

**The
Fine Art
Of
Self-
Justification**

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**But wisdom is justified of all her children.
(Luke 7:35)**

This is a short study on the motives, methods and madness of Pharisees. This is also just a generalisation of the behaviour of Pharisees when their faith and practice are found wanting in the light of Scriptures. In this discussion, the seven deadly Pharisees will be presented. Pharisees major in self-justification. The practice of self-justification is insidious and some Christians are not even aware of its presence. It is not just a bad habit acquired unknowingly. It is the condition of one's heart when sins are exposed in the light of Scriptures and the refusal to repent of these sins. There are Pharisees who have been so conditioned in their years of engaging in practicing the fine art of self-justification that they are unable to recognize the detrimental effects on their walk with Christ. This exposé is done in hopes of sincere Christians learning to avoid the pitfalls of the Pharisees, especially in the modern day context of living out a victorious Christian life full of joy and faithful service for the blessed Redeemer, even the Lord Jesus Christ.

**For John came neither eating nor drinking,
and they say, He hath a devil.
The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say,
Behold a man gluttonous, and a winebibber,
a friend of publicans and sinners.
But wisdom is justified of her children.
(Matthew 11:18&19)**

There is a generation of people who are hell-bent in self-justification. Such practice of self-justification has developed into a fine art and a way of life. This self-taught and self-developed art just come naturally to some people whose heart are not right with God. They hold the words of the living God in contempt in the application of Scriptures in their lives. These people are not the people of the world. They are the people who are supposed to be followers of the way, a people chosen by God. They are people who are given the oracles of God and with such a wonderful privilege, they are supposed to know the mind of God and do the will of God. So there is this unquenchable desire to justify their behaviour and practice of their faith supposedly derived from the Scriptures they claim they hold in their hands to be the perfect, inspired and inerrant words of the living God.

Self-justification concerns the response to messages preached by the preacher and the preacher's manner of life. Sermons and godly manner of life pose a serious challenge to their authority. Here it concerns the Pharisees who rejected the work and the preaching of the Lord Jesus Christ. They were self-righteous as they were the custodians of the Law. But they knew not the Law and they went about to condemn the Author of the Law when He showed up to expound about the finer points and practice as well as administration of the Law.

In the Christian church, such Pharisees are still found in our midst. Though not clothed with outward adorning of religious garb of the Pharisees in time past, their modus operandi remains unchanged. They did not die out some two thousand years ago. They survive and evolve to take up the practice of self-justification in the context of their way of life in relation to the preaching they receive from preachers of righteousness. They are like hawks always eager to pound on the preacher and his sermons. They are there to prove a point that they are right with God. They assume they are the ground and pillar of truth in the church of the living God. When the sermons

cross their practice of the faith, they will go into self-justification mode almost immediately like the Pharisees of old.

They, of course, will defend their actions as defending the faith and ensuring that Christian liberty for the brethren are protected from false teachings. They are outwardly pious and they spare no effort to put up a front of godliness to undermine the work of preachers of righteousness. They are professionals in the art of self-justification. Sometime, their operation is carried out with such finesses that the simple minded are taken in by their pretentious piety. But they may turn confrontational when they fail in their attempt to prove they are right with God. The Pharisees in the past went as far as to accuse the Lord as the prince of devils: **But the Pharisees said, He casteth out devils through the prince of the devils. (Matthew 9:34)** So preachers of righteousness seeking to turn people from evil should expect no better treatment: **It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household? (Matthew 10:25)** Pharisees will always try to have the last say whether done with fair speeches coated with honey dripping from their self-righteous mouth or with arrows of deceit designed to strike the messengers of God with utmost hatred.

These modern day Pharisees are pretentious people like their predecessors of old. They pretend to be non-judgmental but they practice judging unrighteous judgment when their pet sins are exposed. When the preacher preaches against the sin and folly of drinking alcoholic beverages, such Pharisees who do not share the same conviction will go into self-justification mode. They feel a need to explain themselves and justify their disagreement with the preacher. Social duty requires them to keep cartoons of beer and bottles of wine at home. In case unsaved friends and relatives visit them, they have to show them hospitality. They contend that if they are not friendly towards the lost like the Lord, how can these lost people get saved? After all the Christian faith is not about drinking or not drinking alcoholic beverages. Was not the Lord being accused as a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners? Let's live and let others live.

