

Dismantling Pharisaism

Being the Church in the midst of Pharisees

If you have not read the previous section, *A Chronological Study of Pharisaism in the Four Gospels*, then this section will sound over-the-top. Justification for what follows is found in that study, not here. In other words, I'm only listing practical steps here that will help believers heed Jesus' warning against the leaven of the Pharisees, Sadducees and Herodians. Getting rid of Pharisaism is easier said than done, so we're not going to beat around the bush. The process is similar to casting out demons, which should come as no surprise since the "*Father of Pharisaism*" is Satan himself (cf. John 8:44). These suggestions will sound radical, but we think you'll find they are consistent with what we've already discussed. Also, keep in mind that the more immersed in Pharisaism a person becomes, the more difficult it is to break free and the more it costs. In other words, you should expect a lot of resistance from your own mind and from others. So, having said that, let's begin.

The most obvious way to dismantle Pharisaism is to disengage from all pharisaic forms. I'm starting here because this is the easy part. The hard part is becoming Christlike, where believers effectively challenge Pharisees on their own turf (and get ostracized and even killed for doing so).

Step 1: Dismantling Pharisaic Forms

Leaving the leaven behind

Dismantling pharisaic forms does not mean Pharisaism will disappear. Pharisees are here to stay, and they are as prevalent today as they were in the Gospels. This is a fact of life, and efforts to eradicate Pharisaism will not stop them from building empires or careers. However, as a believer, you do not need to tolerate this religious nonsense or subject yourself to its influence.

Rather than fall into the trap of listing a bunch of "do's and don'ts," I've decided to simply tell you what I've done in my own life to remove leaven. Therefore, this next section is simply a description of the decisions I've made.

1. *I dropped out of seminary 12 units from receiving a Masters Degree.*

As a young believer I was convinced that I should go to Bible school and seminary. I thought this would please God. I had lots of support encouraging me in that direction. However, as I read the New Testament, it slowly dawned on me that this approach to

God ran contrary to what Jesus taught. Unfortunately this did not stop me from graduating from Bible school and pursuing my goal to complete seminary. As I neared the end of my Master's program and those coveted titles that would append themselves to my name, my convictions regarding formal religious studies became much stronger and God started warning me about the consequences of pursuing that path. I was studying John 5 at the time and could clearly see the dangers spelled out in that chapter. The Pharisees became spiritually blind during the very process of studying Scripture!

In essence, God warned me that getting a Master's degree would, in due course, alter my spiritual life, permanently changing me in ways that would be impossible to reverse. *"If you go through with this ~ and add those letters to your name ~ it will change you."* And He did not mean in a good way!¹ So, when I was just 12 units from graduating, I made the decision to obey God and dropped out of seminary. It was one of the best (and most difficult) decisions I've ever made, and perhaps the one most effective at putting distance between myself and Pharisaism. You can imagine the kind of flak and persecution I took for this decision: "Are you crazy?! You'll never be able to work in the Church without a Master's degree! At least not as a pastor!" "You're throwing away your career! All that talent, education and gifting down the drain!" "You'll never amount to anything!" "No one will hire you." "Are you nuts?! You're completely off-base here." "You can just kiss ministry good-bye," and the like.

The following section explains the internal process and reasoning I followed:

There were many religious men in Jesus' day tenaciously holding to the inerrancy of Scripture. Some of them devoted their lives to studying the ancient texts and teaching them to others through the "church" (i.e. synagogue). How many of these men did Jesus choose as apostles? Not one. I recommend you pay close attention to this aspect of Jesus' ministry. The Scripture that changed the course of my life is Jn 5:38-47. I recommend you let it change yours. Listen to what Jesus said to the religious Jews:

(38) "And you do not have His word abiding in you, for you do not believe Him whom He sent."

Keep in mind that many of these men had the Law memorized, yet Jesus says, *"You do not have His word abiding in you."* He does not stop there.

¹ Am I the only person to whom God has spoken this warning? Am I uniquely susceptible to the untoward effects of formal religious education? I highly doubt it. I suspect God attempts to convey this message to everyone who embarks on this route to usefulness in the Kingdom of God, but most are already so indoctrinated in pharisaic thinking they can no longer see or appreciate the simple reality of Jesus' words on this subject.

