

## SEEING JESUS THROUGH JESUS' EYES

### I. Luke 7:36-50

A. Today's text tells us about Jesus being invited to dinner by a Pharisee named Simon. He accepts the invitation. Others are invited and gather there also. Then an uninvited woman shows up and it's not Mother Teresa.

B. Matthew 26:6-13, Mark 14:3-9, and John 12:1-8 give an account of a woman, Mary the sister of Martha & Lazarus, who anointed Jesus' feet with expensive perfume. That event takes place shortly before His crucifixion. This ain't that event. That was a different time in Jesus ministry, not to mention a different woman and a different setting. So let's be careful not to mix up the two events...

C. Hopefully the stories of our own roads to redemption will allow us to look upon others with eyes of mercy and compassion. For example, I don't believe our Lord is intimidated by tattoos or piercings or wild hair or weird attire. We dare not be naive but neither should we be quick to rule out the possibility of a Divine encounter with someone who looks a lot different than us. Today's encounter tells us why...

D. Luke 17:36-50 (ESV) is about Jesus' dinner with a Pharisee...

1) **V36-38: 36** *One of the Pharisees asked Him to eat with him, and He went into the Pharisee's house and reclined at table. 37* *And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner, (The NLT calls her: "A certain immoral woman." The Living Bible calls her: "A woman of the streets, a prostitute." The Message is more blunt: "The town harlot.") when she learned that He (Jesus) was reclining at table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment, 38* *and standing behind Him at His feet, weeping, she began to wet His feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head and kissed His feet and anointed them with the ointment. (Be warned, Hollywood loves to drag this story straight into the gutter. But this was an act of pure humility and love toward her Messiah-Savior!)*

2) **V39: 39** *Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he said to himself, (Not even out loud!) "If this Man were a prophet, He would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching Him, for she is a sinner." (First of all, Jesus is more than a prophet, He is God the Son from eternity past. Second, He not only knows what kind of woman she was, He knows what kind of man Simon the Pharisee is!)*

3) **V40-43: 40** *And Jesus answering said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." And he answered, "Say it, Teacher." 41* *"A certain moneylender had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. (Wages for a year and a half vs a month and a half...) 42* *When they could not pay, he cancelled the debt of both. Now which of them will love him more?" 43* *Simon answered, "The one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled the larger debt." And He said to him, "You have judged rightly." (I wonder if the Pharisee is squirming yet?!)*

4) **V44-46: 44** *Then turning toward the woman He said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has wet My feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. 45* *You gave Me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss My feet. 46* *You did not anoint My head with oil, but she has anointed My feet with ointment. (All commonly practiced acts of hospitality...)*

5) **V47-48: 47** *Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven--for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little.* **48** *And He said to her, "Your sins are forgiven."* (Not forgiven because she 'loved much' and washed Jesus' feet; rather, because of God's mercy, love, and forgiveness so deeply touched her heart, this foot washing/anointing couldn't help but take place! Her actions displayed her faith. They weren't the cause of her forgiveness and salvation, they were the effect, the evidence, the result of a changed heart. **C.S. Lewis** astutely said: "Prostitutes are in no danger of finding their present life so satisfactory that they cannot turn to God: the proud, the avaricious, the self-righteous, are in that danger.")

6) **V49-50: 49** *Then those who were at table with Him began to say among themselves, "Who is this, who even forgives sins?"* **50** *And He said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."* ("Your faith has saved you, go in peace." Hear two important words in that last sentence: **Sozo** and **Shalom**. **Sozo**: The word translates: wholeness, wellness, salvation. **Shalom**: A peace that includes goodness, wholeness, rest, acceptance, well-being, right relationship and rich blessing!)

**E. Know this: Jesus is still in the business of apprehending sinners like this woman! We see people as they presently are; Jesus sees them as to how He wants to remake them! Our Lord is still saving tax collectors and sinners of every stripe! And He's also awakening Pharisees like Nicodemus and Saul. He redeems guys like Luther, Calvin, and Wesley and likewise your favorite preachers and theologians. Occasionally even some politicians! Everyone you might think is out of His reach is well within His grasp! We may see someone as only fit for hell but Jesus aims to snatch them from the flames and make heaven their home! Even those you detest! Even the likes of me and you!**

