

The Pharisees, as we know, are great ones for expanding and multiplying rules, all in aid of making things better. They want to “manage” processes in such a way as to ensure success without risk. Managers many times have the attitude that the more rules you have, the better defined the process and the better the final product is. But so many times, frivolous rules impede progress and simply get in everyone’s way such that the desired or needed goal cannot be reached. The comprehensively detailed rules become stumbling blocks that overwhelm us. It is like a fog, blinding us to the true path that is the way to accomplish our task.

I often wondered about the aftermath of the incident where the men tore up the roof of a house to let down their sick friend so that Jesus could heal him<sup>1</sup>. This happened one day when Jesus was in Capernaum teaching a large group of people who had come from every Jewish village in the land. There were so many that there was no room left in the house, not even outside the door, and He preached the word to them and healed the sick.

When men came carrying a paralyzed man on a mat and tried to take him into the house to lay him before Jesus, they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd. They made an opening in the roof above Jesus by digging through the tiles and lowered the man into the middle of the crowd, right in front of Jesus.

Jesus was impressed by their faith, and forgave the paralyzed man his sins. The Pharisees and the teachers of the law, of course, reacted against this and accused Jesus of blasphemy. Jesus immediately knew what they were thinking and showed His power by having the man get up and take his mat home. Everyone was amazed and gave praise to God.

Christ was a carpenter<sup>2</sup> and a builder, but He was mostly a Healer<sup>3</sup>. When He began His ministry, He had time for preaching and healing, but not for repairing houses. He healed the paralytic but did not fix the house after the roof was virtually destroyed. But I knew that it had been fixed, though without Jesus it had not been easy.

I talked to the owner of the house, and asked him how he had gotten it restored. He told me that the town leaders had given him a lot of grief. He had to get building permits from the council and review the re-building plans before them. The house was such a mess that he had to get permission even to cart the rubble away before he could begin the process. Perhaps those he sought approval from had an agenda because of Christ’s presence and power there. But is more likely that this was just the way these things worked.

The owner had to bear many indignities getting his home restored. He stated that remembering the miracle was the only way he could get through it. As he worked, thought, he considered that it might take another miracle to finish the project.

The Great Teacher told us that if we were to build a tower, we must count the cost<sup>4</sup>. He didn’t mention the cost of bureaucratic impediments. All good building works, walls, barns, wells, altars, pools, etc., had become subject to such constraints. All of the efforts to turn planning into procedure, to “improve” the process, had become blinded<sup>5</sup> and entangled in their own net<sup>6,7</sup>. Many times, valuable and needed projects were ultimately scrapped as a result. Others took a long time to finish, frustrated all those associated with it (especially the workmen), and became unreasonably expensive.

Jesus spoke of the way the Pharisees laid on burdens that they themselves would not lift a finger to help with<sup>8</sup>. Our brother Paul said that indeed they could not even bear them<sup>9</sup>. It turns out that what they also could not bear are the results – or lack of them – caused by these burdens. The time invested in detailed planning reviews (accounting for the tiniest seeds<sup>10</sup>) left no time or resources for action. The managers involved could not bear that the job was not accomplished even though it was their own -unreasonable demands (in the name of test rigor and righteousness) that ultimately killed it. The work was buried in the details of their management. We must free ourselves from such constraints if we are to accomplish our mission for the Lord.

*Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.*  
*Hebrews 12:1-3*

1. Mark 2:1-5 and Luke 5:17-26
2. Matthew 13:55 and Mark 6:3
3. Matthew 4:24 and many other scriptures
4. Luke 14:28-30
5. Matthew 15:14 and Luke 6:39
6. See Psalm 7:15, Psalm 9:15, Psalm 35:8, Psalm 57:6, Proverbs 26:27, Ecclesiastes 10:8
7. similar to the idea of being "Hoist with his own petard"
8. Matthew 23:4 and Luke 11:46
9. Acts 15:10
10. Matthew 23:23