(39-40) “You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is these that bear witness of Me; and you are unwilling to come to Me, that you may have life.”

The Pharisees thought that knowing the Bible was the way to know God. Their approach did not work. Why not? It should have. What went wrong? The next four verses tell us. Jesus said,

(41) “I do not receive glory from men; (42) but I know you, that you do not have the love of God in yourselves. (43) I have come in My Father’s name, and you do not receive Me; if another shall come in his own name, you will receive him. (44) How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another, and you do not seek the glory that is from the one and only God?”

There you have it – the name game! What do men do to their names to bring them glory? They add initials, titles, and other credentials (like books, which compounds the effect²). This is what drives enrollment in Bible schools and seminaries. *“If another shall come in his own name, you will receive him. How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another?”* Once I understood what Jesus was getting at, I ran away from the system He’s talking about.

Men receive glory by making others dependent on them. There are many ways to do this, but formal education is one of the most powerful (especially when combined with money and position). Men love to “pat one another on the back,” taking titles like “The Bible Answer Man,” Senior Pastor, Doctor (Ph.D.), Chaplain, Reverend, and on it goes. There is a bright light here. Don’t miss it. In the first century, the nametags were different, but they accomplished the same thing. Listen to Jesus in Mt 23:2-12:

(2) “The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses; (5) But they do all their deeds to be noticed by men; for they broaden their phylacteries and lengthen the tassels of their garments. (6) They love the places of honor at banquets and the chief seats in the synagogues, (7) and respectful greetings in the market places, and being called Rabbi by men. (8) But do not be called Rabbi; for One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers. (9) Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven. (10) Do not be called leaders; for One is your Leader, that is, Christ. (11) But the greatest among you shall be your servant. (12) Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted.”

² Which is why we are using a pseudonym in the writing of this book. It is not our desire to achieve fame for ourselves in this endeavor.

This is the same problem Jesus is addressing in John 5. *“If another shall come in his own name, you will receive him.”* What does, *“...you will receive him”* mean? In this age I think it means, *“You will buy his books, go to his schools, listen to his teachings, let him lead, fail to hold him accountable, etc.”* I hope you’re catching my drift. Jesus made four important points about people infected with religious pride:

They are not teachable. (40, 43, 47)

They do not love God. (42)

They do not understand the Scripture. (38-39, 45-47)

They cannot understand Jesus. (39, 40, 43, 46-47)

Please keep in mind that learning, loving God, understanding the Scripture and looking for the Messiah was the life-focus of this group! These are precisely the four areas they considered their greatest strengths. Was Jesus impressed? Listen:

(45) Do not think I will accuse you before the Father; the one who accuses you is Moses, in whom you have set your hope. (46) For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote of Me. (47) But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?”

Do you still want to go to Bible school and seminary? I hope not, but if you do, please look at the following two passages. They speak loud and clear about the false value of formal, religious education.

Mt 11:25, At that time Jesus answered and said, “I praise Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You did hide these things from the wise and intelligent and did reveal them to babes. (26) Yes, Father, for thus it was well-pleasing in Your sight.”

Acts 4:13, Now as they (the highly educated religious council) observed the confidence of Peter and John, and understood that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were marveling, and began to recognize them as having been with Jesus.

2. I do not involve myself with denominations.

I was raised in the Lutheran Church (Missouri Synod) and attended Lutheran Bible Institute after coming to faith in Christ. It did not take long to realize my professors were “wearing Lutheran eye glasses” when interpreting Scripture and history. I wanted unbiased teaching, so I left the Lutheran Institute to attend college with the Assemblies

of God. Same problem, *different glasses*. About this time I learned that a similar situation had arisen in the early Church, with some groups following Paul, others Cephas and still others Apollos. It did not take long to connect the dots: Lutherans follow Luther, Presbyterians follow Calvin, etc. On the other hand, my teachers were not connecting these same dots! Quite the contrary, they swept denominational divisions under the rug, using terms like “trans-denominationalism,” and “inter-denominationalism.” I became suspicious that all was not well. After all, Jesus said we are “one flock,” and He is our “Shepherd.” Obviously, this is how it will be in heaven, so why should it look different on earth? In addition to all this, it became clear that denominations spoon-feed their members religious diets favoring each organization’s theological bent. In other words, “faith” is defined by adopting certain creeds and traditions, rather than maturing in a spiritual walk with God. All of this (and more) led me to break off connections with denominations. It was an easy decision.