**F. Let's prepare for home with another parable. This one is found in Luke 18:9-14 (NLT):** **9** *Then Jesus told this story to some who had great confidence in their own righteousness and scorned everyone else:* **10** *"Two men went to the Temple to pray. One was a Pharisee, and the other was a despised tax collector. 11 The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed this prayer: 'I thank you, God, that I am not like other people--cheaters, sinners, adulterers. I'm certainly not like that tax collector! 12 I fast twice a week, and I give you a tenth of my income.'* **13** *"But the tax collector stood at a distance and dared not even lift his eyes to heaven as he prayed. Instead, he beat his chest in sorrow, saying, 'O God, be merciful to me, for I am a sinner.'* **14** *I tell you, this sinner, not the Pharisee, returned home justified before God. For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."*

**G. I wish there'd been a better ending for this Pharisee. Something like this: The Pharisee realizes like Isaiah that his righteousness amounts to nothing more than filthy rags. He realizes his arrogance and pride and contempt are a stench in God's nostrils. Then like scales falling from His eyes he sees Jesus taking his sin upon Himself and paying for it on the cross. He sees the same for this broken, desperate, lost, chest-beating tax collector. Together they cry out, "God be merciful to us two sinners!" And God hears them! He announces their forgiveness, their redemption, and their full adoptions as sons, making them brothers in Christ. Together they are forgiven, born anew, saved to live forevermore. And that's most certainly the ending I want for all of us.**

\* Close with Prayer...

## [Scriptures, Videos, & Bonus Stuff](#)

### [Luke 17:36-50 \(ESV\)](#)

**36** One of the Pharisees asked Him to eat with him, and He went into the Pharisee's house and reclined at table. **37** And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learned that He was reclining at table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment, **38** and standing behind Him at His feet, weeping, she began to wet His feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head and kissed His feet and anointed them with the ointment. **39** Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he said to himself, "If this Man were a prophet, He would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching Him, for she is a sinner." **40** And Jesus answering said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." And he answered, "Say it, Teacher." **41** "A certain moneylender had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. **42** When they could not pay, he cancelled the debt of both. Now which of them will love him more?" **43** Simon answered, "The one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled the larger debt." And He said to him, "You have judged rightly." **44** Then turning toward the woman He said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has wet My feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. **45** You gave Me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss My feet. **46** You did not anoint My head with oil, but she has anointed My feet with ointment. **47** Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven--for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little." **48** And He said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." **49** Then those who were at table with Him began to say among themselves, "Who is this, who even forgives sins?" **50** And He said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

### [Luke 18:9-14 \(NLT\)](#)

**9** Then Jesus told this story to some who had great confidence in their own righteousness and scorned everyone else: **10** "Two men went to the Temple to pray. One was a Pharisee, and the other was a despised tax collector. **11** The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed this prayer: 'I thank you, God, that I am not like other people--cheaters, sinners, adulterers. I'm certainly not like that tax collector! **12** I fast twice a week, and I give you a tenth of my income.' **13** "But the tax collector stood at a distance and dared not even lift his eyes to heaven as he prayed. Instead, he beat his chest in sorrow, saying, 'O God, be merciful to me, for I am a sinner.' **14** I tell you, this sinner, not the Pharisee, returned home justified before God. For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

### [Quote by C.S. Lewis](#)

"Prostitutes are in no danger of finding their present life so satisfactory that they cannot turn to God: the proud, the avaricious, the self-righteous, are in that danger."

## [Bonus Rations for Further Nourishment](#)

**Sinful Woman Forgiven - The Jesus Film**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SVRsFNCrVgl>

**Has My Sexual Sin Made Me Unsaveable? - John Piper**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BkKKWO0qSvw>

**Jesus Loves Prostitutes (Luke 7:36-50) - Skip Heitzig**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l-asEwbbTWM>

**Self-Righteous Snobbery - R.C. Sproul - Ligonier Ministries**

<https://www.ligonier.org/blog/self-righteous-snobbery/>

**The Making of a Modern Pharisee - Marshall Segal - Desiring God**

<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/the-making-of-a-modern-pharisee>

### **[Isaiah 64:6-7 \(NIV\)](#)**

**6** All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away. **7** No one calls on Your name or strives to lay hold of You; for You have hidden your face from us and have given us over to our sins.

### **[Matthew 21:28-32 \(ESV\)](#)**

**28** What do you think? A man had two sons. And he went to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work in the vineyard today.’ **29** And he answered, ‘I will not,’ but afterward he changed his mind and went. **30** And he went to the other son and said the same. And he answered, ‘I go, sir,’ but did not go. **31** Which of the two did the will of his father?” They said, “The first.” Jesus said to them, “Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you. **32** For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him. And even when you saw it, you did not afterward change your minds and believe him.

