

L A R R Y O S B O R N E

A C C I D E N T A L
PHARISEES

AVOIDING PRIDE,
EXCLUSIVITY,
AND THE
OTHER DANGERS
OF OVER-ZEALOUS
FAITH

A PDF COMPANION TO THE AUDIOBOOK

ZONDERVAN

Accidental Pharisees

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Osborne, Larry W., 1952–

Accidental pharisees : avoiding pride, exclusivity, and the other dangers of
overzealous faith / Larry Osborne.

p. cm.

ISBN 978-0-310-49444-7 (softcover)

1. Christian life. 2. Pharisees. I. Title.

BV45O1.3.O825 2012

248.4—dc23

2012019463

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Cover design: Ann Gjeldum / Cadmium Design

Interior design: Matthew Van Zomeren

Printed in the United States of America

13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 /DCI/ 20 19 18 17 16 15 14 13 12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4

Discussion Questions for Part 1

THE DARK AND DANGEROUS SIDE OF AN OVERZEALOUS FAITH

1. When it comes to the dark and dangerous side of overzealous faith, “The problem is not spiritual zeal. . . . The problem is unaligned spiritual passion, a zeal for the Lord that fails to line up with the totality of Scripture.”
 - a. Can you think of a time in your life when you were especially zealous for something only to discover later that your zeal didn’t line up with the facts?
 - b. Can you think of a time in your life when you were especially zealous for something in the spiritual realm only to discover that your zeal didn’t line up with Scripture? If so, what happened? What changed your mind? What changes did you make as a result?
2. The Pharisees of Jesus’ day were champions of self-discipline, personal sacrifice, and rigid morality. Imagine you were alive back then. How do you think you would have responded to their spiritual passion? Would you

have been inclined to look up to them, be intimidated by them, be repelled by them, or perhaps have some other response? Why or why not?

3. What, if anything, did you find to be most *surprising* in Joseph of Arimathea's story (the "secret disciple" nobody wants to be)?
 - a. If you were one of the apostles, how do you think you would have viewed Joseph *before* he boldly stepped forward to claim Jesus' body?
 - b. Does his story change anything about the way you look at other Christians? How might it change the way you look at yourself? What does it say to you about the kind of people God uses in his kingdom?
4. If you had to pick just one insight or principle from part 1 to put into practice, what would it be and why?

Discussion Questions for Part 2

PRIDE

1. As we've seen, our spiritual comparisons can be spiritually dangerous. Take a moment to list all of the downsides and dangers you can think of that can come from comparing ourselves with others.
2. It's hard, if not impossible, to avoid making comparisons. They happen naturally and subconsciously.
 - a. What are some areas of your life where you are most prone to compare yourself with others?
 - b. When you find yourself comparing, are you most likely to focus on areas of your life where you don't match up, or on areas where you tend to come out on top? Why do you think that is?
3. If it's true that we all have a list of people we naturally look down on, what types of people are most likely to end up on your personal, "I'm so glad I'm not like them list"? What do you think Jesus would say to you about your list?

4. How would you advise someone who asked you, "What can I do to avoid 'log-eye disease'?" What specific steps would you suggest they take?
5. Do you think most people are inclined to use the Bible as a mirror, or as a pair of binoculars? Which are you most inclined toward, and why?
6. If you had to pick just one insight from part 2 that has your name on it, what would it be? Why? And how do you plan to respond to it?

Discussion Questions for Part 3

EXCLUSIVITY

1. As you look at the churches and Christians you personally know, are there any areas where you believe the bar needs to be raised in terms of what it means to follow Jesus? If so, list them. What makes these things particularly important?
2. Have you ever found yourself drawn toward an expression of Christianity that emphasized “thinning the herd” more than “expanding the kingdom”? If so, what are some of the areas and issues you focused on? How would you respond differently today?
 - a. As we saw, a bias toward (or a delight in) thinning the herd is spiritually dangerous and out of line with Jesus. If you had to confront someone who preferred thinning the herd to expanding the kingdom, what would you say to them?
 - b. Obviously, there is a time and a place to thin the herd. Jesus did so. Can you think of some areas today where we need to thin the herd?

3. Have you ever experienced or observed the NIMBY effect (Not In My Back Yard) in your own church, small group, or circle of Christian friends? What happened? What can you learn from that experience?
4. Would you agree that, at some level, we are all “consumer” Christians? Why or why not? And is that a good thing, a bad thing, or no big deal?
5. Thinking back through the chapters in part 3, what one thing most jumps out at you as something you had never seen before or you need to work on most? What makes that particular principle or insight important? How do you plan to respond to it?

