

Voices: Under the mask, are you a Pharisee?

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As I was reading through the Gospel of Mark, I had a terrifying realization. I am a Pharisee.

✘ Zac Harrell I have been a Christian more than 20 years and served in ministry the last 10. I have been around church and the things of God for a long time, and as I read through Mark and the interactions between Jesus and the Pharisees, I began to see myself needing the rebukes of Jesus.

So much of the time, my own heart is marked by the Pharisee's prayer: "Thank you, God, I'm not like him." I look at others, and my heart is filled with judgment and pride. All of our hearts are proud and judgmental at some points, because we are broken.

A Pharisee & a scribe

If I am even more honest, I must admit there are times when I am the scribes Jesus warns the disciples about in Mark 12:38-40. I like people's approval and praise. I like to be honored. I like for people to think I am holier than I actually may be. I have to check my own heart: "Am I just putting on an act? Am I just pretending for the approval of man?"

**Texas
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Voices**

Many Sundays, I call our church to quit playing the religious game, to take off their religious masks or whatever other metaphor we want to use to call one another to be honest about our Christian walk. The reason I know my church needs this call is because I need it, daily. There is a reason Jesus warns his disciples over and over about the "leaven of the Pharisees."

To be a Pharisee is easy. It is easy to seek the approval of man. It is easy to put on a front and seem more religious than you are. It is easy to pray long prayers in public to be noticed. It is easy to make everything look good on the outside. It is easy to play as if we have it all together.

When we have been around the church for a while we learn how to fake it. We learn how to seem like we are OK. We learn to be Pharisees.

Breeding ground

So much of our church culture, influenced by our broader culture, is superficial. This superficiality is a breeding ground for pharisaical hearts. The hard work of the kingdom of God is to open our lives and submit our lives to one another. It is to confess sin and to allow others to call us out when we begin to become Pharisees toward others and think more highly of ourselves.

It is also easy to condemn others and to be judgmental. We love to read about the Pharisees in the Gospels and point to others today and call them Pharisees. But if we are honest with ourselves, many of us have a pharisaical heart, too. Even when we are calling the church to faithfulness and saying and maybe even doing the right things, if we have a heart of stone toward those we call modern Pharisees we, ourselves, are showing pharisaical tendencies.

We don't know the hearts of others, and we should give the benefit of doubt and show grace.

Called to love

Sometimes we need to call others out. Jesus calling out the disciples and Paul calling out Peter in Galatians 2 provide us examples of how to do this. But in doing so, we also must check our own hearts. Are we doing this out of love? The Great Commandment goes for us, too. We must love our

neighbor; we must even love our enemy. The one across the aisle. The one in the other convention.

We should call for biblical faithfulness, but we must do so with love for those we disagree with, or else we are no better than the Pharisees. We don't get an exemption from loving because we disagree or even because someone else is rude or condescending.

Our pleas and our standing for the truth always must come from a heart that knows its own tendencies toward pride and judgment, a humble heart that cries, "Have mercy on me, a sinner!"

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