Such act of self-defence is a desperate attempt to justify social drinking at any cost. Was there a moment the Lord ever got drunk or lack of sobriety? The lost people in this world happen to be a convenient alibi to support their drinking habit or addiction or lack of sobriety. Such arguments could be used to stock up any drugs or substances in case some die-hard partygoers visit them as these people have a penchant to consume ecstasy pills or smoke pot or even just to light up a cigarette. In fact, there is no commandment in the Bible where a Christian is told not to smoke or take drugs either! So the pretentious Pharisees go about justifying themselves and their practice of indulgence. Drinking problem is just one such issue that ruffles their feathers. It upsets them because their practice is not inline with brethren who are sober. So they like to pretend they are all things unto all men and by all means they might save some.

The Lord Jesus Christ indeed spent a lot of time with publicans and sinners and yet not tainted with their sinful ways. Not an ounce of His holiness was lost during His mingling with sinners in this world. The Pharisees do not understand how to interact with the world of sinners and yet not having to compromise their faith in Christ and partake in the ungodliness of sinners in order to try to win them to Christ. Pharisees always regard preaching against ungodliness as intruding into their private space. Teaching others to pray to God to grant them a non-judgmental spirit is one way to deflect such perceived criticism of their ungodly lifestyles. So they take the posture of "Judge not and ye shall not be judged" stance and hope to convince others to mind their own business. The constant need to justify themselves whenever the practice of their faith is questioned is an

unmistakable hallmark of Pharisees. **And he said unto them, Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God. (Luke 16:15)** So wisdom is justified of all her children.

The modern day Pharisees are also very self-conscious of their image. They wear different masks when dealing with different people. When they are socializing with the unsaved people in the world, they act, talk and behave just like anyone of them. They share their mannerism and sometimes even their filthy jokes. When they are fellowshiping with Christians, they adopt a very different approach and temperament and they blend in with Christians like a chameleon. They are very sensitive on how people view them. So when the preacher preaches against worldliness, they have to justify themselves.

When Christians found them having a mahjong table at home, they feel a need to explain that the table is meant for the children to do their schoolwork at home. Mahjong tables are usually foldable and very convenient to store away when not in use. Indeed, it could be true that the mahjong table could be used for the children to do their homework. But why is the need to explain when these Pharisees do not feel that some Christians think it is wrong for Christians to play mahjong? If mahjong is not associated with gambling, why the need to be defensive about a mahjong table? In fact, the children could do their homework on a dining table, kitchen table, computer table and even just a normal table whether foldable or not. Why the need to explain the presence of a mahjong table in their homes? Actually, these Pharisees are playing mahjong with family and friends during weekends. But they are very worried how Christians will view them. They want respect and they fear ridicule more than death.

This exposes the Pharisees to be double-minded men who are unstable in all their ways. They want to please both the world and Christians at the same time. So these Pharisees consciously go about trying to please both the unsaved who love to play mahjong and Christians who frown upon such activities. They want the best of both worlds and they end up neither here nor there. There are many areas where Pharisees have to hide their questionable practices from Christians. That is why Pharisees are very concerned whenever Christians are visiting them in their homes. Some things have to be kept away and some arrangements are in order so that a clean and wholesome Christian image of the home is presented to visiting Christians. Such are the ways of the image conscious Pharisees having to adopt different postures dealing with different people all the time. Pharisees do not understand preaching against worldliness is meant for Christians and not for the lost world. Worldliness is not an issue to the people in this lost world for they are still dead in trespasses and sin. No wonder Pharisees are

miserable people. **He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad. (Matthew 12:30)** Wisdom is of course justified of all her children.

As keepers and defenders of the faith, these modern day Pharisees are also very keen to show that they have works to justify their faith. They want to project an image of godliness before Christians that they are also faithful servants of Christ. They want to be respected and to be seen as doers of the word and not just hearers only. When the preacher encourages Christians to witness by putting out three gospel tracts a day, these Pharisees jump into the conclusion that the preacher is preaching against them for not witnessing and lack of service for Christ. How the conscience accuses! They will whine and complain to other Christians instead of approaching the preacher to clarify his constant admonition of suggesting to give out gospel tracts everyday. They would even go to the extent to deliberately putting out gospel tracts in front of other Christians to prove that they have performed their Christian duty as suggested by the preacher.

If they are really doing the Lord's work and having compassion for lost souls, any sincere and honest Christians would not take offence when the preacher exhorts them to pass out gospel tracts. Such are the ways of Pharisees ever eager to prove their superiority over others to undermine the work of the preacher who encourages Christians to serve the Lord in simple ways.

