

## *Marks of a Pharisee*

### *Matthew 23*

The title *Pharisee* carries a negative connotation, and rightfully so. In the days of Jesus, however, they were recognized as the most observant religious leaders of the day. I suppose there exists some Pharisee in all of us, so it's important to recognize their toxic attitudes and behaviors.

Fortunately for us, Jesus left little to the imagination about their hypocrisy (Matthew 23:1–33). We would do well to learn and apply the warnings He gave the Pharisees. Here are a few marks of Pharisees to which we should all take heed:

#### **1. Pharisees expect of others what they will not do themselves.** vs. 4

Words have weight. When we repeat them and say them loudly, they even have more weight. But all of our words put together aren't nearly as weighty as our actions. Actions always speak louder than words. When I expect of others what I will not do myself, I not only negate the expectation, but I invite the anger of the one on whom the burden has been laid.

#### **2. What Pharisees actually *do* practice, they only do in order to be noticed of others.** vs. 5

You typically won't find Pharisees working behind the scenes or making an anonymous donation. Slaves to the approval and approbation of others, they proclaim their own goodness. On the football field of religious life, they are the after-tackle dancers and the after-touchdown prancers. "Look at me! Look at what I did!" Religion is their football field.

#### **3. Pharisees are fond of positions, titles, and formal recognition.** vs. 6-7

Thoughts of, "where I sit" and "what I'm called" rule them. Dangerously, and all too often, Christian become enamored with what people say about them or what position they "have attained" in their church. Perhaps we should all be a bit more fond of Jesus who did not seek position, title, or formal recognition—but rightfully possesses all three!

#### **4. Pharisees take advantage of the weak for personal gain while simultaneously making a show of religious superiority.** vs. 14

A Pharisee thinks, "Look at how godly I am! I can impress you with my religious jargon and the eloquence of my public prayer and ministry." Meanwhile, he takes advantage of those who are most vulnerable. Pure religion cares for widows and orphans (James 1:27).

#### **5. Pharisees approach holy living from the outside in instead of the inside out.** vs. 25-26

Everyone gets this illustration. It's not difficult to understand. Yet it plays itself out time and time again in our lives. Why? Because it's so much easier to deal with cosmetics than it is to deal with character. Mowing grass beats pulling weeds, every time. Jesus is concerned about the inside and the outside. But the teaching is clear: prioritize the inside. Deal with it first. Always remember that a Pharisee will exert great effort to guard his image, but will make little effort to maintain his integrity. Like beautifully maintained gravestones, their lives attract admiring attention, but testify only to the deadness within.