

366 Confessions of a recovering Pharisee

If you've never had any niggling doubts about your faith then please don't bother reading this article; I have, indeed in 2011, I lost my faith totally, tried unsuccessfully to rebuild it, moved house and church, and slowly rebuilt. Recognising that I am a Christian Pharisee has helped greatly.

Pharisee: someone (like Saul/Paul) who is well-meaning, studies the Scriptures, tries to put it into practice, and tries to get other people do the same. But what's wrong with that?! Isn't that what Christians should do?! Well, sort of.

Anyway, I'm an ideal Pharisee – it's in my DNA. From my earliest years, I took things to pieces to find out how they worked and invented new things; I studied engineering at uni; I taught physics = learn how things work and explain that to others; I ran my own business = work things out and sell them to others; I became a book editor, where I worked out how to use computer programs to do my job (much) faster.

This last is a good illustration of my Pharisaism. I've written these programs for almost 20 years and am now a world expert (I give the programs away free); a friend and I train people in their use in editing organisations all over the world. The only editors group that is *not* taking them up is my own UK group. I wonder why?!

Over my 57 years as a Christian, I have certainly persuaded a few people to come to faith, but I do wonder how many other people I have put off by my attitude. And among my own family – the people who know me best – not one believes in Jesus. A sobering thought.

Sue and I do jigsaw puzzles – loads of them – and we've just completed the most difficult one ever. We struggled with this painted village snow scene for two days, almost giving up, when Sue said, 'Hang on! On the box it says: Can you spot the 15 differences between the picture on the box and the puzzle itself?!' The boy's red coat is actually green, etc.

What if the 'picture' on the Christian box – what we've always been taught – is largely the right shape, but maybe some of the details are less clear than we think? Christians may not kill one another these days, but as born-again Pharisees, we look down on one another and split churches, criticising each other's views.

If we approach not-yet-believers with an 'I know I'm right' attitude, it encourages them to argue back and causes polarisation – very similar to party politics, where each side knows that any idea 'they' come up with is definitely wrong.

Yes, I know that's (my) human nature, but it's what Paul was trying to get the Roman Christians to see: Ch 1 'Look at all the terrible things *they* do'; Ch 2 'But *you* do the same things, so stop being judgemental!'

Father, please help me to stop judging 'them'.

Paul Bev. 22.1.24