### **[Mark 2:15-17 \(ESV\)](#)**

**15** And as He reclined at table in his house, many tax collectors and sinners were reclining with Jesus and His disciples, for there were many who followed Him. **16** And the scribes of the Pharisees, when they saw that He was eating with sinners and tax collectors, said to His disciples, “Why does He eat with tax collectors and sinners?” **17** And when Jesus heard it, He said to them, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.”

### **[Luke 5:27-32 \(ESV\)](#)**

**27** After this He went out and saw a tax collector named Levi, sitting at the tax booth. And He said to him, “Follow Me.” **28** And leaving everything, he rose and followed him. **29** And Levi made Him a great feast in his house, and there was a large company of tax collectors and others reclining at table with them. **30** And the Pharisees and their

scribes grumbled at His disciples, saying, “Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?” **31** And Jesus answered them, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. **32** I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.”

### **Luke 15:1-2 (ESV)**

**1** Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear Him. **2** And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, “This Man receives sinners and eats with them.”

### **Luke 15:3-7 (ESV) The Parable of the Lost Sheep**

**3** So He told them this parable: **4** “What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it? **5** And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. **6** And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.’ **7** Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

### **Luke 15:8-10 (ESV) The Parable of the Lost Coin**

**8** Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it? **9** And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.’ **10** Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

### **Luke 15:11-32 (ESV) The Parable of the Lost Son**

**11** And He said, “There was a man who had two sons. **12** And the younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.’ And he divided his property between them. **13** Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living. **14** And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. **15** So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. **16** And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything. **17** “But when he came to himself, he said, ‘How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! **18** I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. **19** I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.”’ **20** And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. **21** And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ **22** But the father said to his servants, ‘Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. **23** And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. **24** For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.’ And they began to celebrate. **25** “Now his older

son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. **26** And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. **27** And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound.' **28** But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, **29** but he answered his father, 'Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. **30** But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!' **31** And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. **32** It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.'"

### **Romans 10:1-4 (AMP)**

**1** Brothers and sisters, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for Israel is for their salvation. **2** For I testify about them that they have a certain enthusiasm for God, but not in accordance with [correct and vital] knowledge [about Him and His purposes]. **3** For not knowing about God's righteousness [which is based on faith], and seeking to establish their own [righteousness based on works], they did not submit to God's righteousness. **4** For Christ is the end of the law [it leads to Him and its purpose is fulfilled in Him], for [granting] righteousness to everyone who believes [in Him as Savior].

### **1 Timothy 1:15-17 (ESV)**

**15** The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. **16** But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display His perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in Him for eternal life. **17** To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

### **Quote by Martin Luther**

"The most damnable and pernicious heresy that has every plagued the mind of man is the idea that somehow he could make himself good enough to deserve to live with an all-holy God."

### **Quote by Charles Spurgeon**

"The greatest enemy to human souls is the self-righteous spirit which makes men look to themselves for salvation."

### **Quote by John Piper**

"God lays our sins on Christ and punishes them in Him. And in Christ's obedient death, God fulfills and vindicates His righteousness and imputes (credits) it to us. Our sin on Christ; His righteousness on us.

### **Quote by William Secker**

"Many have passed the rocks of gross sins--who have suffered shipwreck upon the sands of self-righteousness."

**Quote by Charles Spurgeon**

"The bridge of grace will bear your weight, brother. Thousands of big sinners have gone across that bridge, yea, tens of thousands have gone over it. Some have been the chief of sinners and some have come at the very last of their days but the arch has never yielded beneath their weight. I will go with them trusting to the same support. It will bear me over as it has for them."

**Quote by Charles Spurgeon**

"The greatest enemy to human souls is the self-righteous spirit which makes men look to themselves for salvation."

**Quote by Ralph Erskine**

"Legal obedience hath the evil of blasphemy in it. It reproaches the righteousness of Christ, as if it were not sufficient, as if His atonement were not perfect, as if His satisfaction were not full, as if His obedience were not perfect, unless it be patched up with the rags of man's own righteousness."

**Quote by Charles Spurgeon**

"The more unworthy you feel yourself to be, the more evidence have you that nothing but unspeakable love could have led the Lord Jesus to save such a soul as yours. The more demerit you feel, the clearer is the display of the abounding love of God in having chosen you, and called you, and made you an heir of bliss."

