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**Presentation Transcript**  
**Don't Be a Pharisee**  
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*Don't Be a Pharisee* – twelfth in our series on *Important Stuff*.

Good afternoon, everybody. Nice to see all of you and, also, to have the faithful with us on streaming video. You know, we're going to stream at the Feast this year, so that should be good.

Well, in this series – which is *Important Stuff* – we started with some important stuff that Jesus told us to *do*, like loving God and loving our neighbor. I mean, He did say those were the two *most important things*, right? So now we're looking at important stuff He told us *not* to do. We're doing that because, for example, if Jesus tells us not to be like the Pharisees, it seems that a large number of us, instead, try as hard as we can to be just like them. Now I know that isn't really true, but... I mean the reason Jesus told us not to be like them is because we can just naturally fall into that attitude that the Pharisees had. And so there is a warning for us. So let's take a look at that warning. It's in Matthew 16:12. There are a lot of them, but I am using this one for a particular reason. It says, in Matthew 16:12 – and I'm breaking right in the middle of a discussion here:

**Matthew 16:12** – *Then they understood that He did not tell them to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and the Sadducees.* He said, “Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees,” and they thought He was talking about bread, because they always misunderstood Him. He was talking about the teaching of the Pharisees and the Sadducees.

Now this is recorded in the Bible and we say that's a timeless book, which it is, so we're going to understand that even though there are no people who would call themselves Pharisees today, their teaching is still around and it's to be avoided. So, do you avoid it? Is that one of the things you think about – avoiding the teaching of the Pharisees? Do you even know what that is? Well, that's why we're talking about it.

Who were the Pharisees? The first mention of the Pharisees in history, actually, was between some hundred and hundred and fifty years before Christ in the time of Jonathan, the Maccabean. Do you know who he is? Well, just Wiki him. It's a fairly good write-up

on who he is. Also, the Maccabees were a Jewish rebellion at that time. Jonathan was someone who enlarged their borders. But that's when it first came to the attention of modern-day historians. They think the word *Pharisee* is a reference to *separatism* – that most of the Pharisees were common people who had separated themselves from those who did not obey the law of God. They were, at first, a movement and then later they became a political party within Judaism. They think that the idea behind their separatism was to create a set of rules that would fence in the law of God. The idea that they needed a fence was because God had sent the Jews into exile because of lawbreaking. So their solution to that problem was to build a boundary of strict rules – additional rules – that would keep them away from the law so that God would not punish them as He had done in times past.

They saw themselves as *exclusive* – exclusively good in a world of wrong-doers. Does that sound familiar to anybody? It's really interesting, isn't it? The reason, in their own minds, for their goodness was their strict and rigorous observance of the law *and* the traditions that they added to it.

In Jesus' day there were also other parties among the Jews. There were the Sadducees, the Essenes and the Zealots. But they didn't seem to anger Jesus as much as the Pharisees. The Sadducees got in here a little bit in Matthew 16:12, but they didn't really catch the brunt of it that He laid out for them later on in other passages.

It's also interesting to note that by a hundred seventy years after Christ there were no more Sadducees, Essenes or Zealots. Everybody was a Pharisee. In fact, the term was just absorbed into Judaism because it just became, pretty much, their doctrine. So today, in Judaism, there are many traditions that are left over from that concept of fencing in the law.

What was it they did that was so bad? Well, it can pretty much be summed up in the concept of picking the wrong solution to solve a problem. They had a problem. They went into exile. Then they were traumatized by the exile itself. They were sent into exile because of lawbreaking. So they developed a strategy to avoid further lawbreaking and, therefore, trauma. It was something they didn't want to happen again. So it was a strategy designed to prevent lawbreaking, which, on its face, sounds pretty good. Well, they decided the best way to get everybody to obey the law was to set up additional rules that would keep people far away from violation. I'll give you an example. Let's go to Acts 1:12. Luke records:

**Acts 1:12** – *Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet – that's Jesus and the disciples – which is near Jerusalem – a Sabbath day's journey away.* The term *Sabbath day's journey* is nowhere to be found in law of God. It comes out of the oral tradition of the Jews. Not supposed to do work. Walking is work. So we'll make a rule telling everybody how far they can walk before they're doing wrong. And we'll make it so strict that there is no way that, even if they double up on that and go twice as far, they'd still be breaking the Sabbath. That's kind of the way they thought about all this. We'll make it really tight. So that's the approach that they took. And from this approach,

there developed a whole host of problems. The law of unintended consequences started to take affect as their approach continued down through time.

