

the new
PHARISEE



Jeff Saxton

The New Pharisee

The New Pharisee

Jeff Saxton



Strategic Book Publishing and Rights Co.

Note: All scriptural references are taken from the NIV Bible.

Copyright © 2010 Jeff Saxton. All rights reserved.

Hardcover version published in 2010.

Softcover version published in 2014.

No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, graphic, electronic, or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, taping, or by any information storage retrieval system, without the permission, in writing, of the publisher. For more information, send a letter to our Houston, TX address, Attention Subsidiary Rights Department, or email: support@sbpra.net.

Strategic Book Publishing and Rights Co.
12620 FM 1960, Suite A4-507
Houston, TX 77065
www.sbpra.com

For information about special discounts for bulk purchases, please contact Strategic Book Publishing and Rights Co. Special Sales, at bookorder@sbpra.net.

ISBN: 978-1-63135-992-7

Design: Dedicated Book Services (www.netdbs.com)

*This book is dedicated to all of those who have been
wounded, abused, persecuted and disillusioned by the
New Pharisees throughout the world.*

Contents

Prologue	1
Chapter 1—Identifying the New Pharisee	11
Chapter 2—Christian Pharisees	27
Chapter 3—The Shift toward Hypocrisy	45
Chapter 4—Avoiding Sinners.	75
Chapter 5—Secular and Sacred	97
Chapter 6—Performance Worship	119
Chapter 7—Religion or Relationship	155
Chapter 8—Abusing Spiritual Authority	183
Chapter 9—Revivals and Pharisees	203
Chapter 10—Breaking Old Wineskins	225
Epilogue	243
Notes	249

Prologue

It's AD 31—The Year of Our Lord. A young man from Nazareth is going around the land stirring up the people, calling himself the *Son of God*, doing miracles, breaking the religious rules.

And it makes Nicodemus furious.

After all, Nicodemus is a Pharisee. He is an expert in the Law of Moses and in the oral traditions of the Jewish elders. He studied and applied himself for years to reach this honorable position. The Jews respect him and follow him because he is a religious leader. He represents the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He teaches in the synagogues, for heaven's sake! Not only that, but he is even a member of the ruling council! And this Jesus has the nerve to tell everybody that Pharisees are hypocrites.

Nicodemus has made up his mind. This lunatic must be stopped. Somehow. Surely, this Jesus is doing these miracles by the power of Beelzebub. But, Nicodemus continues to listen and

watch. He continues to follow from a distance. He can't help but sense the power and authority in Jesus' voice. It's even in his eyes, this mysterious wonder, and absolute confidence in who he claims to be. This man speaks of God as if he has seen Him. Jesus speaks of heaven as a place he has actually been before.

Slowly, surely, inescapably, Nicodemus begins to hang onto every word this man utters. And slowly, surely, and inescapably, the young rabbi begins to make sense. For the first time, Nicodemus begins to see inside himself—the shallowness, the emptiness, the coldness of his religion. He senses the foundation of his spiritual pride and self-preservation is crumbling, with no hope of recovery. His soul is undone. His motives revealed as if opened up before the entire heavenly host. He wants to run and hide from this man and never return. But he can't leave. He can't turn around. Something inside him won't let him.

It's not that Jesus will not let him turn away. But, inside of Nicodemus is a heart that longs to know God, which yearns to escape the dryness and deadness of a soul that has long since departed from the childlike desire to simply know the Almighty and his ways. Perhaps fearing persecution from his peers, he walks the countryside in the moonlight, searching for the dynamic rabbi. On the eve of this wonderful day, Nicodemus finds Jesus. He really wants to know God. But, he has no idea how to get there. Jesus explains, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again."

Nicodemus is confused, initially. But, Jesus has a way of explaining things to those who long to know the Father. And then Jesus says what is now one of the most well known verses

in all of Scripture, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16)

Very likely, Nicodemus left Jesus that evening a new man. At least, he surely had a realization of what it truly meant to be a man or woman of God. We don’t really know what happened to him after Jesus died and rose again. Did he leave his position and ministry to follow the way of this Galilean? Did he stay in the sect of the Pharisees and work towards the spiritual renewal of his colleagues? Did he become a follower and go off to other lands preaching the Gospel to the poor? We don’t know.