**Quote by Jonathan Edwards**

"The deceitfulness of the heart of man appears in no one thing so much as this of spiritual pride and self-righteousness. The subtlety of Satan appears in its height, in his managing persons with respect to this sin. And perhaps one reason may be that here he has most experience; he knows the way of its coming in; he is acquainted with the secret springs of it: it was his own sin. Experience gives vast advantage in leading souls, either in good or evil."

- Jonathan Edwards, *The Religious Affections*.

**Quote by Tim Keller**

"We tend to draw conservative, buttoned-down, moralistic people. The licentious and liberated or the broken and marginal avoid church. That can only mean one thing. If the preaching of our ministers and the practice of our parishioners do not have the same effect on people that Jesus had, then we must not be declaring the same message that Jesus did."

- Tim Keller, *The Prodigal God: Recovering the Heart of the Christian Faith*, p.p. 15-16.

**Quote by Adrian Rogers**

"I believe that a great number of people are going to die and go to hell because they're counting on their religiosity in the church instead of their relationship with Jesus to get

them to heaven. They give lip service to repentance and faith, but they've never been born again."

### **Theological Note on Matthew 9:13**

The ESV Study Bible

*"Go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners." - Matthew 9:13 (ESV)*

**9:13 I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.** Jesus' offer of salvation to sinners threatens the Pharisees' way of life, yet it is at the heart of the gospel He came announcing. "**I desire mercy, and not sacrifice**" is a quotation from Hosea 6:6 (see note). "Sacrifice" summarized observance of religious rituals. More important to God was "mercy" (the Septuagint rendering of Hebrew *hesed*, meaning steadfast love), which would have led the Pharisees to care for these sinners as Jesus did.

- Theological Note on Matthew 9:13, *The ESV Study Bible*, Crossway, p.1837.

### **Theological Note on Matthew 9:13**

The NKJV Study Bible

*"But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice.' For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance." (NKJV)*

**9:13** Jesus quoted Hosea 6:6 (and again in 12:7) to make the point that God is more interested in a person's loyal love than in the observance of external rituals. Jesus refers ironically to the Pharisees as **the righteous**. They were not righteous; that was only how they perceived themselves because of their pious and scrupulous law-keeping (see Phil. 3:6). But Jesus explained, quoting from the familiar words of an OT prophet, that God had already judged sacrifices without mercy as worthless.

- Theological Note on Matthew 9:13, *The NKJV Study Bible*, Thomas Nelson, p. 1503.

### **Peace (Hebrew - Shalom)**

*Peace... my peace.* A common Hebrew greeting (see Jn. 20:19; 21, 26), which Jesus uses here in an unusual way. The term [peace] speaks, in effect, of the salvation that Christ's redemptive work will achieve for His disciples--total well-being and inner rest of spirit, which the repetition emphasizes.

- *The NIV Study Bible*, Commentary on John 14:27.

### **Peace (Hebrew - Shalom)**

The expression **Peace** (Hb/shalom) had a much richer connotation than the English word does since it conveyed not merely the absence of conflict and turmoil but also the notion of positive blessing, especially in terms of a right relationship with God (e.g. Num 6:24-26; cf. Ps. 29:11; Hag. 2:9; and also, as a result, the idea that "all is well" in one's



life). This may be manifest most clearly amid persecution and tribulation; see also John 15:18-19; 16:13.

- *The ESV Study Bible*; Commentary on John 14:27, p. 2053.

### **Peace (Hebrew - Shalom)**

This was the common Hebrew salutation used in greeting or farewell. Jesus gives it a new and deeper sense that reappears in the salutations of the New Testament letters. Jesus' peace is true reconciliation with God, purchased with His death (Acts 10:36; Rom. 5:1; Rom. 14:17; Eph. 2:14-17; Phil. 4:7; Col. 3:15). It is the supreme remedy for all fears (v 1), and the legacy Jesus left for His heirs.

- *The Reformation Study Bible*, Commentary on John 14:27, p. 1541.

### **Who Were the Pharisees?**

By S. Michael Houdmann

Question: *"Who were the Pharisees?"*

Answer: The Pharisees were an influential religious sect within Judaism in the time of Christ and the early church. They were known for their emphasis on personal piety (the word Pharisee comes from a Hebrew word meaning "separated"), their acceptance of oral tradition in addition to the written Law, and their teaching that all Jews should observe all 600-plus laws in the Torah, including the rituals concerning ceremonial purification.

