge.

But if you want to speak like Jesus spoke, you've got to live it. People have asked me, Brother Zach, can I preach your sermon? I say, sure. If you live it first, you can go ahead and preach it.

Because once you live it, it's not my sermon, it's yours. If you preach it without living it, you're just seeking honor. That's all.

And that'll kill you. You belong to those people whom God said in Jeremiah 23, I hate those prophets who steal my words from one another. So, you've got to live it.

The word has to become flesh in you. Then you can speak it. You must ask God, as what I did 30 years ago, and God's helped me through the years to try and keep that.

Lord, let me never preach in my life what I have not practiced. I'll give you an example. Have you ever heard me preach that you must go to North India and be a missionary? You think North India doesn't need missionaries? They need thousands of missionaries.

Why haven't you heard me preach it? Not because it's not needed. I'll tell you, it's greatly needed. I do not have the authority to preach on that subject.

And you know why? I've not lived there. Most of the missionary societies in India, listen carefully, most of the, even the evangelical missionary societies in India, their leaders all live in South India, educate their children in good schools and colleges in South India, and tell other people to go into those remote villages of North India and preach, and to send their children to boarding schools or something like that. I'm not here to judge them.

God is their judge. All I say is, I will not follow that example. I would be a Pharisee if I followed that example, because I cannot preach what I have not done.

The person who has lived in North India, and who has brought up his children in those difficult circumstances, that person can tell other people to do it, not otherwise. The rest are all Pharisees. The same principle applies to many other things.

Don't ever try to speak on something which you have not done. Don't try and tell people who have got teenage children, how to bring up their teenage children, if you have never had, if your children are not yet in teenage. It's like a bachelor telling people how to bring up their children.

I have seen people who have got children, but they haven't come to teenage years, but they are telling other people how to bring up their teenage children. If you don't have married children, please don't talk to other people who have got married children. You know zero about them.

Just keep your big mouth shut, and you will be a blessing in the church. But do you know the number of people who are Pharisees in the church, who are experts on giving advice to all types of people, areas

they have never done a single thing in. What advice can you give? The advice of a Pharisee.

They preach, but they don't do it, or they haven't done it yet. Why not be patient, and wait, so that you can speak with authority, and because you have done it first. You brought up your children right, speak on it.

You haven't done it, leave that subject out, speak on all the other subjects. How can you teach chemistry, when you haven't studied chemistry? I mean, people in the school know that. Why can't we know it in the church? They won't appoint an English teacher to teach chemistry.

You got a degree in English, you can't teach chemistry. Leave somebody else to do that. Chemistry needs to be taught, but you are not the person.

You got a degree in English, teach English. This is so simple. Atheists in school know it, but elder brothers in our churches don't know it.

That is how Phariseeism infiltrates our churches. When we speak what we have not practiced. Further, it says here in verse 4, number 19, Pharisees bind heavy burdens on others.

They tie up heavy burdens, and lay them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are unwilling to move them with so much as a finger. They put heavy burdens on people, but they won't lift it themselves. I remember once I was in a student camp, where I was years ago, and I was a speaker along with another speaker.

And that speaker preached, and said, you must tithe your time, just like you tithe your money. That means 24 hours, 2.4 hours every day, you must give to God to have your quiet time. Now I don't do that.

I have a quiet time with God 24 hours a day, not 2.4 hours. But anyway, he believed in giving this 2.4 hours, and then question time came. I love question times, especially with students, because they ask the most searching questions.

And they say, question, we want brother Zach to answer this question. Okay, that's great. Do you agree with the other speaker that you must tithe your time? I said, great.

This is my opportunity. I said, I do not agree. And I asked that other speaker, who was sitting there.

I said, brother, do you spend 2.4 hours every day with God? He said, no brother. Hypocrite. I didn't call him that, but everybody knew it.

You know, put heavy burdens on people, which they don't lift with a finger themselves. There are numerous cases like that. There are people who preach tithing, who do not tithe their income themselves.

Hypocrites. The Christian world is full of hypocrites, who preach all types of things, tell people to do this, that and the other, put impossible standards for people, and then don't lift it with one little finger themselves. God save us from such people.

