

10 Signs You Might Be a Pharisee

What is the possibility that you could be a Pharisee? What are the signs—or warning signals?

I list 10 below, though there are many more. But these are a good start.

Chances Are You Are a Pharisee If

1. **You love to point the finger.** The devil is a master at this; that's why he is called "the accuser" (Rev. 12:10, ESV). You must choose whether you want to play the devil and point the finger, or be Jesus, who lets us save face. Jesus actually gives us a selfish motivation for not pointing the finger. "Do not judge, and you will not be judged" (Luke 6:37, NIV).
2. **You are good at sending people on a guilt trip.** The Pharisees tried to do a "Gotcha!" again and again because of the fact that Jesus performed miracles on the Sabbath and allowed other things to be done on the Sabbath that seemed to go against the Law. For example, when His disciples were hungry on the Sabbath and plucked heads of grain and began to eat, the Pharisees seized the moment to condemn both Jesus and His disciples.

The Law invariably finds people guilty. When you have interpretations of the Law that exceed the Law—or rules of your own you think are valid—it increases the occasions for placing blame. Are you good at giving a person a guilt trip? Do you like making people feel guilty? Chances are you might be a Pharisee.

3. **You require people to live up to standards not written in Scripture.** Do you require duties of others that you

yourself do not do? The Pharisees, said Jesus, “tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on people’s shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to move them with their finger” (Matt. 23:4, ESV). It is somewhat like preachers who tell their congregations to witness for Jesus in the streets and in the workplace, but they themselves never mention the gospel except when they are in the pulpit.

4. **You say a person is not a Christian if they disagree with you.** You say they are not saved if they oppose you. This is judging just as the Pharisees did. It is a quick cop-out; it is your way of punishing the person with whom you disagree. Instead of saying politely that they disagree with you, you glibly claim, “These people aren’t even saved.”
5. **You fail to practice what you preach.** Jesus plainly said of Pharisees that they “do not practice what they preach” (Matt. 23:3, NIV). The greatest testimony we give to the world is not our articulate theology or eloquent way of presenting it but their discovery that we are real—that we really do practice what we preach. This does not mean we are perfect or never sin. “If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:8). But if our faces, hearts, and lives reflect the love of Jesus, people are going to want what we’ve got.
6. **You judge by outward appearance.** “Do not judge by appearances,” Jesus said to the Pharisees (John 7:24, ESV). Samuel, the great prophet of the Old Testament, had to learn this lesson. The Lord said to him as he was trying to discern who would be the next king, “Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart” (1 Sam. 16:7).

If you don’t like the way a person dresses—too fashionable,

too expensive, or too casual; you don't like their accent—too posh or too working class; you don't approve of their education or lack of it or where they received it; you don't approve of their theological or church background; you judge them by their neighborhood; you don't approve of their employment; or you don't like their friends, you are a Pharisee.

7. You care more about people's opinions than about God's.

Jesus said that the Jews were not able to believe in His Messiahship because they preferred the praise of one another over God's praise. People ask, How could the Jews have missed their own Messiah? Here is the answer: they made no effort to seek the honor, glory, and praise of the Most High God. They chose the praise of each other. But you too could miss what God is doing in our day—and the direction He is taking—if you are controlled by the opinions of your peers, whether friends or enemies.

8. You want people to notice when you give, pray, or fast.

Jesus told us not to be like those who gave, prayed, or fasted only when their acts would be seen by people. Why was this so important? Because the principle of John 5:44 is at stake. Jesus made it clear: if we do what we do to be seen of men, we get a reward, yes; but it is only in the here and now. We get a feeling that builds up our egos: the praise of people, not of God.

"Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. Thus when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogue and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving might be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you"

(Matt. 6:1-4).

The irony is, we actually develop a healthy ego, significance, and sense of self-esteem when we cultivate a habit of seeking only the praise of God. God has a way of doubling our sense of significance and self-worth. He will not let us down. But when we choose to give, pray, or fast only when people are likely to find out, we risk repeating the fatal sin of the ancient Jews who utterly missed out on what God wanted them to receive.

9. **You are motivated by money.** The Pharisees were “lovers of money” (Luke 16:14). This was partly why they ridiculed Jesus—because much of His teaching pertained to money. To be clear, the Bible does not say that *money* is a root of evil; it says that “the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils” (1 Tim. 6:10). This is because, as God’s Word makes clear, we must be wholeheartedly devoted to God, not to the things of the world. We cannot serve both God and money (Matt. 6:24).
10. **You feel righteous when comparing yourself to others.** Rather than measuring yourself by the Word of God, you measure yourself by others. Instead of discovering the sinfulness of your own heart, you find someone you judge to be in bad shape and assume, by contrast, that you are OK. But that is by comparison. We can’t know what is in another’s heart. Therefore when we get a righteous feeling by selecting someone we assume to be more wicked than ourselves, we totally avoid the very thing Jesus wants us to do; namely, to see what we are like before God and not in the eyes of people.

Whether you see yourself in any of these signs, the truth is, the Pharisee lurks in all of us. This means we are among those Jesus condemned the most! Hopefully the desire to be in good standing with Him will motivate you to search your heart and confess any area of self-righteousness, trusting God to not only forgive you but also empower you to put this sin behind

you for good. {eoa}

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