Nevertheless, Christians who have a good and honest heart sincerely serving the Lord faithfully would rejoice even when these Pharisees serve the Lord for strives and vainglory. **Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife; and some also of good will: The one preach Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds: But the other of love, knowing that I am set for the defence of the gospel. What then? notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice. (Philippians 1:15-18)**

These Pharisees do not understand the true joy from sincere Christians when the gospel of Christ is preached. Thus, they continue to preach the gospel without reward and without joy. Pharisees are self-promoting by nature. They will spare no effort putting themselves in the forefront of spiritual warfare but they have little works to show they are true soldiers of the Lord. **Woe unto you, Pharisees! for ye love the uppermost seats in the synagogues, and greetings in the markets. (Luke 11:43)** Surely wisdom is justified of all her children.

Modern day Pharisees are no different from those of old. One main character trait of such Pharisees is that they are covetous people. When the preacher preaches against ungodly living and exhorts Christians to spend more time reading and studying the Holy Bible as well as to look forward to the second coming of Christ, they feel a need to justify themselves. They caution that Christ may not come during their lifetime but Christians may go instead. They claim that spending too much time studying the Bible is not practical and will not work in this modern world. You cannot make a living by reading the Bible. Reading the Bible does not mean God will provide for you. If you just stay at home reading the Bible, nothing will happen and poverty will await you. They claim that they had tried reading the Bible at the beach and nothing happen to them and the Lord did not provide for them that way. What the preacher preached did not work for them. So their experience is the final authority. While all these arguments are true and sound good to the fallen mind, the Pharisees cannot prove that not spending time reading and studying the Bible will ensure that their livelihood will be taken care of. There are billions of people in this world who are not Christians and do not read and study the Bible and yet many of them could not even have three square meals a day.

It is also true that living out the Christian faith in faithfulness will bring poverty and trouble including persecution for Christians where many Christians suffer for their faith in Christ since the beginning of the Church Age. But such blatant truths as taught in the Bible are conveniently ignored by the modern day Pharisees. They are professionals in self-preservation. The reason why they have to justify themselves when a preacher exhorts Christians to be more faithful in their walk with the Lord is because they are unfaithful and covetous. They feel the preacher needs to be balance in his preaching. They insist that when the preacher preaches about faithfulness to the Lord, he must also preach about not neglecting his duty in making a living otherwise Christians would neglect their social duty. Is it not just plain common sense that the Bible also teaches Christians to labour and work with their own hands and not to be busy bodies? They jump into the wrong conclusion that Christians will just stay at home to read and study the Bible and not work at all. Why the Pharisees always have a warped mind in understanding a sermon exhorting Christians to draw near to Christ is too amazing for words. Instead of rejoicing because there is a faithful preacher who encourages Christians to follow the Lord, the Pharisees become critical of his approach and find fault all the time. They do not understand that the preacher would be a happy man if he could encourage even just one child of

God to live for Christ and faithfully serving the Lord while the rebellious Pharisees live in a dry and thirsty land of fruitlessness. Of course this is nothing new. **And the Pharisees also, who were covetous, heard all these things: and they derided him. (Luke 16:14)** Indeed wisdom is justified of all her children.

Modern day Pharisees are also strict adherents of orthodoxy. They insist in church worship be carried out strictly in a certain way according to their own understanding. They call this worshipping God in Spirit and in truth but sometimes it is actually furthest from the truth. One such area is singing in the church. Singing must be just vocal expressions and no musical instruments are allowed. They claim that no Christian in the New Testament uses any musical instruments. They sang only hymns and psalms and spiritual songs. So the singing in churches must strictly conform to New Testament practice and an iota of deviation is anathema. But who defines what is a hymn as sung in the New Testament? Are the hymns we are singing today coming directly from the first century? Are the psalms we are singing also arranged to be sung the same way back during the time of the apostles or even during the time of king David? What about spiritual songs? What are spiritual songs? None can define to anyone's satisfaction all the three categories as admonished to be sung in the New Testament. And yet, such orthodoxy must be followed strictly in church services.

However, privately, it is acceptable when their children learn to play the piano and play the songs in this world that do not fall under the three categories of music in the New Testament. These Pharisees have no qualms buying musical CDs performed by worldly musicians and join in wholeheartedly singing in karaoke lounges singing their hearts out on their woes and unrequited loves with sinners in this world. Singing during church services however must be just vocal expressions singing old hymns and from the Psalter. Such unnatural Christians are a pity having to change masks from time to time.