They are the ones who build Babylon, who destroy the work of God. Binding heavy burdens on people. In other words, instead of God's word being something that blesses people, they are making it a burden.

I love the message translation which says, listen to this, instead of giving you God's word as food and drink, in which you can have a banquet on God, they package it all in bundles of rules, and load you down

like pack animals, that means donkeys. You know, God's word can be packed up with like heavy burdens. Come you donkey, come on, take this.

Or it can be presented as, here's a feast, come and have it. There's a world of difference. It all depends how you preach.

It's the same message from the Bible, but you can package it up into a whole lot of rules and regulations, and treat everybody like donkeys, who are to carry these burdens, and send them out, instead of preaching God's word like a banquet. Come and feast brothers and sisters, everything is ready, God has prepared it, come and eat. How do you preach God's word? And this is how Phariseeism comes into the church, this is why many people are sick and tired of coming to some of our churches, we don't want that.

And I say to them, I agree with you, I also don't want that. That's not, it's from the Bible, but the way it's presented. The same Bible, you can present it in two different ways, and it can be a heavy burden.

That's because you're a Pharisee, it's the person Jesus preached, from the same Old Testament, that the Pharisees preached from. But he liberated people, but the Pharisees took the same Old Testament, and bound people up. Yeah.

So that's the other thing we see that the Pharisees do, they don't lift a finger, to help them, help others in any way. Okay. Number 20.

Pharisees seek honor from men. Verse 5, 23-5. They do all their deeds to be noticed by men.

They do all their deeds to be noticed by men. You know how Jesus said, they pray, standing in a corner, blowing a trumpet. Now, Jesus was exaggerating.

Jesus was a great master at exaggeration. A speck in somebody's eye, and a beam in your eye, and things like that. Great.

I love to follow Jesus in exaggeration, where it drives home a point. Not exaggeration when we are reporting, Ah, 2000 people came to my meeting, when about 200 people came perhaps. Not that type of exaggeration, which is a lie.

But this type of exaggeration, which drives home a point. You know, straining out a mosquito, and swallowing a camel. I love that.

It's great listening to such a preacher. I would have loved to listen to Jesus. I would have followed him around everywhere, to listen to such wonderful pictures he used about, you know, people who do such things.

But, so when Jesus said about praying like that, what he meant was, that you pray to get honor. Have you ever done that? Any of you holy people ever done that? Prayed in the meeting to get honor from people? I've done it. Ah, any honest people here? Okay.

To get honor, to say something, and you are listening with one ear. Is anybody saying Amen? Is anybody saying Hallelujah? Nobody is saying, Ah, let me pray with more zeal. Ah, I heard one Amen there.

Praise God. This is all hypocrisy. This is Pharisees.

They are not praying to God, they are praying to men. Do you preach ever to get honor? You preach, I know times when, you know, I judge myself after almost every sermon I've preached in the last 30 years. Always gone home, judge myself.

God has shown me so many things in my life. I say because Lord, I want to improve the quality of my preaching. Just like if I am a cook, I want to improve the quality of my cooking.

I want to improve the quality of my preaching. I believe that the reason why many people are boring till the day they die, because they never judge themselves. They think everything is okay.

They won't even ask their wives what they think about their sermons. So, if you work on yourself, I know God has shown me many times, that was not necessary, that other thing was unnecessary, that other thing you said to seek honor, then I cleanse myself, it gets better and better. So in every area, we have this tremendous temptation to seek honor from people.

We want people to know what we are giving to God. We want people to know what we are doing for God. We want people to know.

That's why we decided, right when we started our ministry, that we'd never send a report or a photograph of our work anywhere in the world. We don't want anybody to know. It's enough if God knows.

Seeking honor is one of the sins which is not spoken about in the church. Most churches. And that's why people continue to seek honor.

But to seek honor from people is what makes a Pharisee. Pharisees can only build Babylon. And if you don't cleanse yourself completely from all seeking honor when you pray, seeking honor when you preach, seeking honor as an elder brother, seeking honor in anything, you can never build Jerusalem.

I'll tell you that. The more you cleanse yourself from seeking honor, the more you'll be able to build the true church of God. Otherwise, it'll only be Babylon.