The Pharisees were mostly middle-class businessmen and leaders of the synagogues. Though they were a minority in the [Sanhedrin](#) and held a minority number of positions as priests, they seemed to control the decision-making of the Sanhedrin because they had popular support among the people.

Among the Pharisees were two schools of thought, based on the teachings of two rabbis, Shammai and Hillel. Shammai called for a strict, unbending interpretation of the Law on almost every issue, but Hillel taught a looser, more liberal application. Followers of Shammai fostered a hatred for anything Roman, including taxation—Jews who served as tax collectors were *persona non grata*. The Shammaites wanted to outlaw all communication and commerce between Jews and Gentiles. The Hillelites took a more gracious approach and opposed such extreme exclusiveness. Eventually, the two schools within Pharisaism grew so hostile to each other that they refused to worship together.

The Pharisees accepted the written Word as inspired by God. At the time of Christ's earthly ministry, this would have been what we now call the Old Testament. Unfortunately, the Pharisees gave equal authority to oral tradition, saying the traditions went all the way back to Moses. Evolving over the centuries, the Pharisaic traditions had the effect of adding to God's Word, which is forbidden ([Deuteronomy 4:2](#)). The

Gospels abound with examples of the Pharisees treating their traditions as equal to God's Word ([Matthew 9:14](#); [15:1–9](#); [23:5](#); [23:16](#), [23](#); [Luke 11:42](#)). Jesus applied the condemnation of [Isaiah 29:13](#) to the Pharisees, saying, "Their teachings are merely human rules" ([Mark 7:7](#)).

The Pharisees taught the following doctrines:

1. God controls all things, but decisions made by individuals also affect life's course.
2. There will be a resurrection of the dead ([Acts 23:6](#)).
3. There is an afterlife, with appropriate reward and punishment on an individual basis. The Messiah will set up His kingdom on earth.
4. The spiritual realm, including the existence of angels and demons, is real ([Acts 23:8](#)).

Many of the Pharisees' doctrines put them at odds with the Sadducees; however, the two groups managed to set aside their differences on one occasion—the trial of Jesus Christ. To accomplish the demise of Jesus, the Sadducees and Pharisees united ([Mark 14:53](#); [15:1](#); [John 11:48–50](#)).

The Pharisees were responsible for the compilation of the [Mishnah](#), an important document with reference to the continuation of Judaism beyond the destruction of the temple. Rabbinical Judaism and modern-day synagogues owe their existence to the Pharisees' work.

In the Gospels, the Pharisees are often presented as hypocritical and proud opponents of Jesus. The Lord stated it bluntly: "They do not practice what they preach" ([Matthew 23:3](#)). As a general rule, the Pharisees were self-righteousness and smug in their delusion that they were pleasing to God because they kept the Law—or parts of it, at least. As Jesus pointed out to them, however scrupulous they were in following the finer points of ritualism, they failed to measure up to God's standard of holiness: "You have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness" (verse 23).

Of course, not every Pharisee was opposed to Jesus. Nicodemus was a Pharisee who rightly considered Jesus "a teacher who has come from God" and honestly sought answers from Him ([John 3:1–2](#)). Nicodemus later defended Jesus before the Sanhedrin ([John 7:50–51](#)) and was on hand at Jesus' crucifixion to help bury the Lord's body ([John 19:39](#)). Some of the early Christians were Pharisees, as well ([Acts 15:5](#)).

The [apostle Paul](#) was trained as a Pharisee, and his credentials in that group were sterling ([Acts 26:5](#)). Paul called himself "a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless" ([Philippians 3:5–6](#)). But Paul found that his performance of the Law could not produce true righteousness. After he placed his trust in Christ's finished work on the

cross, he desired to “be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith” (verse 9). No one, not even the strictest Pharisee, is justified by keeping the Law ([Galatians 3:11](#)).

Recommended Resource: [Bible Answers for Almost all Your Questions by Elmer Towns](#)

- While he is not the author of every article on GotQuestions.org, for citation purposes, you may reference our CEO, S. Michael Houdmann.

### **Spiritual Fruit vs Self-Righteous Works**

by Melissa Kruger / The Gospel Coalition / September 22, 2015

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/melissa-kruger/spiritual-fruit-vs-self-righteous-works-2/>

Picture with me for a moment two trees in the distance. Both are heavy laden with apples. The natural assumption is that you’ve come upon two apple trees.

However, once you arrive at the base of the trees, you notice that they differ in one very important way. On the first tree, apples hang naturally from the stem, just as you’d expect. The second tree causes you to look again in bewilderment.