Actually, the issue is not what a Christian can or cannot sing. It is what a Christian will or will not sing. To the Lord he stands or falls for what he sings or does not sing. Since when the American National Anthem is the only acceptable non-Christian song that a Christian can sing? Then where does this leave non-American Christians? Christian music is just one such area of contention. The Pharisees cannot understand what is true Christian liberty. They hold to a "holier than thou" attitude in comparison with other Christians on things that they cannot rightly define as right and true. The Pharisees of old held orthodoxy in supreme place but in practice, their works were evil and they went about plotting the murder of the Lord of glory. **Then Jesus said unto them, Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees. (Matthew 16:6)** Wisdom no doubt is justified of all her children.

While modern day Pharisees can be easily identified by their over zealousness on outward conformity to traditions and practices, some Pharisees will go to the other extreme of non-conformity. This may sound paradoxical. It must, however, be remembered that a Pharisee is a rebel at heart. While some Pharisees take pride in their dress code, there are other Pharisees who will rebel when a preacher preaches on simplicity and modesty on dress code. The Pharisees will rebel and dress in a way to ensure they are different from the crowd who dress in simplicity and modesty. They want to be different. They preach by their actions that they dare to be different by either being sloppy or outlandish in the way they dress. Wearing just a slipper or a sandal to church worship is acceptable while the music must be vocal expression from old hymns and psalms. They will not dress the same way when they go to work or attend a business meeting though.

This behaviour exposes their attitude towards the spiritual things of God and their testimony before other Christians. They wear a motto in their heart that no man can tell them what to do. This is to be expected as Pharisees are very self-centered people. Their primary preoccupation is power and prestige, which is a manifestation of pride. The Pharisees in the past tried to use Scriptures as well as traditions of the elders to justify themselves before the Lord but they failed miserably. Modern day Pharisees are no different. Scriptures or no Scriptures and they mean nothing to them. **Then spake Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples, Saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not. For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers. (Matthew 23:1-4)**

Their ultimate objective is respect from others as well as to remain in control in their own self-made ivory tower of authority based on their own human understanding. They are control freaks in their own rights. **If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him: and the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation. (John 11:48)** They indulge in church politics and they seek to control the minds of Christians to bring them into bondage. **These are wells without water, clouds that are carried with a tempest; to whom the mist of darkness is reserved for ever. For when they speak great swelling words of vanity, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through much wantonness, those that were clean**

escaped from them who live in error. While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage. (2 Peter 2:17-19) Such professional church politicians bring untold harm to the Body of Christ. Their lust for power causes division in the church and stumbles Christians who are grieved with their pernicious ways. There is no way to please Pharisees unless one is willing to submit to their authority and be subject to their every whim and fancy. These are extremely unappeasable people. Surely wisdom is justified of all her children!

Pharisees have a predisposed disadvantage in that they cannot rightly divide the word of truth. Yet they claim to be the authority on spiritual matters. They are not teachable because they are just too proud to reveal their own inapt ability in understanding the Scriptures. They view inability to understand Scriptures to be a weakness and so they have to pretend they know it all. They try to fake it until they make it and hence they fail in practical application of Scriptures. Those who follow them suffer the same fate like we are told that the blind lead the blind into the ditch.

The Pharisees cannot understand the difference between a doctrinal and a spiritual or a devotional application of the Scriptures. They do not know when and how Scriptures can be applied to them in the New Testament Church Age. They cannot understand prophecies either and they make a mess of the Scriptures contradicting Scriptures without end. Their pathetic effort to pretend to know what they are doing just make matters worse. They do not allow personal testimony and testimonies of others in preaching because they have none. They insist on preaching Christ and Christ crucified and illustrations must be taken from the Bible alone. They reduce the Bible to a historical book and application of Scriptures has no practical relevance at all in the modern day context. They just want their fallen minds to be tickled and preaching of the cross simply becomes an academic exercise. This allows them to live the life they want and they fidget in discomfort whenever the preacher preaches the Bible in the modern day context dealing with their immoral and ungodly lifestyles. How they want to justify themselves in their practices and their lifestyles!

Of course they claim Sola Scriptura but they mean nothing to that effect. The only way they understand how to apply Scriptures is how and when Scriptures have an impact on their lives. They do not believe in the authority of the Scriptures though they claim the Holy Bible is their final authority in all matters of faith and practice. They interpret Scriptures through the lens of the world and their own fallen human understanding. They use Scriptures to justify their lifestyles and reject Scriptures that will cause them loss or disadvantage or inconvenience when dealing with Christians or the world at large. Their motto is self-preservation and self-gratification. **And Jesus answering said unto them, Do ye not therefore err, because ye know not the scriptures, neither the power of God? (Mark 12:24)**