It may look beautiful, maybe large, but it'll be Babylon. Babylon is pretty large. So that's number 20.

Number 21. Verse 5 again. They brought in their phylacteries and lengthened the tassels of their garments.

See, there was a law. I think it's written in Numbers 15, 38 perhaps. I don't remember offhand.

Where God gave a law to the Israelites that in their dress they must have a border at the bottom of their garments. And there must be a cord of blue that went around them, those border of their garments, to show them that, to remind them of God's word which came from heaven. The sky is blue, you see.

So God's word came to them to remind them to obey God's word. There was this tassel of blue around their garments. And these Pharisees would make it a little bigger.

You know, yours is only 3 inches, mine is 6 inches around my board. You know, because I'm a little holier than you. So they, this is the 21st thing.

The Pharisees think holiness is in one's dress. That is the 21st characteristic of a Pharisee. He thinks holiness is in the dress.

And that's why I wore this shirt this morning. To show you that holiness is not in a dress. Because some people are horrified.

Other people can wear the shirt. Brother Zach wearing a shirt like this, he's supposed to be a holy man. Did you ever feel like that? What if I came here in a Hawaii shirt or something? Dear me, coming for a meeting like that? You know, if you're a picnic and all, it's okay.

But for a meeting? Do you know the amount of Phariseeism that we are saturated with in our life? It oozes out little by little. It's like getting the pus. You know, you squeeze some boil, a little bit of pus comes out.

Tomorrow, there's a little more pus there. Squeeze it out some more. Dear me, when will we get rid of it? We have got so many ideas which are completely the opposite of the spirit of Jesus Christ.

And we've got these ideas in our head from Babylonian Christianity that we have all seen and grown up in for so many years. And we've never got rid of it because we don't meditate on scripture. We are afraid, what will people think? Because holiness is in our dress, you see.

Who said holiness is in your dress? That's exactly how these Pharisees felt. Jesus didn't feel like that. His holiness was not in his dress.

And Pharisees not only will be careful themselves to get honor from him, they are always observing other people. What is that person wearing? What is that person wearing? They've got eyes like an eagle, like an owl, even in the dark, it can see. Oh, oh, I see.

Aha. And then they've got it all stored up in their mind, all those information and then they go home and they'll tell their wives, you know what that sister was wearing? And you know what that brother was wearing? And you know what shoes? Nike shoes. Have you heard of that? Nike shoes.

Know how much they cost? I have no time for these things. I have no time to talk to my wife about all this rubbish. You can do it, brother, sister.

You want to build Babylon, go right ahead and build it. I have no time for it. I finished with it ages ago.

Holiness is not an address. It's an inner thing. He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

I think some people will never hear. Let them be. Leave them alone.

They'll be blind leaders of the blind. Okay, number 22, verse 6 and 7. They love the place of honor and the banquets and chief seats and to be called rabbi, etc. The 22nd characteristic of a Pharisee is he loves position and titles of honor.

He loves position in the church and titles of honor. He feels a little proud that he's an elder brother now. Are you proud that you're an elder brother? You're a Pharisee.

And no, not even the slightest doubt about it. Don't even ask a second time. If you have the slightest bit, slightest bit of pride that you are now an elder brother in the church, you are a saturated Pharisee, you are going to build Babylon.

And no wonder you're building Babylon in your church because you're proud that you're an elder brother, not an ordinary brother. You're a rabbi. You don't want to call yourself pastor because in our churches, you

lose honor if you call yourself pastor.

So you call yourself, I'm only a brother. But the spirit, is the spirit worse than the spirit of the pastor is the spirit of the rabbi. You're a brother with a capital B. Love position.

Love titles of honor. I want to read this to you. They love to sit at the head table at church dinners, basking in the most prominent positions, preening in the radiance of public flattery, receiving honorary degrees, and getting called doctor and reverend.

That's a living, that's a message Bible. See, that's why I'm against these titles. I remember I got a letter once, saying, your book, Sex, Love and Marriage, has been widely used all over India, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera.

We'd like to give you an honorary doctorate. I just threw it in the garbage bin, that letter. Who wants an honorary doctorate? What would Jesus have done if he got a letter like that? He wouldn't have said, Oh, that's great.