3. *I do not tithe.*

Please don’t take this as meaning I don’t financially support the Kingdom of God. I am talking about the Mosaic regulation of giving 10% of one’s earnings to the Temple treasury. Tithing is a financial powerhouse for Pharisaism, and it is widely promoted. I remember taking a class on tithing in seminary where the professor was advocating this practice for the Church. I was already convinced tithing was not for the Church, so I voiced my objections to the class. About half the students were pastors, and they were understandably defensive given that their future livelihood depended upon this practice. Nevertheless, I told them their belief in tithing was skewed by their desire for financial security, and that they had professionalized their ministries. That was the truth. Career pastors expect the same financial return they see in other professions, and tithing guarantees they will get it. I remember being surrounded by about a dozen of the students who accused me of not knowing Biblical hermeneutics. I was mildly surprised and asked what hermeneutical principle they were referring to. One of the students said he would bring me a book at the break to straighten me out on tithing. I waited. During the break, the group advocating tithing presented me with their book on Biblical hermeneutics. I looked at it and smiled, because I knew that the author, Bernard Ramm, believed like I did! I took the book, opened the index to tithing and proceeded to read them the section where Ramm explains that Christians teach tithing because they do not follow sound Biblical hermeneutics! I handed the book back to the student who brought it to me and suggested he read it. My position has not changed in nearly 40 years. Tithing is dead center in the Mosaic Law, and was used to support the tribe of Levi. It is not a principle the Body of Christ should follow.

The only reason institutional Christianity pushes tithing is because Pharisaism is expensive. Tithing is the main support for the entire pharisaic program and without it, Pharisaism would die. In addition, tithing is often used (by tithe-supported ministers) as a kind of heavenly arm-twisting or manipulation: “You can’t out-give God,” and “if you tithe, God will bless you monetarily in return,” based on Malachi 3:8-12. This produces all sorts of compromised motives on the part of believers. We prefer to follow Paul’s instructions, to give generously as God has prospered us, to do so with a cheerful heart and expect God to lead us.

4. *I no longer regularly attend institutional church services.*

My main reason for not attending institutional churches is the absence of Spirit-led Body life. In my experience, most institutional services are religious performances designed by talented speakers and musicians. I attended one “church” like this for 18 years, “*sitting in a pew and standing on cue,*” until I realized the essential nature of the service had nothing to do with whether or not I (or anyone else) even showed up! The entire event was scheduled down to the smallest detail and orchestrated for effect. It was not an *entire* waste of time, but it’s a long throw from what God desires. It was and is a lonely, superficial experience on the horizontal plane even though corporate worship in institutional churches can still be satisfying – not so much because of the quality of the performance, but because worshipping God is fun no matter where, when or how it occurs.

5. *I do not refer to people by using religious titles.*

I decided long ago to be content with my own name, and not to decorate it with artificial tags. Additionally, in obedience to Jesus, I also apply this rule to everyone else. This means I do not use religious titles (e.g. Reverend, Rabbi, Pastor, Doctor and so on). Everyone who believes in Jesus is my brother or sister in the faith and there is no higher honor than that! I’ve found that religious titles carry artificial expectations, causing those who use them to “perform” accordingly. In other words, titles turn people into actors. And Jesus, of course, strictly forbade this practice in Matthew 23.

6. *I regularly attend a house church.*

As I’ve already mentioned, the idea that church is a building where people function according to prescribed schedules is an extension of the synagogue system, and it is not what we find believers doing in the New Testament. After making the decision to leave

the institutional church, we opted to try house churches because these fit the New Testament model. Though not perfect, they provide the opportunity for a much richer spiritual experience, and we've discovered many unexpected benefits. The primary benefit is authentic relationship, which is expressed in an environment that encourages everyone to use their spiritual gifts to worship God together as the Bride of Christ. Of course this does not happen overnight! House churches, like people, have their own struggles and flaws and their own unique problems. But in our experience, they do tend to more closely approximate the first-century Church. Also, house churches are inexpensive. They generally have no paid staff, no mortgages, no professional performers or any of the other expenses that come with institutions. As a result, finances that were previously gobbled up for "empire building" become available for meeting needs directly connected with the Kingdom of God and evangelism.