We *do* know that he could no longer live an externally based religious life—justifying himself by performing various spiritual activities. When Jesus comes to us in the core of our hearts, he shows us our bankruptcy. He shows us that, no matter how much we know, or how long we have been Christians, we all live this new life by grace, through faith in what Christ has done on the cross.

We are forever changed when we have believed the Gospel.

WHAT IS THE GOSPEL?

The Gospel is not solely the *message* of faith in Christ. Rather, the Gospel is the good news for those who *repent*, and *believe* the Gospel. (Mark 1:15) Jesus encouraged Nicodemus that whoever believes in Him would not perish. Believing in this sense is more than mental ascent or theological adherence. We are commanded to believe in the sense of commitment to that

which we believe, and in whom we believe. This is where many “Christians” have problems today. They think that *agreeing* with the Gospel theologically is the same thing as *believing*. Actually, many have a problem with *believing* itself.

You’re probably familiar with the famous story of Frenchman Charles Blondin, the great tight rope artist and acrobat of the nineteenth century. Blondin greeted a huge crowd of fans before he walked over Niagara Falls in 1859. The crowd began chanting his name at the beginning of the great challenge before him, “Blondin! Blondin! Blondin!” Blondin turned to the crowd just before he set his feet on the tightrope and cried out, “Do you believe that the great Blondin can walk across?” The crowd shouted louder, “We believe! We believe! We believe!” Blondin got up on the great tight rope, but before he began the incredibly long and treacherous walk all the way across the falls, he asked once again, “Do you believe the great Blondin can walk back across the falls?” They shouted, “We believe! We believe! We believe!” And then, something came to Blondin’s mind. Whether this was planned ahead of time is unknown. He put a wheelbarrow on the tightrope, and then he asked a very strange question to the crowd, “Which of you truly believes that the great Blondin can cross the falls? Come now and sit in this wheelbarrow.” The crowd was dumbfounded. No one volunteered to get into the wheelbarrow. Finally, a young man stepped out from the crowd and said, “I believe.” He sat down in the wheelbarrow as Blondin pushed him across the falls. They arrived safely on the other side.¹

Many people claimed to believe that day. But truly, only one *actually* believed in Blondin. The rest merely *claimed* to believe in him.

Jesus has that same desire for sincerity that entered Blondin that day. He would say to you and me, “Which of you truly believe in me? If you believe, lose your life, pick up your cross, and follow me.”² Believing is about committing to that which we say we believe. There is no faith without commitment. Commitment is a risk, for we do not know what is ahead of us, or what the ramifications of our commitment may mean. Faith without risk is merely a concept, a fantasy notion. It has no actual substance until it risks. It is not enough to be faithful to the *message* of the Gospel. We must be faithful to the *Messiah* of the message. This is the proverbial fork in the road. This is where the true believer parts ways with the others.

**Faith without risk is merely a concept, a
fantasy notion.**

When we give our lives for the Gospel, we then believe the Gospel.

When we believe the Gospel, we judge no man. We speak evil of no other. We have no grounds for spiritual pride. We have no place to seek the respect and honor of other men. We deflect such praise and honor for we know only One is worthy. Our gifts are not our own. He gave them with no help from us. He gave us the understanding to know his Word and his ways. He builds his kingdom by his Spirit. Our ideas are

foolish. Even if they bring forth earthly results, this has little, if nothing, to do with heavenly fruit that will remain after trial by fire.

Only this question remains, will you believe, and obey, and be faithful to the Gospel to the end?

The Pharisees of Jesus' day failed. Their pride and ego blinded them from seeing. They were too intoxicated with the perks and pleasures of being religious leaders. This removed a whole generation from the only hope that could save them. When we allow spiritual pride, legalism, and external religious rules to block out the Holy Spirit, we also, in effect, stand against God. We oppose him. We turn him away. We choose to let the people burn and perish. The Pharisee sect of those days may be long gone, but these same characteristics of the Pharisees are alive and well in the world today. Perhaps they are at work in your life. Perhaps you and I are the modern version of the Pharisee in more ways than we would imagine.

This book is an attempt to help you and me to remove this New Pharisee from within us.

INTRODUCING...“CHRISTIAN PHARISEES”

I have been thinking about the concept of the *Christian Pharisee* for several years. I'm not sure when it was that I first considered this term. I have had several opportunities to study the Pharisees in depth as this whole idea has continued to take shape in my thinking—both in personal devotional time as well as in Bible training at a theological institution. Formal study is definitely an advantage in terms of having the time to

dig into the biblical material, historical background, and context of the Pharisees of the New Testament. This really helped me develop a solid foundation for understanding who these people were and why Jesus was always finding himself in opposition to them.