I can wear the gown and go alone and get an honorary doctorate. Jesus wouldn't be bothered. Who wants this? Who wants all this type of honor? Don't seek honor.

If you want to build a church, don't love titles and positions. And also, when you get these positions, you like to control others. A lot of people like to control other people.

Don't let anybody control you. Let me read this. Don't let people put you on a pedestal, like that.

You all have a single teacher. That's Christ. And you're all classmates.

Don't set people up as experts, warning to the classmates. Don't set people up as experts over your life. Don't allow them to tell you what to do.

Save that authority only for God, your Father. Let Him tell you what to do. And don't let people maneuver you.

If you're a leader, don't let people maneuver you into taking charge of their lives. Refuse to take charge of their lives. Let God take charge of their lives.

I know a lot of people have tried to maneuver me to take charge of their lives. I say, sorry. I will not take the position that God should have in your life.

I'm not excited if you try to give me that position. Oh, Brother Zach, I'll do whatever you say. I'm sorry.

I'm not going to tell you anything. You know that. All of you have sought advice from me.

I say, you can throw my advice in the garbage bin. Seek God. You know, there is only one leader.

That's Jesus Christ. And I believe that many, many elder brothers are failing 100% because they're not following Jesus Christ's words in these areas. And that's why they are Pharisees and they are building Babylon.

That's why their churches are not becoming better because they are under the law themselves and they are bringing people under the law. They don't know the freedom of the Spirit because they love their

position and honor. Next, point number 23.

They corrupt others. Verse 13 and 15. 13 to 15.

You shut off the kingdom of heaven from people. You don't enter in yourselves and you hinder those who are entering in from going in. They corrupt others by various means.

You know, their way of life is such that they don't get into God's kingdom themselves. And some sincere, good, young people who come to their church get corrupted. You know, this is the great tragedy in Christendom.

I've seen young people with a great zeal to live for God, converted, born again. And they come and what do they see in most of Christendom today? They see this great leader standing up on a platform with the lights all upon him and making a lot of money and living in the five-star hotels. And this young chap who had first seen Jesus in the Bible and thought, I really want to be like Jesus.

Now he sees, oh, things have changed now. Maybe this is what I'm supposed to be when I'm a man of God. And wow, if I'm faithful, one day I will also make money like that preacher.

One day I'll also stand in the platform like that man. One day I'll also be able to stay in a five-star hotel. That man is corrupted.

That sincere young man who came with a great desire to follow the Lord. You know what young people lack today? Role models. Role model means a good example whom they can follow, who is seeking to follow in the footsteps of Jesus.

They corrupt others. They don't get into God's kingdom themselves. And those who are sincerely coming in, they lead them astray into some other path.

Don't be a leader like that. Then number 24. They take advantage of poor people.

It says here, they devour widows' houses, in verse 14. That means some widow could not pay the rent. They turn her out of the house.

Pharisees. They go in the temple and start praying after that. There are other ways of exploiting widows today.

You come over television. Some of these poor widows and old grandmothers who are living on some pension. Watch this television evangelist who has got his own private jet planes and always lives in five-star hotels.

He tells people, now give money to this ministry and God will bless you. God will give you so much. God will give you so much.

And you got to give it by this date or that date. You hear all types of things. Such and such a date is the feast of atonement.

And you better give your money before that comes. And God will bless you so many times. And give 2.4 or 24.

And all these crazy, stupid, psychological tricks. And these poor simple old widows and mothers who are having problems. If I give to this ministry, I'm in great need.

I'll give. And they swipe this money from these poor widows to live in grand style themselves. There are Indian preachers doing it.

It's a crime. It's an absolute crime to take advantage of poor people. Anyway, it may not be with money.

You can take advantage of poor people in other ways. Never, never, never take advantage of any person. You should be able to say at the end of your life like Paul said in 2 Corinthians 7, we have taken advantage of no one.

Tell me, in what way have I taken advantage of you? Have I made you pay for my travel or anything? Yeah, we have elder brothers who take advantage of others. Even in that area, who are not, who are just lovers of money. Take advantage of others.