You know, that always happens every time we try to solve problems our own way. I sit in my office all day talking to people who have been abused. When I get to talk to kids that have been abused, I always want to get my ball bat and go do some behavior modification on the perpetrator. But that's *my* solution. And I have to remember that, while it would produce a certain feeling of justice in me, it would be short-lived and so would my career – and maybe even my life. That's why Jesus said that one of their big problems was with their teaching. It was the doctrines that they put out. That's another good one for us, isn't it? We need to think about what we believe and what we teach.

So what were the problems that trickled down from their approach of fencing in the law? Let's go to Matthew 12:1. It says:

**Matthew 12:1** – *At that time Jesus went through the grain fields on the Sabbath. He probably went further than an eighth of a mile, which is a Sabbath day's journey. What was He doing? Well, they were doing God's work on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry and they began to pluck heads of grain and to eat them. Fast food, right? On the move. But when the Pharisees saw it, they said to Him, "Look, your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath!"* One reason God made the Sabbath was for doing God's work. I know we've never emphasized that, but there it is. You're looking at it. That's what they were doing. To the Pharisees, what they were doing was breaking the Sabbath. They broke a lot of the Pharisees' rules. They traveled too far. They didn't wash their hands. They did work to get food. They were not sitting at home veg'ing. They were out doing the work of God on the Sabbath. So, in answer to their question, Jesus pointed them to the law for further consideration.

**V-3** – *He said to them – in verse 3 – "Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, and those who were with Him? How He entered the house of God and ate the bread of presence, which was not lawful for him to eat, nor for those who were with him, but only the priests? Or have you not read in the law how, on the Sabbath, the priests in the temple profaned the Sabbath and are guiltless? So I tell you, "Something greater than the temple is here. And if you had known what this means – 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice' – you would not have condemned the guiltless."*

God made the Sabbath to be a weekly taste of the life in the Kingdom of God – to taste the freedom in Christ – the day of relating to God. And instead, the Pharisees shrink-wrapped it in all their fussy rules – made it a drudge – made it a trial – not what God intended of the Sabbath.

So God does not like it when we condemn people when they are guiltless. Now the idea there is that one way to avoid getting Jesus angry with us is to just mind our own business. Worry about our *own* behavior rather than the behavior of other people. Why do we always have to get in people's faces and preach to them about all their problems. "Look! Your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath!" That's what

they were doing, right? There's that accusative attitude. They were focusing on the sins of others rather than on their own – so condemning the guiltless.

Now, as time passed on and as this movement began to solidify, and more rhetoric was involved in it, and more thought – more concreteness – was developed, over time they began to look upon themselves as the *true* worshippers. And they also began to look upon others as less than themselves.

There's a parable in Luke 18, starting verse 9. It says:

**Luke 18:9** – *He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous – “trusted in themselves that they were righteous” – and treated others with contempt. I wonder why He was telling that parable? “Two men went up to the temple to pray – one a Pharisee, the other a tax collector.” Tax collectors get it, no matter what era you're from. Right? “The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus, ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men – extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week. I give tithes of all that I get.’ But the tax collector, standing afar off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breasts, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me – a sinner.’” And Jesus said, “I tell you that this man” – this tax collector – “went down to his house justified rather than the other. For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.” So that's another reason why He didn't like them. If you were God, who would you rather be working with? Pretty clear, isn't it?*

From this exclusiveness, a party spirit began to develop. They thought their way was best, so they began to try to impose that on other people. They sought to dominate the power positions. I saw an example of this in my own church experience in the last fifteen years or so. We can see the Pharisees working to defeat anyone that opposed them. They were after John the Baptist from the beginning of his ministry. They condemned Jesus from the very beginning of His ministry, as well. It's interesting that the way they thought about God was so different from the way that God was that, when God showed up, they didn't recognize Him. Pretty sad story. They orchestrated His murder. That's how bad it was. After all, they were the ones who sat in Moses' seat. That's what Jesus said, right? They had the authority. So whatever they thought was assumed to be correct because of who they were – because they were in the seat. It's circular reasoning.