Initially, when I was preparing to write this book, I was going to approach it from an academic point of view. I really wanted to dig into the original text and then season this scholarly salad with quotes from all of the biblical scholars and historical experts. But, something changed my mind, although I am thrilled to include some insightful thoughts from some of my favorite authors. It wasn't that I wanted to impress you as you read along, but I did want to give my hypotheses a weightier authority.

I believe God changed my mind as I read the scriptures regarding the Pharisees. You see, I realized that I was not trusting God's Word to do what it can do. It needs no help from any man or woman, no matter how impressive they are. God's Word *is the authority* on this and all other topics! Of course, Bible study aids such as dictionaries, historical and cultural materials, handbooks, and lexicons are a great aid in studying the scriptures in depth. Anyone who has a Bible and a heart for the Lord can grasp the same basic truths that will be sure to revolutionize their views of legalism, hypocrisy, and most importantly, faith in the living Christ.

I write this now with the idea that you can snuggle in your reading chair on a cold or rainy day with your Bible, this book, and a nice hot cup of coffee or cappuccino. But, don't

get too comfortable! You may also want to spend a little time on your knees.

A CHALLENGE TO YOU

In the following pages, I want to challenge your faith. At least, I want to challenge you with a proposition: I want to propose to you that the modern-day Pharisee lives and breathes, not within a Jewish synagogue or inside a cultic temple, but in the organized structures of Christianity. This is not to say that everyone involved with organized Christianity is a viper and a whitewashed wall! Nevertheless, many Pharisees exist today in our churches, even in leadership positions. We must work to remove all manner of hypocrisy and legalism within.

As I study the Pharisees, sometimes I see myself in certain areas. I am working to remove the New Pharisee within me. Jesus told the disciples to “be on guard!”³ In effect, he was saying to them and he says to us now, “Watch out! The same hypocrisy that infiltrated and corrupted the Pharisees is like leaven! Even a hint of it can corrupt you disciples as well!”

**I want to propose to you that the modern-day
Pharisee lives and breathes, not within a
Jewish synagogue or inside a cultic temple, but
in the organized structures of Christianity.**

The purpose of this book is two-fold: first, to help you see who the New Pharisee really is so that you can be on your guard—watch out for the leaven of the New Pharisee! Secondly,

the purpose of this book is to help you locate and eliminate the New Pharisee within YOU.

The New Pharisee is not found in the Jewish religion and culture of today. As you will see, the New Pharisee must be intrinsically attached to and part of the Christian community *by definition*. You will not find the New Pharisee anywhere else. Only within the true, authentic structure of God's established authority here on earth can there be such a person who embodies today everything that the Pharisees embodied then.

Lastly, I warn you with this: after reading this book, you may conclude that you more resemble a Pharisee than a follower of Christ. If so, I most seriously encourage you to repent and then bring forth fruit of that repentance. Perhaps you should repent verbally before the church. If you are part of a small group, (I don't see how you can remove all manner of shallowness and hypocrisy without being part of a small group or accountability group) confess it to the group and have them pray for you.

Also, I am becoming increasingly convinced that hypocrisy can be like any other addiction and must be dealt with in similar ways. Usually there are deep-seeded issues from as far back as childhood that set the tide in motion for covering up hurts and weaknesses. Somewhere early on, the Pharisaical individual began building and maintaining an image that was not, and is not real. People who have built such an image are in store for a difficult journey toward authenticity. I pray you will have the courage and strength to allow Jesus to break you, build you, fill you...and restore you.

1

Identifying the New Pharisee

The state of Christianity in the west has been in stagnation for years. The latest ARIS (American Religious Identification Survey) from 2008 reports an 11% drop in the percentage of Americans who call themselves Christians since the last ARIS survey in 1990.¹ The statistics from the 2000 National Church Surveys by George Barna revealed a decrease of Christian vitality in the lives of its adherents in almost every facet. The number of Christian conversions in North America did not increase in the 1990s as it had on the other continents.² And yet, many would most likely declare that things have never been better. The buildings being built, the increase in denominational and individual church budgets, the growing numbers of attendees—these things would (some say *should*) seem to equate growth in Christian living and faith at an individual level.