It's evil. It's absolutely evil to take advantage of other people. In any way, we should be able to say at the end of your life, whom have I taken advantage of? Have I taken any of your money? Have I taken anything from you? Have I tried to interfere with your life? Have I told you not to do this, not to do that? I mean, I'm concerning the ugly things.

I mean, if you want to go somewhere, go somewhere. I've seen elder brothers who, you know, are leading a church and they get a better opportunity to go somewhere else. They say, brother, I've got a burden to go there.

And they go there. What for? Just because it will advance them in their profession. What did I tell them? Did I tell them not to go? Go.

I know this is wrong. I tell them, well, if you want to go, you go. I don't agree with it.

But if a person is self-centered, what's the use of doing something because I tell him not to do it? It will be a dead work. If he doesn't have a sensitive conscience to listen to God, it's no use listening to me. So, we've got to be very careful that we don't take advantage of poor people.

Now, the other thing, verse 25, number 25, rather. Pharisees are people who pray long prayers. Verse 14.

Long prayers in public. For a pretence they make long prayers. And I'll tell you something that I've observed through the years.

The people who pray longest in public are the people who don't pray at home. Remember that. Whenever you hear a person praying a long prayer in public, even after it's announced Sunday morning, everybody pray for one minute.

There are some people who will not listen to that. They pray much longer. They say, that's all for other people.

I am a Pharisee. I shall pray for five minutes. Okay, go ahead.

But if I were there, I'll start a chorus after one minute to stop that person. Sure. And if he still continues, we'll sing another chorus.

We're not going to let people disobey God's advice that's given in the church and think they can get away with it. Not in a church which I'm running. Sorry.

If I tell people to speak for three minutes, I'll say, brother, time's up. We'd like to hear other people. I have seen less than 5% of people who obey when they are told to speak for three minutes in our local church.

If they're asked to speak for one minute, there are some godly people who will obey that. But most people just don't obey because they've got such a fantastic opinion about themselves. If you don't believe me, you watch in your local church.

You challenge your elder brother to say, everybody speak for three minutes and just keep your watch and you'll see the bunch of proud people in your church in no time at all. You can experiment with it. I've seen it for 30 years in CFC.

There are very, very few humble people. They make long prayers. I have told elder brothers across this country and other countries in the Gulf and everywhere, dear brothers, I don't think most of you have the content to speak for so long.

Most of you should speak for 15 to 20 minutes. You think anybody listens to me? There'll be a tsunami if they listen to me. There'll be another tsunami.

They don't listen. I've preached it for years. In elder brothers' meetings, I've said for years.

I mean, there are few brothers like Brother Prabhakar or something who's got content to speak for, but most people, 15 to 20 minutes maximum. They won't listen to me. I don't sit on their head.

Years have gone by. I say it a second time. They still won't listen.

I tell them personally. They still won't listen. I leave them alone.

I follow what Jesus said. Leave them alone. They are blind leaders of the blind.

What to do? The brothers in the church complain to me, Brother, it's boring listening to this person. I say, Brother, what to do? I've told them 10 times not to do it. What should I do? Be like Saddam Hussein? No.

Say, come on. We're going to run Iraq the way I want it run. No.

Leave them alone. Let them do what they like. Let them destroy themselves.

You don't follow such a man. You live a godly life in the midst of that. Okay.

26. Verse 15. You travel land and sea to make a proselyte, and when you make him, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourself.

They are missionary minded. They do God's work, for sometimes with great sacrifice, they become full-time workers, but their converts are double children of hell. Because they don't preach repentance.

They make people feel they are born again, when they are not born again. These are pharisaical preachers. They make people feel they are filled with the Holy Spirit, when they are not filled with the Holy Spirit.

They make people double the children of hell. I mean, they were already the children of hell, before this pharisee went there as a missionary. But he went there as a missionary, and told this fellow he is born again, just because he repeated some mantra.

Lord Jesus, come into my heart. Okay, Brother, praise the Lord. Now just put your tithe here every Sunday, and you are okay.

And they made the fellow double the child of hell, because he has been insulated against the gospel now. Now whatever gospel preacher comes and says, you must be born again. Oh, I was born again that day, when I said this mantra.

What a deception going on today. I have told people in some of our churches, some elder brothers, that person in your church is not born again. I mean, I can see that, visiting that church for three days.

