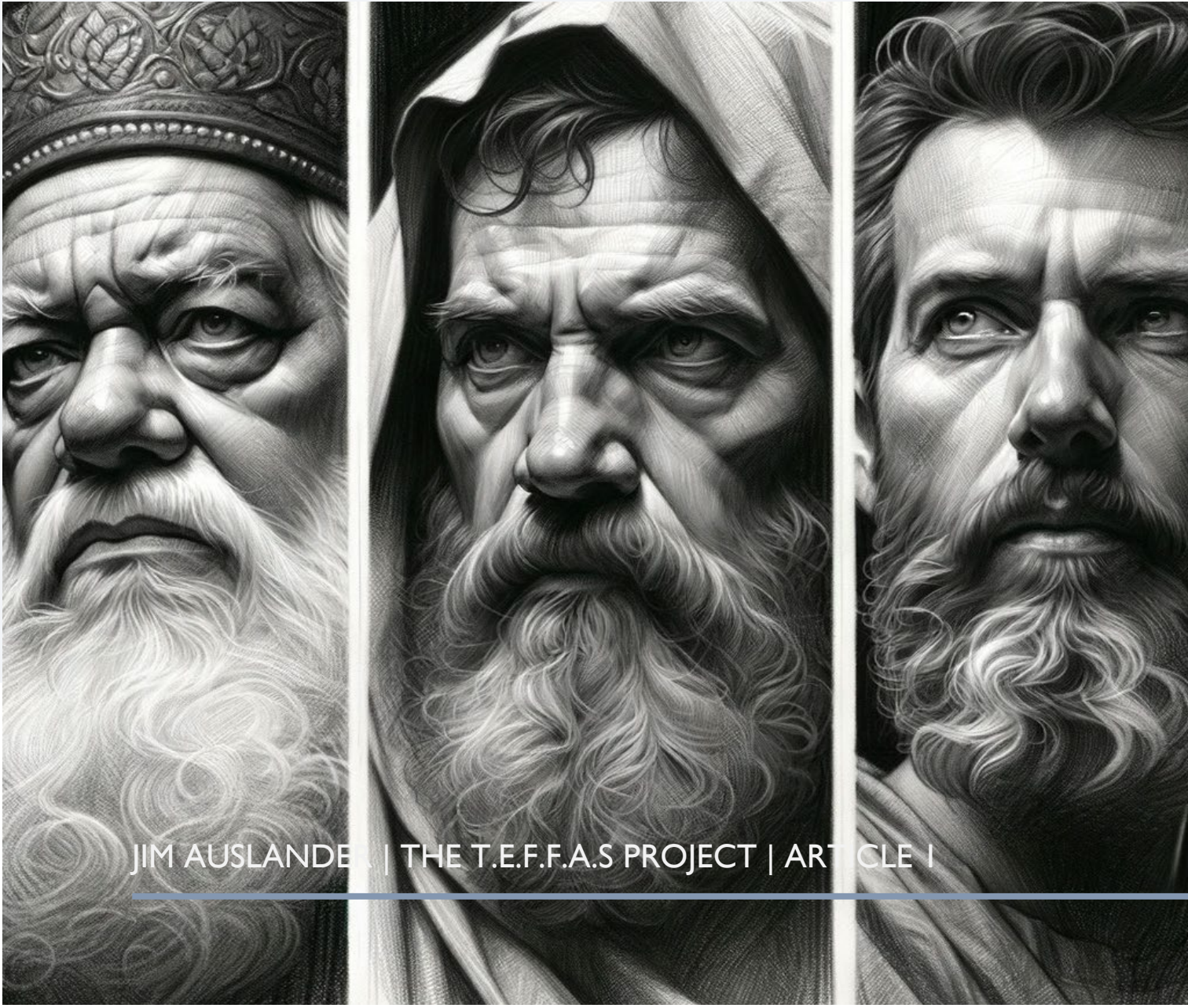


# WHICH PHARISEE ARE YOU

EMBRACING HUMILITY, SEEKING GRACE



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I'm very curious when I meet people who think they are doing God's will when criticizing or condemning the sin in others. The main reason for my curiosity is understanding where this motivation to condemn comes from.

This chapter will explore the concept of emulating different Pharisees in Christianity. By examining the behaviors and characteristics of three prominent Pharisees—Caiaphas, Saul (Paul), and Nicodemus—we can gain insight into our own tendencies to judge and criticize others. Through this exploration, we will consider the importance of open-mindedness, self-reflection, and the power to change our mindset to align ourselves more closely with the teachings of Jesus.

## **PERHAPS THEY THINK THEY ARE MODELING “GOOD CHRISTIAN BEHAVIOR”?**

If you ask me, if you are a Christian, the best model you can attempt to emulate is Jesus. Could Jesus' example ever be not good enough for you? While we examine the behaviors of different Pharisees, it is important to remember that Jesus is the ultimate model for Christians. His teachings and actions exemplify love, compassion, and understanding towards others. As Christians, our goal should be to emulate Jesus in our thoughts, words, and actions. By following His example, we can navigate the complexities of human interactions with grace and humility.

Let's cut to the chase. Jesus is not the example that fits these folks' behavior based on a scripture study. A better example of what these well-meaning Christians should be calling their model is the Pharisees.

If you have ever criticized sin in another person, you look more like a Pharisee than Jesus.