But the facts prove otherwise. In fact, certain misdeeds such as divorce and pornographic addiction are as prevalent, if not more prevalent, within the church than without. More and more “Christian” youth are having sex with a greater number of partners. Pornography use on the Internet is skyrocketing with Christian men and women...and children. In addition, many other problems beset us inside the church. How many people have experienced rejection, judgment, condemnation, and hypocrisy from within the walls of a church building? Far too many have.

We sing, we build, we strive, and we work. It certainly cannot be said of us in the western church that we are lazy. But with all our labor, what are we producing? Wouldn't any competent businessperson ask that? If Christianity were a business, how would we rate our production? If we were in a board meeting discussing the business of Christianity, we would ask some of the following questions: What is the purpose of this organization? What is it we are trying to produce? To whom are we marketing this product? Are we achieving some level of success? Are we fulfilling our vision—the original vision of our founder?

Looking at the current organizational paradigms in Christianity, one might conclude that we are merely producing financial contributors who fund building programs. Others suggest that we are producing just crowds of admirers to a few super-clergy personalities who perform for us every Sunday morning. Any more, it seems when you hear someone ask the questions “Is your church growing?” or “Is your ministry growing?” what they are really asking is, “*Is your attendance increasing?*”

Taking a deeper look into the hearts of men and women, we are generally most concerned with appearance, form, and style. We are in danger of becoming more and more like the Israel of old of whom God said, “These people...honor me with their lips. But their hearts are far from me.” (Isaiah 29:13)

The biblical model for this kind of hypocritical religiosity found today is most completely defined by a popular religious classification of Jewish leaders two thousand years ago—*The Pharisee!*

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO...PHARISEES?

When you think of the word *Pharisee*, what comes to your mind? Some might think of snobby, religious guru-types in white cloaks with big, wrapped turbans on their heads. That seems to be the image portrayed in various films about the life of Jesus Christ over the years. I don't know how accurate it is. You probably know that the Pharisees were Jews, and they were the leaders of the Jewish religion at the time of Christ. After that, it may get a little fuzzy. They were the people with whom Jesus always fought. Most of us know that much.

The Pharisees are mentioned in the four Gospels almost as many times as the twelve disciples. Gaining a basic knowledge of this group of people is vital in understanding the life and ministry of Christ. Dare I say that the Pharisees were the bad guys of the greatest story ever told? I think they were. They were the antagonists. In a blockbuster film, the Pharisee would have been the nemesis—the enemy of the hero. But would they have appeared to be the bad guys at that time and place? It's human nature to point the finger at someone else. It's natural for

us to pass the buck or to think everyone else has a problem except us. Let us remember that the Pharisees were all too much like you and me. They were serious. They were sincere and devout. They meant business. They thought they were so right. And...they were dead wrong!

As you might have noticed from the scriptures, Jesus characterized the Pharisees as being completely infected with hypocrisy. After feeding the multitudes with the miracle of the loaves and fishes, Jesus used the symbolism of bread multiplying in Luke 12:2 when he said to his disciples, "Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy." Of course, the disciples had no idea what he was talking about, as usual.

I have a hunch that there were numerous times when the twelve sat by themselves and discussed some of Jesus' eccentricities while he was away praying. I can just hear them saying, "So, do you think he's okay? I mean, maybe he's getting a little sunstroke. My doctor tells me to drink a lot of water and wear plenty of sun block in this torturous, Judean sunlight!" Okay, maybe they didn't know about sun block then. But I am sure they wondered at times if he was in his right mind.

Jesus warned them as he said, "Be careful...Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees!" (Matthew 16:6) After this comment, they really didn't know what to think. Matthew 16:7 records their response, "They discussed this among themselves and said, 'It is because we didn't bring any bread.'"

I find that amusing. There seems to be a slight air of pride in that statement. The disciples sound so sure that they know what

he is talking about. I can just hear the disciples—Peter, James and John in particular because they seem like militant vigilantes to me—announcing “Wait Jesus! We know what you are saying. Of course! It’s so clear! Watch out because the Pharisees and Sadducees will take all our bread from us. Yes! How clever! How insightful of you, Jesus. It’s what we’ve thought all along. They will conspire with the Romans and together they will not only take all our bread, but the entire country as well if we let them. To arms! To arms!”

