

# How to Raise a Pharisee

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## Introduction

Let's start with some history.

Who were the Pharisees?

The Pharisees (along with the scribes) were the original legalists. *Pharisee* means “separated one.” They prided themselves in their denunciation of impure and ungodly elements.

Physical separation was of paramount importance. Practical holiness was considered evidence of personal piety. Leviticus 11:44–45 was a central passage.

The Pharisees had no greater task than to *protect* and *propagate* the laws of God. They had so much respect for the original set of Scriptures and wanted to protect them so desperately that they started adding to them. After a while, it seemed not only helpful to make additions, but also absolutely *essential*. These rules, as part of the oral law, became even more important to the Pharisees than God's commandments.

The counterpart to the Pharisees today is the people who are afraid to allow Christians to live only with God's Word. To biblical principles they add *rules, regulations, and standards*...and then come to the point of believing they are part of the Scriptures themselves.

This is the way it is for legalists—God lays down a principle, and then man reduces God's great principle to a set of rules that may be burdensome but that certainly remove individual responsibility for making choices. Finally, man elevates rule-keeping to a mark of spirituality and judges himself and others by it.

Of all the degrading titles that Jesus used to describe the Pharisees, none was more devastating than referring to them as “yeast” or “leaven.” Jesus told his disciples, “Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy” (Luke 12:1).

- The problem is NOT with having traditional practices, or even with a church's local distinction.
- However, there IS something desperately wrong with presenting these personal preferences as eternal truth.

So the Pharisees were *judgmental, prideful*; they didn't differentiate between traditions and God's commands. And they were *hypocritical*, since they couldn't really live out what they taught.

But our discussion is *not* about how to deal with legalism in the church...there's a past Shepherds' Conference seminar on that ("Walking the Thin Line"). Instead, we're to talk about how this relates to *parenting*.

I want to note some practices—12 of them—that if you follow these in your approach to parenting, you will increase the probability of raising a Pharisee.

### **So this is a 12-step program to raising a Pharisee.**

Most of these are related to one another.

#### **1. Majoring on *external* instead of *internal* issues**

See the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5–6).

This is majoring on controlling the child's **behavior** without using Scripture and prayer to deal with his **heart**.

This will produce a Pharisee—everything looks good on the outside, but inwardly he is corrupt (Matt. 23:23–24, 27–28).

- As he grows to adulthood, he has all his table manners and “yes, sirs” in place, but that doesn't mean he knows Christ.
- Don't equate adherence to external regulations with a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ (Luke 18:9–30, the story of the rich young ruler; Col. 2:20–23).
- In one sense, external controls have little or nothing to do with the final outcome of a child's heart (Phil. 3:6).

Many people whose upbringing was without a Christian influence have come to faith in Christ and now enjoy the privileges of useful ministry.

### **So watch out for a lack of balance between the external and the internal.**

This can be manifested in settling for “quick fixes” to issues.

And don't settle for superficial repentance by your child.

#### **2. Excessive control**

This is not balancing discipline with instruction.

This is manifested by the creation of TOO MANY rules and restrictions, rules that are POINTLESS, or rules that are HARSH AND TOO STRICT.

Don't be that walking minus sign, saying no to everything.

Avoid micromanaging your children's life, telling them every little thing they must do. Depending on the child's age, allow some **freedoms**.

Let them pursue their dreams and interests. Enter their world. These ideas and dreams will change along the way, so don't be so quick to point out how illogical something is. You have to think long-term. Fads come and go.

If you try to control and micromanage everything a child thinks and does, you build accountability only to yourself instead of God. Instead, you want to create a God-consciousness.

Don't seek to be the ultimate authority.

You must teach them how to think for themselves—how to evaluate. Otherwise, they grow up only knowing how to live by a set of rules and dos and don'ts.

Ephesians 6:4—a balance between discipline and instruction

You have to allow some freedoms along the way. Otherwise, you are unnecessarily controlling or overbearing.

Matthew 23:23–24—“straining at a gnat and swallowing a camel”

Many parents become overbearing on *preference* issues.

- Don't make mountains out of molehills.
- By and large, molehills are external things.
- Say yes if you can.

It's especially important, as a child gets older, to allow increased freedoms. Otherwise, you are not letting the child grow up.

- Junior high? You need to treat them as “young adults.”
- Know how and when to “bend but don't break.”

Another related issue to being excessive in your control—it's being too focused on minor details and becoming too upset when these details are not handled properly (turning off lights, closing doors, etc.). Yes, I want to train my child in these things, but these just aren't the most important things in the world.

### 3. Overreacting to failure

This includes not allowing the freedom to fail. It's treating failure as the end of the world. You must see failure as an opportunity for instruction. But many parents live in FEAR of failure—and thus they become excessive controllers. This may be manifested in calling attention to every mistake. It's a performance-based love...expecting perfection.

Let's talk about *perfectionism*.

- *Perfectionism* is different from pursuing *excellence*.
- We want to teach our children the importance of living up to the abilities God has given them. That is striving for excellence.
- But we are not all alike. Some people are more gifted than others. So it is very frustrating to a child to think he has to be perfect or that he has to live up to a standard he is not able to meet.

It is most unfortunate for a child to think that NOTHING he does ever pleases his parents. This is “performance based” love. You show approval only when the child has lived up to the standards you have selfishly created.