I am amazed that, that elder brother who lives there for a whole year, can't see it. Because he is a pharisee. He is blind.

They are making such people, double the children of hell. We have to be very careful. I have seen some churches, where, you know, they are partial to the poor.

It's the opposite of being partial to the rich. There are two types of pits. One is to be partial to the rich, and the other is to be partial to the poor.

Oh, there is a poor person. We will not trouble that person in any way. We will honor that person, and make that person feel great in our church, and send him or her to hell.

I won't do that. I am not a communist, trying to raise the standards of the poor. That's not my calling.

I am a Christian. I respect a person who is God-fearing and humble, whether they are rich or poor. But just because he is poor, he is not humble and God-fearing, I couldn't care less for him.

Because I am not a communist. A lot of our elder brothers are communists. They care for the poor.

I don't. I care for the God-fearing and the humble. And I am colorblind as to whether they are rich or poor, or educated or uneducated.

Sometimes we can think, Oh, brother, our church is a godly church. We don't have any educated people here. We don't have any rich people here.

We don't have any cultured people here. We have just a bunch of poor, uneducated, ungodly people. What's the use of that? Babylon in a different color.

I am not interested. You can build your church that way if you want. I'd rather have a bunch of God-fearing people who may be highly educated.

So what? I tell you, this type of crazy stupidity, I have seen in our churches. We are not talking about some other denomination. Elder brothers in our churches who think godliness equals poverty.

Godliness equals being uneducated. Godliness equals living in a hut. This is crazy.

Where do you find it in the Bible? Yeah, yeah. So be careful. It's not in all this great sacrifice and making somebody double a child of hell.

Number 27. They interpret scripture without revelation. Verses 16 to 22.

They interpret scripture without revelation from God. They say, you know, if you swear by the temple, that's nothing. In verse 16, but if you swear by the gold of the temple, oh, that's serious.

You fools and blind men. Which is more important? They take some word of scripture and they add their modifications to it and interpret it in a particular way. I've seen that also among our elder brothers who preach.

They take a particular verse and interpret it in some particular way to make it binding on someone and they don't see the inconsistency that what they are asking another person to do, they are doing themselves in another area. For example, you know, when you jump on some poor sister, as I said the other day, who is wearing a 800 rupee earring on her ear and this elder brother does not realize he spent 8 lakhs on his house. He doesn't think that's wrong.

This is exactly it. Oh, Peter did not say about granite floors in your house. He spoke about earrings.

Is it? It's all hypocrisy. They do the same thing themselves, but they've interpreted and manipulated. Yeah, yeah, if you swear by the temple, that's not serious.

But if you swear by the gold in the temple, that's serious. If you spend 10 lakhs on a grand house, that's nothing. But brother, if you spend 800 rupees on a earring, that's serious.

What is this? This is exactly here. You know, interpreting scripture without revelation. And number 28.

Verse 23. They are sticklers for the letter of the law. They are sticklers for the letter of the law.

Verse 23 says, You type mint and dill and come in small, small things. Oh, brother, you've got to do that. And you've neglected mercy and faithfulness.

I will come to that. But this letter of the law, they take some small little verse in scripture and emphasize that. And they, like they say, they major on minor issues.

A lot of preaching in Christendom which majors on minor issues. And so the church becomes full of people who are very careful about typing mint and dill and come in these small, small things in the law. It's in the law.

Jesus didn't say you shouldn't do it. But he says you got it all wrong. You got it all wrong.

That's not the main thing. You know, I have, I once made a Bible study. I probably have it somewhere here.

I called it, The themes on which Jesus preached. And I made a Bible study of it. I went through all the Gospels.

And I said, What are the subjects Jesus preached on? And I found such a lot of wonderful things. Repentance, poverty of spirit, mourning for sin, gentleness, purity, paying your taxes and being born again and worship and being without sin and washing people's feet and fruitfulness and love and humility and

marital faithfulness and breaking with all traditions and things like that. And I said, Lord, these are the things I should speak on.

And there are a whole lot of other things Jesus never spoke on. He never spoke on the way people should dress. Not even once.

Try and find it. He never spoke on ornaments. Not even once.