They get up and get ready to fight with the Messiah about whom they have always dreamed. And in my imagination, I can see Jesus giving them a gentle, verbal backhand as they sit back down. In verse 8 of Matthew 16 he says, “You of little faith.” And he corrects them again!

I don’t know about you, but that’s usually the way it goes with the Lord and me. That’s okay. His corrections are gentle and loving, as long as we don’t get so hard-hearted that it takes a really hard backhand.

Jesus wanted the disciples to see something. But he didn’t spell it out. He wanted them to perceive it for themselves. If we always must be told what to believe, we will never be able to believe anything for ourselves. Jesus wanted to make the disciples think for themselves. He used parables for this very reason. He knew that smart people who had no faith would not be able to grasp the truths of the kingdom. Socrates used this same method for similar reasons—because it works! Both Socrates and Jesus had the habit of answering questions with other questions.

I recall a time when I was around twelve years old. I really wanted a brand new racecar set. I begged my father constantly. He would never give me a straight answer. Finally, I blurted out one day, “Dad! Why can’t I have a racecar set?” My dad replied, “How long did you play with the train set I bought you last year?” I couldn’t answer because I played with it for maybe two weeks. I got bored and never even finished setting up the track. I knew he had me. I couldn’t answer.

My dad had not only given me an answer, but he also taught me a lesson. In fact, I was just as troubled with myself after that as I was with his answer. For weeks, and even years, I never forgot that lesson. Even today, whenever I see something I want, I see my dad sitting in his chair in the living room asking me how long I had my train set before I became bored with it. Wow! What a powerful way to teach and to reveal wisdom!

The Pharisees were experts in the Law. Many had probably memorized the entire Septuagint (the Old Testament in Greek) and could repeat it verbatim upon request. They were intelligent and smart. And they never could figure out what Jesus meant in his parables. I guess we should cut the disciples slack. They were a little slow in learning the truths of the kingdom of God, but they were catching on. Jesus continued to challenge them in their faith.

PHARISEES AND SADDUCEES

Originally, the term Pharisee (first used during the reign of John Hyrcanus in 135–105 BC) was reserved for that most sincere Jewish sect that was committed to taking the Law literally

and observing it wholeheartedly and completely. Pharisees, “separated unto God,”³ began as a collection of disenchanting Jews who wanted to separate themselves from the evils that had been spreading in Judea for years. They were successors to the Hasidim, pious Jews who joined the Maccabees in opposing Syrian domination during the years 166–142 BC.⁴ To be sure, before and during Christ’s earthly life, there were great evils introduced by the Romans: homosexuality, immorality, paganism, imperialistic crimes of various kinds including confiscation of property, forced military participation, and other lewd and cruel acts. The Romans were known for their brutality and villainess. This created an arousal of no small amount of righteous indignation in the hearts of the Jews.

One can hardly blame them. The city of Jerusalem was a sacred place—the location of the temple and the Holy of Holies. For centuries, the Jews were awaiting the coming of Messiah. He would strike down the Gentile trespassers and deliver Israel from the Roman occupation. The Gentiles were seen as an unclean race; unfit for salvation. Around AD 40, God would show Peter through a dream⁵ that the Gentiles were clean; they had been accepted as potential children of God, depending on their willingness to obey the Gospel of Christ.

The Sadducees, also a religious sect of Judaism, were very similar to the Pharisees in that they were moral and devout and had a measure of authority within the ranks of the Jewish faith. Together with the chief priests and elders, they joined forces with the highly feared and respected Jewish council called the Sanhedrin, and eventually arranged the arrest and crucifixion of

Christ in *Anno Domini* (year of our Lord) 33. The Pharisees became the leading sect of the Jewish authorities after that time.⁶

The Pharisees were moral. They were conservative. They stood for moral purity and righteousness. But what started out as a holy passion to obey the Law of Moses (the Torah), ended up being an obsessive legalistic craze of strict adherence to the oral traditions of the elders. Somewhere along the line, hypocrisy crept in until they reached the stage where Jesus described them as a “brood of vipers.” (Matthew 3:7)

How could this happen? Where did they go wrong? Or could it be that they were wrong from the beginning?