7. *I do not advocate church-growth strategies.*

By church-growth strategies, I'm referring to the practice of designing church programs to attract large numbers of people. How people who study the Bible get church-growth strategies from the words of Jesus (or any other writer) is a complete mystery. Church-growth movements are loaded with worldly marketing techniques and minimize or ignore the Kingdom of God. From a spiritual perspective, church growth is God's business and our job is to faithfully represent His Son to the world (c.f. 1 Corinthians 3:7-9). The mega-church movement gives one the impression that there is a lot of healthy fruit there, but a quick comparison with the life and message of Jesus reveals such systems are spiritually bankrupt. The last two institutional churches we attended became involved in the Willow Creek Seeker Movement, where church programs were designed to draw large crowds and to appeal to as yet unconverted seekers. The elders in the second of these organizations actually said publicly that they intended to relocate the church to a more affluent neighborhood in order to pay for programs and building expansion. In other words, the people God gave them to shepherd were too poor! One of these pastors also made the statement, publicly and passionately, that "corporate prayer was killing us!" What he meant was, it made seekers "*uncomfortable.*" Heaven forbid. The Church gathers to be edified and built up, but he was more concerned that the seekers not be offended by true Spirit-led Body life. Before this atrocity was over, hundreds of families were disrupted, wounded and scattered. There was nothing about any of this that had anything to do with Jesus Christ.

8. *I do not believe in (or participate in) any religious rituals, liturgies or sacraments.*

True spirituality is very informal, which is why it's so real. For many people, this is the most difficult hurdle of Pharisaism to get over, and very few succeed. My perspective on Baptism and the Lord's Supper is that they are not sacraments. Some of you reading this paper will be curious what we believe. Here it is (taken from our website, www.grace-n-truth.com):

If you like controversy, you've come to the right place! There are many views on baptism and communion, and we're adding ours to the mix. We think you'll find our interpretation interesting and unexpected. We ourselves have believed different interpretations at different times in our lives, but hope we've finally settled on a theory we can live with!....This is not a discussion about the pros and cons of the Eucharist, baptismal regeneration for infants, the merits of consubstantiation, or any other historically held belief. As far as I know, this is the only place you will find this particular point of view.

Our Baptism & Communion Theory: Can you picture the church without a Bible? Probably not. The Bible seems to be the “bread and butter” of the modern Church, and nearly everyone in the free world has one. However, this picture is artificial. Most Christians throughout church history did not have Bibles and a good number have been illiterate. The Church “stuffed with books” (and institutions that are financed by teaching them) is a relatively recent phenomenon (primarily in the last century). A willingness to accept this is foundational to what we are about to say.

The Great Commission is not, “Go into all the world and pass out Bibles.” When Jesus commissioned His apostles and disciples He did not even mention the Scripture.³ Instead, He gave them authority to heal the sick, raise the dead, and cast out demons. Paul said it like this: “*For the Kingdom of God does not consist in words, but in power*” (1 Corinthians 4:20). God knows the human tendency toward religious pride. In many circles, the Church practically worships the Bible, leaving an emphasis on our faith and the Holy Spirit at a minimum. So what did God have in mind? We think the answer might be straightforward and simple. Jesus gave the Church two traditions to hold the Gospel of the Kingdom in place, and then He filled His Bride with the Holy Spirit.

Our theory is this: The Gospel of Jesus Christ is embedded in the traditions of baptism and communion. These two commands are the heavenly tools a Spirit-filled Church needs in order to carry out the Great Commission.

³ And of course the New Testament was not yet written.

Baptism: The tradition of baptism in water preserves the historical events and meaning of the life, death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ, as well as the essentials of conversion (repentance, death to one's "self," and new life in Christ). No bibles are needed, because the tradition of baptism (preceded by repentance) cuts through illiteracy and language barriers. This is, in our current view, the primary purpose of baptism.