John the Baptist even spoke to them about this attitude. You can read it in Matthew 3, and verse 7.

**Matthew 3:7** – *But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism – not that he was being baptized, but he was baptizing people – he said to them, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit in keeping with repentance and do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I tell you, God is able to raise up stones to be children for Abraham, and even now the ax is laid to the root of the tree. Every tree, therefore, that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown in the fire. God is God. He does not need our plans. He*

does not need us. He does not need anything that we have. He can do whatever He wants. And we have nothing to offer Him.

What else? We've covered four problems that they had so far. Let me back up and read them to you. They thought the rules were more weighty than the law. They condemned the guiltless. They were exclusivists in their thinking. And they were controlling. They had that party spirit, where they were trying to get control. They were totally sold on their way – their program. And the fifth thing we can read about in Matthew 15, and verse 1.

**Matthew 15:1** – *The Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem and said, “Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders, for they do not wash their hands when they eat?”* There was a prescribed way and a prescribed time when you did this. *And He answered them, “And why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your traditions?”* Right back atcha! *“For God commanded, ‘Honor your father and your mother, and whosoever reviles father or mother must surely die.’ But you say”* – and this was one of their rules – *“If anyone tells his father or mother, “What you would have gained from me is given to God, he need not honor his father.””* If you give the money away to the church, you don't have to give it your parents. *“So for the sake of your tradition, you have made void the word of God. You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you when he said, ‘This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. In vain do they worship Me’”* – in futility do they worship Me – *“teaching as doctrine the commandments of men.”*

I have to look at this and ask, “Is my worship in vain? Is it a wasted effort?” There are certain ways to worship God that He accepts and respects, and then there are other things that He doesn't like. That's one of the things that we're talking about. So there's that word *teaching* again. “In vain do they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.” Notice, too, the problem was that their heart was far from God – not so much what they said and what they did, but their attitude was bad.

So what caused all of these problems? Where did it come from? Well, it goes right back to the beginning. They picked the wrong solution. In the first place, what was wrong with it was, it wasn't God's solution, it was theirs. We always muck things up when we try to do God's job. Secondly, they were focused on exterior behavior. You can only walk an eighth of a mile on the Sabbath. You have to wash your hands in a certain way. You're supposed to fast X number of times a week. One of the things they used to do in public to show how contrite they were was to wear expensive clothing and then tear those clothes to show humility or repentance. That practice had been in effect for thousands of years in the Middle East. When people were upset they would throw ashes on their heads and they would tear their clothes. They really should have known better, however, because in Joel 2, and verse 13, God told the people of Israel, “Rend your *hearts*, not your garments!” Right?

Let's read some more about what Jesus said to these people in Matthew, chapter 15 and verse 10.

**Matthew 15:10** – *He called the people to Him and He said to them, “Hear and understand. It is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person.”* And the context here is the accusation that they ate with unwashed hands – like you were going to get your food dirty and defile it. *“It is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but what comes out of the mouth that defiles a person.”* And the disciples came to Him and said, *“Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this saying?”* And He said, *“Every plant that My heavenly Father has not planted will be rooted up.”* He’s said that a bunch of times so far. You have to produce fruit. Everything that doesn’t produce fruit is going to be thrown in the fire. Are we producing fruit? That’s what all this is about. *“Every plant that My heavenly Father has not planted will be rooted up. Let them alone. They are blind guides. And if the blind lead the blind, both will fall in the pit.”* But Peter said to Him, *“Explain the parable to us.”* And He said, *“Are you still without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth passes into the stomach and is expelled? But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart and that defiles a person, for out of the heart come evil thoughts – murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person. But to eat with unwashed hands does not defile anyone.”*

We know where the problem is. It’s about our heart. That’s what God is worried about. He doesn’t care about washing hands and praying in the synagogue and all this stuff for show. He doesn’t need that. What He is after is *us!* He wants our hearts. He wants a right attitude.