A STORY FROM BIBLE COLLEGE

I had the joy and privilege of attending a Bible college after graduating from high school. The joke at every Christian college is that the girls are there to get their MRS. degree (marriage degree). Bible colleges are similarly called *bridal colleges* by many of these same marriage-seeking individuals. I have to admit that I was thinking the same thing but just acted cool about it. You know what I mean? The cool type—they’re the kind that walk down the hallway pretending not to notice an attractive member of the opposite sex. And as the two apparently uninterested parties pass each other like ships in the night, they turn back when they think the other is not looking to get another glimpse of each other.

Many meet their mates in college. But when the eager spouse-seeker finally meets and marries *the one*, there are sometimes not necessarily letdowns, but certain adjustments in expectations.

Let's face it, we can't all marry Miss America or Mr. Olympia. It's one thing to look forward in expectation to a certain thing or person. But many times, we have to adjust our expectations when "faith" and "waiting" become "sight" and "arrival."

I think you can see the disciples, and everyone else, going through this same thing with Jesus Christ. After thousands of years of waiting, it is understandable that the Jews developed expectations of who their deliverer would be, what he would look like, and what he would accomplish. The Messiah became the most looked for and awaited figure of the Jewish faith. Indeed today, the Jews still look for the Messiah. They have rejected Jesus Christ because he did not fulfill certain expectations.

UNDERSTANDING THE PHARISEE

To understand the New Pharisee, which as I have stated may be within us, we must understand the Pharisee of Jesus' day. It only made sense to the Pharisees that the Messiah would deliver them from the Roman forces and set up a Jewish rule unprecedented even in Solomon's day. What about all those prophecies concerning a new Jerusalem and God's reigning over the earth from Zion? Can we blame them for thinking that the Messiah would set up God's reign in a visible, tangible kingdom upon the earth in their lifetime?

Sure, we look today with hindsight and can easily see that they were wrong about the Messiah coming to reign in Jerusalem back then. It's 2,000 years later, and he still isn't reigning physically in Jerusalem. But what would we have thought back then? Would we have understood the Messiah to be a lamb who was

slain from the foundation of the world? Would we have looked in expectation for a child to be born in a humble place, in a humble town, in such humble circumstances? Would we have traveled afar to follow the star? I guess the only way to answer that is to ask ourselves what we seek presently in our time.

Are we looking with anticipation for Christ's return? Or, are we happy and content with a comfortable life here on earth and lukewarmness in our hearts toward the things of God? Do we seek daily to carry our cross and to fight the good fight of faith? Or are we too busy enjoying life with our spouse and our children? Do we seek to win the lost and reach the world for Christ? Or do we enjoy the nice, safe Christian clique we have found at church and seek to keep it to ourselves? Do we pray and seek the kingdom that is to come? Or are we consumed with increasing our income level, and financial and social status, even our spiritual status?

The answer to those questions will probably answer fairly accurately what kind of Messiah you would have been looking for in first century Palestine.

I know, I know. It is much more desirable to make the Pharisees seem a bit monstrous. We'd rather keep the bad guys far removed from us. We do this all the time in our culture. We slap a label on somebody, and we deceive ourselves into thinking certain people are so much worse than we are. Indeed, others may have done terrible things that we will never do. But we tend to demonize and dehumanize certain people such as murderers, child abusers, those of other creeds, races, cultures, and political persuasions. It feels so much safer, doesn't it? We feel better

about ourselves when we dehumanize someone else whom we see as a bad person. It's human nature, I suppose.

This happens all the time when nations go to war. Unfortunately, you can't fire up a nation, and especially your soldiers, with statements like, "Okay soldiers! Get out there and shoot as many enemy targets as you possibly can with this one thought in mind: They are all scared young teenagers just like you!" No. Wars are better fought by dehumanizing and demonizing the enemy. How often do we do that with people we know to be sinners, or perceive to be evil? We know that horrible acts are committed on both sides in war. At the end of the day, the people we are most afraid of are not that different than we are.

SOME PHARISEES REPENTED

This is helpful in understanding the Pharisees. They weren't all bad guys. Nicodemus was a Pharisee—and a seeker of the truth. After all, we have probably the most well known verse in the Bible because of Nicodemus. John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life." Nicodemus sincerely and humbly inquired of Jesus how he might get to heaven. We also learn about the need to be born again because of Nicodemus. He may very well have become a follower of Christ after that night.