Discussion Questions for Part 4

LEGALISM

1. “Litmus test Christianity” is a dangerous type of legalism that can cause us to write off other genuine Christians as bogus Christians. It’s an easy trap to fall into.
 - a. Do you find yourself naturally drawn toward the clarifying lines of “litmus test Christianity” or repelled by them? If so, why do you think that is?
 - b. Which, if any, of the tribes listed in chapter 10 would you fit best in? Are there any other litmus tests that you or your tribe might be prone to use? If so, list them.
2. In part 4 we looked at both “old-school legalism” and “new-school legalism.” Which of the two do you think you or your church are most tempted to fall into? Why? What are some of the dangers that come with it?
3. The Pharisees of old added to the Scriptures in an attempt to help God out. Looking back over your Christian journey, have you come across examples of people:
 - a. Adding to Scripture? And if so, how so?

- b. Turning implications into commands (making the personal application of a passage a universal rule for everyone)? Again, what are some examples?
- 4. What lessons can we take away from the “diet wars” and the “Sabbath wars” of the New Testament days?
 - a. What are some present-day equivalents of the New Testament diet wars and Sabbath wars?
 - b. How might Paul’s instructions to the Romans apply to these modern-day issues?
- 5. Accidental Pharisees often are driven by the fear that showing too much mercy will lead to compromise and half-hearted obedience. But the fact is that we all tend to treat some sins as less deserving of mercy than others. Why do you think that is? And which ones do you have the hardest time offering mercy to?

Discussion Questions for Part 5

IDOLIZING THE PAST

1. Do you ever find yourself guilty of idolizing the past?
 - a. If so, what are some of the “good old days” you find yourself longing for? And why?
 - b. What are some of the ways that looking at the past through “rose-colored glasses” might warp our perspective? Be as specific as possible.
2. Part 5 discussed the three “whipping boys” that people love to disparage when comparing today to an idealized and idolized past—the church, church leaders, and culture. Which of these three are you most prone to criticize? Why?
3. After reading the chapters in this part, can you think of any great spiritual leaders from the past that you might be putting on a pedestal? If so, who and how so?
4. Why do we tend to remember only the good in our heroes?
 - a. How might this be dangerous to our spiritual walk? Be as specific as possible.

- b. If someone asked you, "How can we learn from the past without idolizing the past?" what would you tell them?
5. Part 5 ends by summarizing the three great dangers that flow out of an inaccurate and unrealistic idolizing of the past:
- Thinking that the sins and failings of today are unique and rare.
 - Lashing out in anger and disgust as if the sins of today are worse than the sins of yesterday.
 - Attempting to help Jesus by yanking out the weeds we see growing up among the wheat in the church.

Which, if any, of these three are you most susceptible to?
Why?

Discussion Questions for Part 6

THE QUEST FOR UNIFORMITY

1. After reading part 6, how, in your own words, would you define the difference between *uniformity* and *unity*?
2. Have you ever seen firsthand a situation where the quest for uniformity destroyed the potential for biblical unity? If so, what happened? What did you learn?
3. If you had to name your tribe's boundary markers, code words, and "red-word" teachers, what would that list look like? Be as specific as possible.
 - a. How would someone from outside your tribe learn about those things if he or she wanted to fit in?
 - b. Would the Jesus of the New Testament be inside or outside of those boundaries?
4. As we saw, there are some things that are worth fighting for. Which specific issues do you believe should be on that list? What filter do you use to decide when an issue is worth fighting for and when it's best to "agree to disagree"?

5. On a scale from 0 (we are clones) to 10 (we are shockingly different), how would you rate the diversity (not just racial diversity) of your congregation? How would you rate the Christian diversity of your personal relationships, circles of friends, and colleagues?
6. Looking back over the chapters in part 6, what one thing most jumps out at you as a new insight or an important principle? Why? How do you plan to respond to it?

Discussion Questions for Part 7

GIFT PROJECTION

1. What are some of the gifts and callings in your life that you would be most likely to project onto others?
2. From your experience, what are some of the most common gifts and callings that tend to be “gift projected” in your church? To help identify them, think about what typically gets promoted, highlighted, or valued in your church. What gifts, ministries, and callings tend to get ignored?
3. Have you ever been guilty of “gift envy,” wishing that you had gifts that others possess and failing to value the gifts God has given to you? If so, where is that most likely to show up? What do you see as the root of these feelings of inferiority or envy?
4. Consider the myth of “full-time ministry.”
 - a. Do you tend to attribute more dignity and significance to those who serve in professional ministry? If so, why do you think this is so?

- b. What could a church do to undercut the myth of full-time ministry and to foster a healthier view of Christian vocation? List as many specific things as you can.
5. Are you prone to be one of the “money police,” or are you more likely to be criticized by one?
- a. After reading the chapters in part 7, are there any parts of Scripture that you realize you may have neglected, ignored, or glossed over?
 - b. What passages and insights in part 7 did you find to be most challenging or troubling, or that you simply didn’t agree with? Why?