Communion: The tradition of communion (i.e. the Lord's Supper, "love feasts," "breaking bread," etc.) was born out of the Passover seder, which symbolized Jesus' death, burial and resurrection as well as His future return. It was both a memorial and a prophetic device designed to keep believers focused on the basic message of salvation. Jesus and Paul both make that clear. Though it has become a stripped-down formalized version due to the sacramentalism of church history, it was not intended to be so. This memorial helps to maintain the unity of believers in forgiveness, love and purpose.⁴ Again, no bibles are needed. This tradition preserves church life (fellowship, transparency, forgiveness, generosity, etc.) and keeps our focus on His return, cutting across cultural and educational lines. This, we believe, is the reason Jesus told us to do it in remembrance of Him.

These two traditions provide a vehicle for the Gospel of Jesus Christ. To fulfill the Great Commission, Jesus gave us baptism, communion, and His own Spirit. For most believers throughout church history, this is all that has been needed for the Kingdom of God to spread. What would stop this from working? The same deception that blinded the Pharisees: religious pride, dogmatism, an intellectual/doctrinaire approach to God, and a lack of genuine love for others. It should come as no surprise that these two simple traditions have become primary points of division in the body of Christ by "Christian" Pharisees (via infant baptism, baptismal regeneration, consubstantiation, transubstantiation, etc.).

9. I am not influenced by Christian orthodoxies, Confessions, Church Councils or Creeds.

In my experience, organizations that hold tenaciously to any one system of doctrine commonly use the Bible as a means to promote those views. Said differently, religious leaders with set convictions on what they believe are much more interested in teaching their convictions than submitting to Scripture. This practice is common, and no one is better at it than those in the Reformed camp (Augustinian Calvinists). For example, I

⁴ By requiring that we deal with any offenses between us before engaging in this aspect of our common worship.

have a good friend who signed up for a Bible study at a Reformed church only to discover the class was going to study the Westminster Confession. To a Calvinist this *is* studying the Bible! Welcome to the world of pharisaic Christianity! In my opinion, the Bible and the Holy Spirit are a sufficient source of truth.

10. *I do not participate in political-action groups.*

I will get involved in a minimal way with some moral issues (i.e. homosexuality, abortion, war), but for the most part I am not involved in politics. My main reason for this is Jesus Christ himself. He was not politically active, whereas the Pharisees, Sadducees and Herodians were. I've also noticed that believers who do become politically active are much less focused on the Good News of the Kingdom of God than the societal issue(s) that concern them. On the other hand, America is not Rome, and our political context is different than it was in the first century, so it's easy to turn the argument in either direction, and one could argue in favor of political action as easily as against it. I'm simply stating the path I've chosen to take, because I believe a demonstration of God's Kingdom conquers ungodliness by changing human hearts, whereas political action will only change laws.

11. *I do not celebrate "Christian" holy days, like Christmas and Easter.*

Pharisaism makes much of religious traditions, ensuring these time-honored holidays are preserved. I'm including a brief explanation of what I believe below, again taken from our website.

Calendar Christianity: What do we mean by "Calendar Christianity?"

When the church puts spiritually significant events on the calendar it changes the nature of Christianity—for the worse. Christmas and Easter are the most well-known examples, but there are many others, including: the Feast of the Epiphany, Saint Valentine's Day, Ash Wednesday, Saint Patrick's Day, Palm Sunday, Good Friday, Ascension Day, Thanksgiving, All Saints' Day and Saint Stephen's Day.

This is "Christianity-by-the-Calendar." Many nominal Christians live by these dates, as is obvious by swelling church attendance on Christmas and Easter. Ever wonder what God thinks about this? Jesus said to judge a tree by its fruit, and that "*a bad tree bears bad fruit*" (Matthew 7:17). Here's our theory: When the Church memorializes "holy" events on

the calendar, the world exploits them for financial gain. Christmas and Easter are two clear examples.