Places of spiritual authority tend to attract the best and the worst, sort of like running for a political office. The folks who truly want to seek the Lord, serve him, and help others find him, will be attracted to spiritual authority positions for all of the right

reasons. Yet, those who want to gain glory, honor, and the other fringe benefits of leadership will be attracted to spiritual authority positions for all of the wrong reasons. One might retort, “Yeah, but spiritual authority can be a real headache. Whoever wants that role can have it!” True. Being in a place of spiritual authority can be painful and challenging, if it is carried out correctly.

Nicodemus strikes me as a man who really wanted to honor God in his role as a Pharisee. We read the same about Paul in Philippians 3:5. He was a Hebrew of Hebrews, and a Pharisee. Paul sincerely believed he was helping God (doing God a favor) by arresting and killing the disciples that followed the ways of the crazy man from Nazareth. Both Nicodemus and Paul represent men who were very devout and very sincere. Don’t you think that sounds like two wonderful characteristics for a man of the cloth to have? However, Jesus had something altogether different to say about the devout and sincere Pharisees.

THE PHARISEES ACCORDING TO JESUS

The denunciations of the Pharisees by Jesus are devastating! Matthew 23 records the lengthiest denunciation of the Pharisees in the Bible. Imagine being called any of the following names: blind guides, hypocrites, brood of vipers, sons of hell, white-washed tombs, fools, snakes, etc. You would definitely have had the feeling that Jesus was a little upset at you. The Pharisees were thoroughly condemned by Christ. There could not possibly be a more severe judgment than what Jesus laid down.⁷

In my junior high school, we had a principal who was most feared by the students. Dr. Eugene Young had a jet black, bouf-

fant hairdo, and a huge face. He looked like he could have been a bodyguard for some mafia kingpin. He had charisma and charm, but one sure didn't want to get in trouble with him because he could really deliver the thunder. Doc Young always assumed absolute control over a rebellious teen. Some teachers and adults can be intimidated. The six-foot-three, three hundred pound plus Doctor Young was not one of those.

For some reason, I think of Doc Young when I think of the stance that Christ took with these Pharisees. Jesus was not intimidated by the Pharisees. He knew they would certainly plot to arrest him and kill him after this, but he didn't back down. Jesus pulled back the shades, so to speak, and let everyone in on the light of the situation. John chapter eight records a lengthy discussion between Jesus and the Pharisees. At one point, Jesus replied in verse forty-four, "You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire."

**When the Creator of the universe calls you a
son of the devil, you've got problems!**

This is not the kind of thing one would say at a political rally. And it certainly is not something one says to a group of people of whom you are afraid. Jesus told them the truth—the horrible, chilling reality of what they had become. When the Creator of the universe calls you a son of the devil, you've got problems!

THE NEW PHARISEE IS A CHRISTIAN!

I use the term Christian in the broadest sense. In other words, any person who *claims* to follow Jesus, I will call a Christian here for the sake of clarity. Today's Pharisee is found within the Christian community. Here are some of the characteristics of the Pharisee of Jesus' day that have direct application to the New Pharisee:

1. They held to orthodox beliefs.

They believed in heaven and hell. They believed in angels and demons, resurrection of the dead, reward, and retribution after death, and the immortality of the soul.

2. They believed that all human beings were equal in God's sight.

3. They held to a balanced view of the free will of man and God's sovereignty.

4. They had a strong sense of ethics, personal character, and integrity.

5. They sat in the seat of God's ordained authority.⁸

The Pharisees were in God's ordained position of authority at the time.⁹ In fact, Jesus and the disciples taught in the synagogues and temple. They were obviously all Jews, as were the people who attended their teachings. One of the major reasons for Jesus' righteous indignation concerning the Pharisees was this very fact that they "sat in Moses' seat." (Matthew 23:2)

...the New Pharisee many times occupies a position of spiritual authority within the structure of the church leadership, be that in a church or a parachurch ministry.

These factors would indicate that a Pharisee in today's society would also sit in God's ordained seat of authority. This seat of authority today is in Christ, of course. All Christians have been given the authority of Christ. "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." (Matthew 28:18) Indeed, the New Pharisee sits in the place of God's authority. In fact, the New Pharisee many times occupies a position of spiritual authority within the structure of the church leadership, be that in a church or a parachurch ministry.

Buy the B&N e-Pub version at:-

<http://www.barnesandnoble.com/w/new-pharisee-jeff-saxton/1102142446?ean=2940149840700>

Buy the Kindle version at:-

<http://www.amazon.com/New-Pharisee-Jeff-Saxton-ebook/dp/B00YDNC3EQ/>