You'd be surprised. Jesus never spoke on it. Things which are such major things for some of our elder brothers.

Jesus never spoke on it. But some people are holier than Jesus. That's the problem.

Sticklers for the letter of the law. I'm not saying these things are not important. I say, by all means, type your dill and come in.

But concentrate on the major things. Don't spend your whole year preaching on a whole lot of things which are not the major things. Because then your church will be full of parishes.

Then, the 29th characteristic is in the same verse. The Pharisee has no justice, no mercy, no faithfulness. It's in that same verse.

You should have concentrated on justice, mercy and faithfulness. That's the thing. Those are the major things.

And you're concentrating on small little things. It's like a bride whose bridal gown is all messy and dirty. And a small little scratch on her sandals.

And this elder brother is focusing the microscope on that. He's magnifying glass. Hey, there's a scratch on your sandal.

We have to remove that scratch. Put a little polish there or something. And the whole bridal dress is filthy.

This is exactly what is happening in lots and lots of our churches. I'm not saying don't remove that scratch from the sandal. Okay, that's fine.

But what is the use concentrating on that when the whole dress is so dirty? There's so much selfishness, so much pride. We're not dealing with that. No mercy, no faithfulness, no justice.

Let's concentrate on being merciful to other people. On being faithful in the Christian life. On being upright and righteous.

It's very, very important. There's a lot more we can say on that. Then we go to number 30.

A Pharisee is one whose... Verse 24, number 30. A Pharisee strains out mosquitoes and swallows camels. And that means it's in a sense the same thing.

Concentrating on the small things. But I want to point out this. I want to read this in the Living Bible.

In the Message Bible. Do you have... Let me read it more fully. Careful bookkeeping.

That means keeping your accounts. It's very commendable. But the basics are required.

Do you have any idea how silly you look. When you write a life story. And it's wrong from start to finish.

You write a life story. And it's wrong from start to finish. But you're very careful about the commas.

And the semicolons. And the full stops. I like that paraphrase.

You know we have had a... There are some people here who used to conduct these... Bible memory contests. And... They were not checking whether people were obeying the scripture. You know how they used to give the prize.

If people had their commas and semicolons. In the King James version or whatever version. Put in the right place.

And we've had people who spent their months studying. Where is the comma and where is the semicolon. To get this 200 rupees or 300 rupees what it is.

To me it's absolute stupidity. And you look at the lives of some of these people. Who win these prizes in all these Bible competitions.

They are Pharisees of the first order. Absolute Pharisees from top to bottom. Who don't... The whole bridal dress is dirty.

But they got their commas and semicolons in the right place. It's a deception. It's a fantastic deception.

To have the commas and the semicolons in the right place. And the whole story is wrong. This is a perfect picture of what's happening in a lot of places.

But brother we must put the comma there. I agree you must put a comma there. But the whole story is wrong.

There is no love in your heart. So let's be careful about that. To strain out mosquitoes and swallow camels.

Means small small things you pick out. And there are big massive things. In another place Jesus said about having a beam in your eye.

And there is a speck in the other person's eye. Do you think... Let me ask you a question. All the intelligent people here.

Is adultery a speck or a beam? What do you think? Adultery. I am not talking about small little things like telling a small lie. Adultery.

Is it a speck or is it a beam? You know. I am trying to catch you so you know the answer. It all depends on how... It's a relative thing.

Is this pulpit big or small? You are clever you will say it's relative. Compared to a skyscraper. Compared to a skyscraper this pulpit is a dot.

Is the earth big or small? Relative. Compared to the universe. A grain of sand.

A speck. It's relative. Adultery is a speck.

Compared to the sin of judging other people. The Pharisees stood there and judged the woman caught in adultery. She had a speck.

They had a beam. And that's what Jesus tried to point out. But do you think... Many of our elder brothers know that.

That even adultery such a terrible sin. Is a speck. Compared to the terrible sin of not being merciful.

Not loving. But judging people. I tell you 90% of our elders don't know it.

That's why our churches are suffering. We are producing Pharisees. Multiple Pharisees.

We need to judge ourselves more. And learn that love is the end of the gospel. To love God with all our heart.