We just did a series on the beatitudes – the attitudes that God wants. And what’s the first one? Well, it’s poverty of spirit, isn’t it? What is that again? Well, it’s realizing that God knows best and we know nothing. It’s realizing that we’re spiritually impoverished before God and that we have to come to Him like beggars and beg to be enlightened. If Pharisees of old had that attitude, they never would have presumed to fence in the law of God. They would have said, “If God wanted a fence around the law, He would have made one.” But they didn’t do that. They thought they knew what to do to solve this problem. If they had just turned their hearts to God, then everything would have been okay.

We saw earlier that this plan came about after the Jews had been led into national captivity. I think that captivity was about seventy years long. So there was still a really good recollection of what happened to those people. Some of them were led off to Babylon blinded because their eyes had been put out. Some had big iron hooks put through their lower jaw, and then chained in long lines and forced to march hundreds of miles that way. I won’t go on. But it was a national trauma. And the people who had returned from captivity were descendants of these people who are the Pharisees. So something really horrible happened that they did not want to happen again. It was *burned* into their minds and into the collective consciousness of the nation.

When people are traumatized, do you know what happens to them? I had a lady come in my office the other day and I gave her a little survey. She wasn’t sleeping. She couldn’t stop controlling everybody around her. She felt like there was no sense to live anymore.

She felt like all her relationships were being destroyed. She was uncertain about whether she was going to continue to live. She had all the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. That happens to people when they are traumatized. They develop a strong desire to control their environment so they can feel safe. And this can be passed from generation to generation, because anxious parents produce anxious kids. They try to control their kids. Their kids feel anxious. They wind up controlling theirs. Then it gets handed down to the third and fourth generations, as it says in the Bible.

So it's not surprising that the Jews, in the time of Jesus and before that, would be trying to develop a controlling approach to religion – to keep people in line. While it was not surprising, it turned out to be a disaster, because it was *not* God's plan. That isn't how God deals with people. He doesn't try to force people to do anything.

So what is God's plan for anxiety? That, really, I think, is what we're talking about. Well, the idea is that we look to God for our safety and protection.

I was listening to a lady who had lost her husband and three-year-old daughter in an automobile accident. She was in the accident and she was pregnant with another child. They both survived, but she lost, in a second, her husband and her daughter. She was talking, in the Children's Grief Center for New Mexico fundraiser, and she said that one of the things she realized was that any belief that you have any control over what's going to happen to you in your life is an illusion, and the good times that God gives us are *gifts*. And we should appreciate them and not expect that there will not also be bad times that come along with those things. That's just how life works. So we need to look to *God* for our safety and protection.

Here's what Jesus said about anxiety. It's in Matthew 6:30.

**Matthew 6:30** – *But if God so clothed the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into an oven, will He not much more clothe you, oh you of little faith? The solution to anxiety is faith. Do not be anxious, saying, "What shall we eat?" or "What shall we drink?" or "What shall we wear?" for the Gentiles seek after all these things. Your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. First things first! Therefore, do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble. Just worry about getting through today.*

Now this is not a blanket promise that nothing bad will happen, is it? *Sufficient for the day is its own trouble*. But, certainly, worrying about it isn't going to help. So, He says, "Don't. Trust Me." So poverty of spirit and realizing what God tells us – His direction about how we can get out of that – is very important.

The second thing, I think, is to let the Holy Spirit manage us. God's plan is a plan of self-management. If we're anxious, we can have a talk with ourselves and focus on God instead of us. We can read the Bible. We can pray. We can think about how we tend to

think, and then can yield ourselves to the word of God and the impulse of the Holy Spirit, and not have our life constricted by our anxiety.

I was talking to a twenty-six-year-old recently who had gotten into drugs in college, and then, more recently, had become an intravenous heroin user. She'd never held a job. She stole and panhandled for money. She'd been homeless. She'd bankrupted her mother, who had had her in treatment program after treatment program. I asked her if she'd ever been to an NA meeting – you know, Narcotics Anonymous. She said, "Yes." I asked her, "You know what the twelve step program is? It's about surrendering to God and putting Him at the head of your life." She said, "Yes." I asked her if she was religious, and she said, "No, but the meetings helped." I said, "Well, if you're not religious, why did they help?" She said, "Well, I believe in God. I just don't go to church. I know that, if I surrendered to Him, my life would be better." So we see that when people even turn the least little bit toward God – however imperfect their effort – it still helps! It helps a little bit.