Make no mistake. Sin is an insult to God and weakens the mind, heart, and soul for good works in God's kingdom here on earth. A good Christian repents of their sin. But what of those of us who are so quick to judge others? We all fall prey to this from time to time, and so maybe the better question is this:

## **WHICH PHARISEE ARE YOU?**

The Pharisees were a Jewish sect during the time of Jesus, known for their strict adherence to religious laws and traditions. They held positions of authority and influence within the Jewish community, but their actions and attitudes often clashed with the teachings of Jesus. By examining the behaviors of different Pharisees, we can gain insight into the potential pitfalls of legalism, judgment, and self-righteousness that can hinder our own spiritual growth.

Three Pharisees in the Bible stand out as people you could emulate, either for good reasons or at your own peril.

### **Caiaphas, Saul (Paul), and Nicodemus**





## WHICH ARE YOU? GO AHEAD AND TAKE A GUESS BASED ON WHAT YOU KNOW ABOUT THESE PEOPLE.

### CAIAPHAS

What would you be like if you had guessed Caiaphas as the Pharisee to emulate?

Caiaphas met Jesus just like the others, but unlike the others, he was completely closed-minded and did not change due to the encounter. His eyes, ears, heart, mind, and soul were entirely clouded by fear in the form of selfishness, greed, and the all-consuming desire to retain power.

You can read the account of Jesus on trial before Caiaphas in Matthew 26:57–68.

Caiaphas is like too many of us Christians. We don't even bother first to understand who the other person we are criticizing honestly is. We jump straight to conviction and condemnation.

Even worse is when we do this with entire groups of people.

For this Pharisee, the Bible has no record of Caiaphas' repentance later. This makes him someone just like you if you demonstrate behaviors like:

- 1) being too quick to judge others
- 2) inability to admit when you are wrong and change
- 3) unwillingness to act with kindness and grace toward others.

Are you stuck in a closed mindset? Are you more like this Pharisee than Jesus?

Take inventory of yourself and explore your behaviors with others. Why not try love, compassion, and understanding before criticism and condemnation? You have the power within you to change your mind and mindset. Why not start today?





## SAUL (PAUL)

What would you be like if you had guessed Saul (Paul) as the Pharisee to emulate?

Saul, who later became Paul, was a Pharisee very different from Caiaphas. He, too, met Jesus, but more on that later. Saul was very closed-minded, and he intensely persecuted the followers of Jesus. Saul (Paul) was so sure of his mindset that he killed Stephen. (See Acts 7).

But the difference between Saul (Paul) and Caiaphas was two things:

- 1) Saul's motivation was that he thought he was honoring God by killing Christians
- 2) When Jesus confronted him, he changed

You can better understand Saul (Paul) by reading the story of his conversion in Acts 9:1-22.

So many Christians emulate Saul (Paul), as it seems to take a miracle or an intensely painful experience to change our minds.

I compare Saul's (Paul's) behavior, which is so wholly driven by his closed mindset, to that of a drug or alcohol addict. If you are like Saul, it might take the intense pain of rock bottom before change and growth can occur. Saul (Paul) had to experience direct intervention from Jesus. He was knocked off his horse and made blind until Saul received the Holy Spirit and became a new creation named Paul.

What is it going to take you to change? Does God need to come down from Heaven and knock you off your "horse"?

Are you more like this Pharisee than Jesus?

Take inventory of yourself and explore your behaviors with others. Why not try love, compassion, and understanding before criticism and condemnation? You have the power within you to change your mind and mindset. Why not start today?





## NICODEMUS

What would you be like if you had guessed Nicodemus as the Pharisee to emulate?

Nicodemus was a Pharisee who differed significantly from Saul (Paul) and Caiaphas. He, too, met Jesus, but instead of having a closed mindset, he was open, curious, and eager to understand who Jesus was. He wasn't consumed by greed (Caiaphas) or a prisoner of society's version of doing the right thing (Saul).

In the Bible accounts of Nicodemus in the Gospel of John, there is a very subtle yet beautiful story of a Pharisee who moves from confusion to a slight notion of possibility to belief. You can see how Nicodemus was unaffected by fear or social norms. Ultimately, he overcame his reservations, believed, and served our Lord. See John 3, John 7:45–52, and John 19:38–42.

To emulate Nicodemus, use your open mindset and explore the possibilities. Many of us are like Nicodemus, who takes baby steps of faith toward our Lord daily.

While that all sounds pretty good, and Nicodemus is to be commended as a positive role model of an open mindset, a subtle restriction limits his passion and demonstration of faith. Outside of John, it seems no one knew about Nicodemus. It was by his own choice that the record of his contribution to the deposit of faith was limited. While he changed inside, his fears of persecution kept him from doing more.



## ARE YOU MORE LIKE THIS PHARISEE THAN JESUS?

In conclusion, examining the behaviors of different Pharisees can serve as a mirror for our own actions and attitudes toward others. By recognizing the pitfalls of closed-mindedness, quick judgment, and fear-driven behavior, we can strive to emulate the open-mindedness and compassion demonstrated by Jesus. Just as Nicodemus took baby steps of faith towards the Lord, we too have the power to change our mindset and positively impact our families, communities, and the world. Let us choose love, understanding, and empathy over criticism and condemnation, and in doing so, truly embody the teachings of Jesus.