All of the apples on this tree have been tied onto it.

Painstakingly, someone spent hours attempting to make this tree appear to be an apple tree. Close inspection reveals the reality that the fruit was not born from the inward sap of the tree, but from the outward labors of someone seeking to create an illusion.

We can all spot the futility of such labor in an apple orchard (knowing full well that hanging apples on a tree does not an apple tree make). However, I have a feeling this might be how many of us go about our attempts to bear fruit in our spiritual lives.

[Galatians 5:22-23](#) tells us, *“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.”*

These graces show forth the beauty of the Spirit’s work in the life of a believer. The sap of the Spirit produces fruit in the life of a Christian. Yet, each of us will find ourselves in situations where we feel unloving, impatient, unkind, or lacking in joy or self-control (all of which may have occurred on this morning’s drive to the office).

Faced with our own barren tree, we often attempt to achieve in our own strength what is not growing in our hearts. We determine that we will act lovingly to that unlovable person, be kind to that annoying relative, or faithfully serve in that ministry (while grumbling to ourselves about it). We will work harder, be more disciplined, and pick ourselves up by our proverbial bootstraps and get on with it.

Now, let me clarify. Hard work, discipline, and diligent labors are good things. Even Paul said, *“I worked harder than any of them”* (1 Cor 15:10). But then, lest he be misunderstood, he rightly added, *“though it is not I, but the grace of God that was with me.”* It is the work of God’s grace, through the power of the Spirit, that fuels our obedience.

Thus, the question before us as we ponder spiritual fruit is: How can I discern the difference between keeping in step with the Spirit’s work in my life and laboring in my own strengths and abilities?

### **Righteousness with Strings Attached**

Just like the tied-on fruit tree, when I am working out of my own strength the false fruit comes with strings attached. Two strings of self-righteousness appear, making it clear to any close observer that these are not Spirit-born fruit. The first string is judgment and the second string is despair.

When I’ve labored in my own strength and find myself somewhat successful in my efforts, the most common overflow is that of judgment. Observing another struggling to do what I’ve attained, it’s tempting to sit high on my perch and think to myself, “Well if she just did this or that, then it would go much better for her.” Thankfully, the Lord has faithfully nudged me off my perch more times than I can count. Falling face forward in the dust has a way of dismantling pride and self-righteousness. Judgment is an ugly string, exposing the illusion of fruit on our tree.

In contrast, when I’ve labored in my own abilities and come up short or missed the mark in some way, a second string appears. It’s the string of despair. How can it be that I’m such a horrible person? I’m a failure of a Christian. What use am I for the kingdom? Everyone is better than me. These are not the thoughts of a humble soul, but a self-righteous one. Should I be surprised at my own inabilities or weaknesses? My false belief that I’m not really that bad is shocked by my complete inability to change apart from the Spirit’s work. Despair is simply the other side of judgment in the currency of self-righteousness.

### **Spirit-Born Fruit**

In contrast, how can we spot the fruit that is born of the Spirit’s work in our lives? Like a painter, the Master puts a signature on His creation:

*The work of the Spirit always overflows in worship.*

When we find ourselves living lives of obedience, showing forth joy and patience, kindness and love, our hearts abound with thanksgiving. We rejoice, not in our own righteousness, but in the work of the Spirit within us.

There is no judgment for others because we recognize all our works are simply a gift born within us. We do not look down on others who are struggling; we just keep inviting them to Jesus. With a heart of worship, we say to all: Come behold the King! I was lost, but now I'm found. I was blind, but now I see. The scar of prideful judgment does not mar the glow of a worshiping countenance.

In a similar way, when faced with our failures, the Spirit prevents us from despairing thoughts and inward focus. Instead, we repent and turn again to Christ in worship. Rather than become paralyzed by our sin, we behold the work of Jesus in new ways. We mourn our sin, and we rejoice all the more in our Savior. All our failures are absorbed in His sacrifice. With confidence, we boldly approach the throne of grace, finding mercy and grace to help us in our time of need.

This type of fruit is only born by abiding in Jesus ([John 15:4-5](#)). There's no need to spend our labors tending on fruit. What we yearn for, He freely gives. As the Master Gardener tends our branch, we overflow in worship and bear the beauty of our Creator:

*"I will greatly rejoice in the LORD; my soul shall exult in My God, for He has clothed me with the garments of salvation; He has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels." – [Isaiah 61:10](#)*