December 25 – Christmas: What happens? The birth of Jesus is eclipsed by Santa Claus, and a red-nosed reindeer named Rudolf. What does Santa promise? New toys! Does Santa pay for them? No. The new toys are usually bought on credit. Where can you find Santa? In large department stores where the new "toys" are on display. It is a celebration of materialism and a financial boon for the economy. In recent years the holiday has been secularized and politicized to the point where it's become unpolitic to say "Merry *Christmas*." The whole event runs contrary to everything Jesus taught, and the Church should not be involved. Not convinced? Here are a few other points to consider:

1. There is no evidence the early church celebrated the birth of Jesus.
2. Messianic Christians (Jewish believers) do not celebrate Christmas.
3. December 25th was the "birthday" for pagan Roman and Greek sun gods.
4. Christmas trees come from a European tradition that is clearly pagan.
5. Celebration of Christmas was banned in some early American colonies.

One popular saying is, "Keep Christ in Christmas." We suggest the Church adopt a different slogan: "Keep Christ. *Get rid of Christmas.*"

Easter is a repeat, in principle, of what we just said about Christmas. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is eclipsed by chocolate rabbits and colored eggs reminiscent of the fertility rites of early pagan cultures! There should be no need to say more. (Anyone can do a quick internet search to discover the pagan roots of most holidays, including Easter, which comes from the name of the pagan "queen of heaven," Astarte, or in Assyrian, Ishtar.) Our purpose is to expose "Calendar Christianity" as a worldly exploitation of faith. It is not biblical Christianity and the problem is not limited to Christmas and Easter. Other values have been placed on the calendar and exploited as well: Mothers Day, Fathers Day, and Valentine's Day among others. All these (and more) are marketed in our economy as obligations for cards and gifts. They are money-makers for a world of merchants that could care less about the values represented.

We identify these traditions as "elementary principles of the world" (i.e. the ABC's of effective worldly principles). Paul warns the Church about this danger in Colossians 2:8, "*See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and*

empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ."

12. *I gave away the majority of my books.*

Over the years, I've noticed that many individuals dedicated to religion own fairly large personal libraries, commonly displayed in study areas or dens for others to see. Many of the books are rarely if ever used, but their presence is impressive. I once owned a modest collection of some 800 books, which I neatly organized around my desk because they seemed to provide a certain level of comfort and credibility. I'm now convinced this practice is pharisaical, fueling false confidence and academic posing. Through a series of unfortunate circumstances in my personal life, I was forced to get rid of this library. Looking back, I can clearly see God's hand in the process, because off-loading my books was much more difficult than I expected. They had become a part of my identity and were definitely a source of pride. I learned an important lesson: book gathering is one way the leavening of Pharisaism is accomplished, and victims don't even know it's happening! Not surprisingly, my walk with God actually improved once the books were gone and I was free to practice a living faith with a focus on the Holy Spirit. As a side note, Jesus never collected books and neither did the apostles, whereas the religious elites were masters of these collections, and they made sure everyone else knew it.

I'm including a segment from our website on "books." I think it helps explain our position.

Books: *"Such things have been revealed to me that all I have written seems to me as so much straw. And now I await the end of my life."*

Can you guess who said this? Thomas Aquinas, the greatest of medieval theologians. God gave him a vision of some sort during worship and that was his response. "Straw" is a good analogy for books in general.

Here's another quote you're not likely to read in a publication, although it comes from the Bible: *"The writing of books is endless, and excessive devotion to books is wearying to the body"* (Ecclesiastes 12:12). The notion that we need Christian bookstores, periodicals, publishing houses, libraries, and so forth is a Christian myth. One of my

Christian mentors is Brother Lawrence (the barefoot monk) and I'm including a statement he makes on this subject from an interview with a man named Beaufort.⁵

“Often he has told me that ‘all that he had heard others say, all that he had found in books, all that he had himself written, seemed savorless, dull and heavy, when compared with what faith had unfolded to him of the unspeakable riches of God and of Jesus Christ. He alone,’ he continued, ‘can reveal Himself to us; we toil and exercise our mind in reason and in science, forgetting that therein we can see only a copy, whilst we neglect to gaze on the Incomparable Original. In the depths of our soul, God reveals Himself, could we but realize it, yet we will not look there for Him. We leave Him to spend our time in fooleries, and affect disdain at commune with Him Who is ever-present, Who is our King. It is not enough to know God as a theory, from what we read in books.’”