And to love one another. That's the most important thing. If you don't have that.

All this speaking out. Even Jesus saying. Even adultery is not serious.

It is serious in God's eyes. But your sin is much worse. If we can see that.

I believe that even if you owe somebody 5 rupees. That is serious. Leave alone adultery.

But judging tops the list. Read that article there. Which you got there on judging.

Okay. Number 31. Verse 25 and 26.

A Pharisee is one who concentrates on and cleanses his outward life. And emphasizes externals primarily. Verse 25 and 26.

You clean the outside of the cup. But inside is all full of self-indulgence. So a Pharisee is one who cleanses the outside of his life.

And does not concentrate on the inside. And what is in the inside? It says here self-indulgence. That means greed.

Are you greedy? Do you want to have more and more and more? You have that inside you. You are selfish without thinking of other people. You only think of yourself and your family inside.

You don't think of reaching out to other people. To bless other people with the gospel. You are just greedy, selfish inside.

But outside you dress properly. You speak nicely. You don't wear any ornaments.

You always cover your head properly in the meeting. That's exactly the type of person whom Jesus is talking about. You clean the outside.

And inside you are selfish, self-centered, greedy, miserly. You are not generous. You are not thinking concern of other people.

This is cleaning the outside of the cup. And anyone who has ears to hear, let him hear. Are you like that? A Pharisee cleanses his outward life.

Number 32. Verse 30. A Pharisee says concerning evil that other people do.

I would never have done that. Verse 30. They say if we had been living in the days of our fathers, we would not have killed the prophets.

Yeah. You know it's very easy to say concerning when you see somebody else sin. Oh, I would never have done like that.

I would never dress like that. I would never behave like that. I would never have spoken like that.

He doesn't know the corruption of his own flesh. A Pharisee is one who says I would never do that. He says he doesn't realize the corruption in his own flesh.

A godly man is one who recognizes what that person did. I'm also capable of doing. God's restraining power kept me from doing it.

I've known brothers who have fallen into adultery. And I say Lord, if it were not for your grace, the same thing would have happened to me. I'm not better than them.

I will not say, oh, I would not have done that. Be careful whenever you have that attitude towards somebody else who has fallen into some sin. You know, there's so much of Phariseeism.

Like this boils, you know, where you got to squeeze out all the pus. I would encourage you to squeeze out all the pus from this big, massive boil of Phariseeism that infected us for so many years. Lastly, Matthew 23, verse 34 and 36.

Number 33, Pharisees persecute God's prophets. Some of these prophets, verse 34, you'll kill, crucify, you'll scourge in your synagogues, you'll persecute them from city to city. A Pharisee is one who gets offended when he hears a prophet.

He persecutes him in one way or the other. He's disturbed. He likes to hear somebody who flatters him.

He does not like to hear somebody who rebukes him and corrects him. Are you one of those who like to hear a preacher who flatters you and tells you you're a great guy? You don't like to hear someone who tells you straight to your face that you're a hypocrite? You get offended with that person? You're a Pharisee. Pharisees hate prophets.

They don't like to listen to prophets. They don't, because prophets, you read the Old Testament prophets, how they preached. They told Israel straight their sin and they persecuted them.

Well, we've gone through some of these marks of a Pharisee in this chapter. I've gone through it quickly. But I would encourage you, my brother, sister, to meditate on this.

There's a lot in it. And if you're determined, like I am, to squeeze out every last drop of pus from this massive boil called Phariseeism, you'll become a godly person. This bar heads before God.

Let's be still for a moment. It's time for us to judge ourselves first before we think of preaching to other people. And think of how much our attitude has hindered the work of God through many years in our locality.

And it is all written in the Bible. The gift of honesty and humility this morning to acknowledge our need.  
Forgive us our sins.

Forgive us our pride, our arrogance. And help us to humble ourselves and see ourselves as you see us.  
We pray in Jesus' name.

Amen.

---

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/8/SID8419.mp3>

Video: <https://sermonindex2.b-cdn.net/NozCNOqYv8g.mp4>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/zac-poonen/characteristics-of-pharisees-2/>

# *Grow in Your Walk with Christ*

---

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

**[www.sermonindex.net](http://www.sermonindex.net)**