They do not believe in repentance. Majority of the Pharisees in the past did not repent on the preaching of John the Baptist as well as the Lord Jesus Christ. Many of the modern day Pharisees are beyond repentance. Interestingly, some of them are still waiting for true repentance from heaven and they are praying to God to grant them true repentance, whatever “true repentance” is supposed to mean. Perhaps only a Pharisee could define what is true and false repentance. Did God initially grant them false repentance and they are now begging God to grant them true repentance? Pharisees always make a mess of theological terms: **Desiring to be teachers of the law; understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm. (1 Timothy 1:7)**

High-mindedness is their weakest link and ignorance their fruit. They practise the fine art of self-justification and some have reached divinity level. Practical repentance is not in their vocabulary anymore. Repentance exists only in prayers and such prayers are said to deceive the simple that they still have such a desire for repentance. Pretentious piety seeking to cover up unwillingness to repent has reached the pinnacle of insanity. These Pharisees think Christians cannot see through their scheming in the fine art of self-justification. Wisdom is truly justified of all her children.

It is true that any Christian can be found to be afflicted with the Pharisaical Syndrome. However, a Pharisee in the New Testament is someone of authority on spiritual matters. While any Christian can become a Pharisee in his manner of life, it is more common that deacons and elders are more at risk in contracting this evil disease of the Pharisees. Pharisees have an inbuilt spiritual circuitry to verify information coming from the preacher and the Holy Bible. They compare sermons with their preset values based on their own fallen mind. When any information falls out of range from their preprogrammed settings, a response will be generated in self-justification of their preferred course of life. The Holy Bible is never the final authority when Scriptures interfere with their preset lifestyles. Scriptures are only used when they justify their manner of life. In a way, they are already short-circuited from spiritual truths. They are no longer sensitive to the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives.

The Pharisees of old thought that Judaism rose or fell on them and they were the keepers of the faith. Modern day Pharisees likewise play their role as the devil's advocate. They are there to check the preacher because the rise and fall of the church rest on them. They believe they are truly the ground and pillar of truth in the church. They simply think too highly on themselves. So more often than not, such modern day Pharisees are found in church office holders. They do not become extinct in the beginning of the New Testament Canon. They survive and they adapt. Moreover, they know the rules of the game and they play the game well. They are like chameleons ever adaptable to their surroundings and circumstances and their chief weapon is to sow discord especially by gossiping. They play the role of Absalom in stealing the hearts of the people by pretending to be interested in their welfare and champion their well-being. They like to rule from behind the scene. They ride upon usurped authority and they want to reign over the people of God. Their chief end is to lord over the people and desire their respect and worship like Satan of old.

There are many people sitting under the preaching of a godly man. But the outcomes for individuals are different. Those who have a good and honest heart sincerely seeking after the Lord bear fruits and become joyful Christian living for the glory of Christ. The Pharisees on the other hand become fruitless and bitter. They still play the role of a preacher checker pretending to be the goalkeeper of spiritual truths. They think they are spiritual auditors able to verify the motives of preachers and their preaching of the cross. They may pretend to be Bereans of old searching the Scriptures

daily to see whether those things were so but by their fruits we shall know them. Their manner of life bears testimony to their fruitless search in trying to be custodians of the truths. Their testimony betrays their profession of faith. They do not wish to be transformed by the renewing of their mind through the Scriptures to be conformed to the image of Christ. They live their self-life and live in a self-delusional state of their own grandeur of knowing it all. Nobody could teach them anything. They fear to be exposed for what they truly are and they cover up their inability to teach and to handle the word of righteousness with skill like a seasoned soldier of the Lord. They practice the fine art of self-justification to perfection. What they lack in spiritual discernment they cover up with worldly wisdom, which is earthly, sensual and devilish. They live a life of self-deception to the very end. Wisdom indeed is justified of all her children. **Good understanding giveth favour: but the way of transgressors is hard. (Proverb 13:15)**

Is there no hope for Pharisees? The apostle Paul was a Pharisee and yet he became the greatest missionary the world ever knew. So there is still hope for Pharisees if only they will repent and submit to the authority of the Scriptures. Do you recognize Pharisees in your midst? Pray much for them. Repent if you are a Pharisee. Do not live a wasted and joyless life of fruitlessness and in the end turn out to be a fool. The practice of self-justification is both delusional and dangerous. There is no spiritual light at the end of this self-made tunnel, which turns out to be a bottomless pit. Avoid the practice of self-justification at all cost. **For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise. (2 Corinthians 10:12) Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is. (Ephesians 5:17)** Be justified in Christ instead. Do not live a fruitless bitter life of a Pharisee.

If you have been blessed with the reading of this book and you wish to contact the author, you may write to him at charles@kjv-asia.com.