So what we need to do is let God work His plan, rather than trying to work ours. Instead of trying to control everything around us, we need to trust God to take care of us. *Our* plan isn't going to work.

I talk to people all the time who are in their fifties and sixties and, instead of doing the work on their heart that they should have done a long time ago, they've put that off. And as they keep getting older and older, the anxiety keeps building and building and building. It doesn't get better. It gets worse. The way we try to do things doesn't work. If we trust that God is a loving God who always works even bad things out to our benefit in the long run – even though we don't like to go through those things – then we can, pretty much, say, "Yeah, everybody has anxiety. And I'm anxious now. So what? Deal with it. Manage it."

There are times, however, when self-management doesn't work. I was talking to a lady, a few months ago, whose husband cheated on her. She divorced him. Now she has a boyfriend. He told her that, if she didn't stop checking his phone and spying on him, he was going to have to leave her, because he just felt totally controlled. And she *is* trying to control him so that she can feel safe. And it's not his problem. It's hers. She doesn't even know why she's acting like she acts. But in probing a bit more I learned that, not only did her first husband cheat on her, but so did her first boyfriend, and her parents – when she was a young child – gave her up for adoption. So she couldn't see any connection between these events of betrayal, but I think *you* can, if you think about what that might have been like for her. So, everybody that she has ever been in relationship with has pushed her off. So she's afraid of being abandoned. She can't make any connection between those events and what is going on now. To her it feels like she just can't stop it, and she doesn't know why she's like that.

So that's where God's second strategy comes in. She needs to do some *heart work*. She needs to rend her heart, instead of trying to control the situation – to examine herself, to understand how all these hurts have piled up to make her afraid and anxious.



There are some things that we can do. Some of them would be categorized as praying. Some might be categorized as studying the Bible. Some might be classed as meditation. But we can make the connection between the past and present in our own minds. “No wonder I have such a hard time trusting that my boyfriend is going to remain faithful to me.” And we can fearlessly explore the past and understand it, instead of pushing it away because it’s not fun to think about. We can turn the past into a rich story about what happened and how it has affected us.

I think I’ve mentioned before that in all the attachment studies that they’ve done over the last fifty years – sixty years now – they know there are a number of people who have migrated out of the insecure category to the secure one. And the single greatest predictor of that is the ability to tell a rational, logical, organized story about how you came to be the way you are and why your family is like it is. Usually when people can do that – where they don’t gloss over the bad parts or get overly dramatic about all of it – usually they have worked their way through it to where those things don’t trigger them any longer. It takes the hurt out of it.

To put it in perspective: Everybody has anxiety. We resist the urge to control. We put our thoughts on God and His power of protection. We take a positive position about life rather than a negative one. What did Paul say? “Whatever things are good, think on these things.” Right? And we can control self.

Two of the most important things people can do to manage anxiety – and everybody has it – it’s just a matter of degree – is exercise – daily exercise – a walk is one of the best things you can do to reduce anxiety. And another thing is to control yourself in a very natural way – and that’s to think about your breathing. Breathe in for the count of seven and breathe out for the count of eight. Try to breathe out a little longer than you breathe in. It’s amazing what happens when we do that. And you know, it’s really boring, so we can’t be thinking about all the scary stuff. It calms us down – totally non-stimulating. It helps us focus on the present moment, not on all the stuff we’re worried about happening. Quite interesting.

I think God gave us the ability to breathe, and to think about it, to be present, to be conscious of ourselves. I used to think all that stuff was a bunch of baloney, frankly. I really did. But then I started telling people to do it, because I was trained to do that. I just was astounded at what I heard the next week when people came back. “I was ready to smack my husband in the face, but I remembered what you said about breathing. And I just stood there and looked at him and breathed in through my nose and out through my mouth, and pretty soon I wasn’t upset anymore.” Somebody said that to me! And not too long ago either. So there are things we can do. We don’t always have to let it happen.

We’re going to talk a lot more about how to do all this at the Feast, by the way. I hope you can catch it. We’re going to explain how it all got this way and what to do about it in much more detail. We’re actually going to have some practice at rending our hearts rather than our garments.

So that's number twelve in the series on *Important Stuff – Don't Be a Pharisee*. We have only one more to do in this series, so be looking for it. Those of you tuning in with us, watch the Website.