On the other hand, your contentment with God's plan for your child's life and with his God-given abilities will help keep you from being impatient and therefore exasperating him.

In a general sense, perfectionistic parents allow an unpleasant atmosphere to permeate their home. There is no allowance for mistakes and failures that are **basic to life**.

### 4. Being unforgiving and impatient.

A grouchy/irritable parent, frustrated over everything that goes wrong.

Instead of a home that is filled with joy, there is an oppressive, negative atmosphere. Sinful choices by your children definitely need to be dealt with. But make sure there is a visible end to the consequences, with the home thus returning to a pleasant atmosphere of peace and tranquility.

The home is where failure should provide a great opportunity for training. Where encouragement and support flourish, there is the ability to see the lessons of life with clarity. Otherwise, you may drive your child to hopelessness and despair.

When you are not getting over their failure, you are teaching how to be unforgiving.

## 5. Elevating preference over biblical principle

Some parents are prone to *emphasize* rules that really don't reflect the Bible at all. Instead, the rules reflect personal preferences.

There is nothing inherently wrong with maintaining some rules that flow out of personal preferences—*house rules*.

Sometimes these rules relate to developing a safe environment or to the need for maintaining some measure of control so there isn't utter chaos in the home. But care must be taken to avoid equating them with biblical commands, or again, allowing them to become excessive (e.g., excessive in number).

This is what the Pharisees did.

**If you are enforcing too many of your preferences, or neglecting to teach biblical principles as the child matures, then preferential rules may be perceived as being the same as biblical commands and principles...and they grow up with this pharisaical mindset.**

- Be honest about views...and about what is and what is not Scripture.
- Don't try to spiritualize everything.

## 6. Unnecessary separatism

This has become a huge problem with many home-schooling families. I believe it's danger they must watch out for.

Frankly, this approach doesn't work as the parents think it will. Frequent phone calls from parents of older children who are rebelling. And frequent discussions with pastors who are having this problem in their church.

As your children grow, they must be involved with other children; this is a testing ground and provides opportunities for training. And your teens must be allowed to be with other teens.

I understand that there's a balance here—you have to be discerning about the company your child thinks. But some parents are going to such an extreme that they won't allow their children to be in the church Sunday School classes, or their junior high and high school students to be involved in the youth group.

Some pastors tell me that their home-schoolers are forming their own youth group, refusing to participate in the church's youth camp, etc.

Listen—the church youth group is a great place for your kids to be around other kids—lost kids, spiritual kids, mediocre kids. They need to be around all these. They need to be around kids who are not in the same type of schooling.

Also, be careful about excessive separatism in your neighborhood.

I talked to a father once who was now concerned with his older kids. They were starting families of their own and were becoming even MORE separatist...and he was finally realizing he had never taught his children how to reach out to unbelievers.

### **7. Judging others...other families**

This is being judgmental about other families, about things going on in the church; being critical of everything, constantly fault-finding, producing a constant rain of criticism.

When you do this in front of children, you're developing that judgmental spirit in them.

### **8. Being “belligerent”—a fighter**

Pharisees fight. So, to this parent, every issue is a fighting issue.

As the child watches you take on every wrong thing in the church, every example of wrong thinking in others, they learn the lifestyle of a fighter.

Thus, they end up learning what to fight *against* and not necessarily what to fight *for*.

### **9. Favoritism**

By this, I mean showing favoritism toward one child over another child.

This teaches a child to want to be only with people who are like you and who meet your standards. Then this can lead to the separatism we discussed earlier.

### **10. No humor**

No fun.

You need to know how to not take yourself so seriously and how to not take things in this world so seriously at times.

“Let your hair down”; teach your child a good sense of humor. I’m not talking about *crass* humor. But make life fun; do fun things.

## 11. Building up their *self-esteem*

A “high self-esteem” is not a biblical concept. Nor is the need to learn to love yourself.

Emphasis on self-esteem encourages individuals to become like Pharisees; they are encouraged to delve into self, to be focused on self, to build up self.

And don’t model a self-focus.

One way this happens in parenting is falling into the trap of seeing your children as existing for your own happiness.

“They exist for my pleasure.”

And you get upset with them if they have upset your happiness, interfered with your television viewing, caused turmoil for you.

“I have a right to a problem-free child.”

This teaches a self-focus.

A related self-focus issue is using children to impress others.

“Showing off” your child teaches them how to live for impressing others... a **fear of man**.

Don’t have kids show off...reciting Scripture, singing songs.

There’s a right way to do this and a right motivation—but don’t use your children to bring glory to yourself.

And I don’t put bumper stickers on my car that brag about my child—“honor student,” etc.

This is tooting your own horn.

## 12. Lack of genuine spirituality

Living hypocritically teaches hypocrisy.

You won’t be perfect as a parent, but there must be a *level* of integrity visible to your children.

Psalm 15—*integrity*

This can be manifested in a parent who never admits his or her wrong—Proverbs 28:13.

This gives children a wrong impression of spirituality.

So does much of what we've already talked about...such as emphasizing externals over the internal—you teach them *they* should put emphasis on that.

And that's a cheap substitute for true spirituality.

### **Conclusion**

Keep parenting simple—don't make it a complicated system of rules and regulations and micro-managing.

Basically, discipline when they clearly disobey, and give them a lot of love.

**Live life with them, and live a life before them that exemplifies joy in the Lord, gratitude for life—and show a lot of patience and grace along the way.**