Books have not been commonly available except in the last 200-300 years, and represent an artificial climate for spiritual growth. I like to compare books with money, because they promise much more than they deliver. We are not saying literacy should be banned, or that all books should be burned. We are simply stating that books are highly over-rated and they compete for time we should be spending with God directly. We suggest you spend far less time reading, and use that time loving the One who made you.

Are we hypocrites for taking the time to write papers for our website and reading books like the one mentioned above? Maybe. We do recognize that humans have the desire and tendency to share what they learn; this seems to be part of our programming. However, it is fairly apparent that books, when indulged in to excess or for the wrong reasons, rob God of our personal attention and substitute human wisdom for what’s available through meditating on Scripture or communing with the King of kings. The lessons we learn personally and directly from God or experience tend to stick with us. Those we learn from books rarely make a lasting impression on our hearts. I can probably count on one hand the number of books that have actually changed me or my life.

13. *I quit accepting a salary for Christian work.*

Once I realized that accepting a salary for Christian work led to compromise and often hypocrisy, I tendered my resignation. You would be better served to never put yourself

⁵ Of course I wouldn’t know that Brother Lawrence existed were it not for a book, so I admit that banning all books is not my position. But it is interesting that Brother Lawrence was adamantly opposed to any of his writing being published, which only occurred posthumously. I can get behind a book like that! But as Solomon said, excessive devotion to books is wearisome to the soul. We should approach books with a proper perspective, knowing that they are no substitute for personal experience with God.

into this self-serving system. The inherent presupposition is that some people should be supported by the work of others, and though missionary work *should be* supported, salaries are another matter altogether. As soon as we entertain the idea that ministry is a profession and treat it like a business, we have entered the world of Pharisaism.

Step 2: Confronting Pharisaism

Becoming Christlike in a Leavened Church

Now comes the hard part: confronting Pharisaism. This is the part that means being like Jesus. Conflict at this point is inevitable, and Jesus made sure His disciples were prepared for it.⁶

This is because Pharisees do not just roll over and play dead; they fight back with a vengeance, resisting and persecuting all perceived threats. This is the reason Jesus told His disciples they would be “*persecuted in the synagogues*” and that if they followed Him they would be hated as He was. I’m including some principles here that help us stay focused during these times of conflict.

1. Christian unity does not mean the Bride of Christ must tolerate Pharisaism. The opposite is actually true, because Pharisaism is the main cause of division in the Church. True unity is achieved by eradicating Pharisaism from the Church, not allowing it to flourish.⁷

2. Pharisees must change or they should be driven out (Galatians 2). It is the nature of Pharisaism to establish hierarchical leadership, impose authority on others, control finances, and determine authorized church traditions. If this is what they want, then they can start their own religion, but they should not be allowed to use the Church to satisfy their religious ambitions.

3. It is Christlike to be angry with Pharisees. In Mark we’re told how Jesus “*looked around at them in anger,*” and was “*deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts.*” Jesus ridiculed, humiliated and severely judged the religious leaders. On at least two occasions he was physically violent, overturning tables and scattering money, animals and people. All of this was godly, Spirit-filled and Spirit-led conduct, and we find men like Steven and Paul imitating this behavior in Acts.

⁶ You should be, too, if you intend to take this to the trenches. You may suffer rejection, ridicule, slander, hostility, or patronizing and insulting comments. You may be called arrogant, divisive, ignorant, naïve, disloyal. And ultimately you may even be asked to leave your church. Don’t say we didn’t warn you. The price for being like Jesus is high.

⁷ Paul did this, boldly confronting those men who sabotaged the simple truth of the gospel, just as Jesus did.

The bottom line is that Pharisaism needs to be confronted by Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. This means Spirit-filled believers must step up to the plate and challenge pretenders like Jesus did. But precisely because this must be a Spirit-led enterprise, there is no prescription. God alone can direct your steps as to how to do this in your own life and/or church. This section is more of a warning as to the cost of this endeavor should you choose to engage in it.

T.L.