

ACCIDENTAL PHARISEE

WEEK 2: OVERZEALOUS FAITH



How Did Pharisees Get Such a Bad Name?

Calling someone a Pharisee wasn't always considered a bad thing. First century Pharisees are made up of people who love God, love the scriptures, and are trying their best to live by them:

- They excelled in everything we admire spiritually.
- They were zealous for God.
- They were completely **committed** to their faith.
- They were theologically astute.
- They were considered the most committed of the committed.
- They fastidiously obeyed even the most obscure commands.

"If we fail to understand how spiritually impressive the Pharisees were, we will remain blind to the danger of becoming like them. We'll assume that their tragic transformation from passionate defenders of God into mortal enemies of God could never happen to us."

– Larry Osbourne

Jesus and Paul both referenced Pharisees when they wanted to illustrate the highest levels of spiritual commitment (Matthew 5:20 and Philippians 3:4-6).

The Dark and Dangerous Side of Overzealous Faith

Zealous faith can have a dangerous, dark side. While recent calls for radical Christians have challenged many to be more passionate about their faith, the down side can be a budding arrogance and self-righteousness that "accidentally" sneaks into our outlook.

No one starts out with the desire to become a modern-day Pharisee and no one looks in the mirror and sees a Pharisee. No one describes themselves as a Pharisee – it always applies to someone else.

Passionate faith can have a dark side – a really dark side. Types of overzealous faith:

- **Unaligned zeal** in ourselves:
 - It is easy to see in others
 - Areas of biblically unaligned and overzealous faith are unintentional.
 - It doesn't matter if overzealous is by choice or by accident – it messes everything up and hurts everyone.
- **Jerks for Jesus**:
 - Self-appointed spiritual watch dogs. Almost always true to some Scripture but it not true to all of Scripture.
 - Fail to do it in a loving way (Jude 3-4).

- Fail to do it without quarrelling, to be kind, and to be gentle (2 Tim 2:24-26).

“Accidental Pharisee are people like you and me who, despite the best of intentions and a desire to honor God, unwittingly end up pursuing an overzealous model of faith that sabotages the work of the Lord we think we’re serving.”

– Larry Osbourne

Warning Signs of overzealous faith:

- It’s often triggered by an eye-opening event where you make big changes and then you notice that some people lag behind.
 - Can be a missions trip.
 - Can be a conference.
 - Can be a power new book.
- It’s at this point that your personal pursuit of holiness can morph into something dangerous with those who don’t share your passion:
 - You become critical (disgust and disdain) for people who don’t share your passion.
 - Inevitably, being **right** will become more important than being kind, gracious, or loving.

What Constitutes a Real Disciple?

How do you see the Gospel? Is the barrier to entry low or is it supposed to be high?

- Did Jesus come to let the riffraff in or to drive the lukewarm out?
- Did Jesus come to call the masses or to thin the herd?
- Did Jesus come only to call those strong in faith?
- Does Jesus like consumer Christians?
- Does God call each of us to leave everything behind to be saved?

Passages that teach that following Jesus is hard	Passages that teach that Jesus is compassionate on those whose faith is weak
Luke 9:23-26, 9:59-62	Matt 11:28-30
Matt 7:13-14	Luke 22:31-34, John 21:1-19
Matt 7:21-23	John 20:24-29
Mark 10:17-22	Mark 5:25-34

“A full and careful reading of the Gospels reveals that Jesus asked only a few specific individuals to leave everything behind and follow him. He actually told some who wanted to join him to stay behind.”

– Larry Osbourne

Joseph of Arimathea

Most of us don't think about Joseph of Arimathea. Joseph was the man who assumed responsibility for the burial of Jesus after his crucifixion. Without Joseph, it is likely that Jesus' body would have been thrown on the trash heap. When everyone else scattered, Joseph was the only disciple who stepped forward to claim the body of Jesus.

“Joseph would be the poster child for a counterfeit disciple. He’s exactly the kind of Christ follower that most speakers preach against, ridicule, and warn us not to become.”

– Larry Osbourne

What do we know about Joseph? Facts about Joseph:

- He was rich (Matthew 27:57)
- He was a secret disciple because he was fearful (John 19:38)
- He was part of the ruling Sanhedrin who put Jesus to death (Mark 15:43)

Today's church would probably criticize Joseph because of these characteristics. However, scripture says that he was a good and righteous man:

*“⁵⁰Now there was a man named Joseph, from the Jewish town of Arimathea. He was a member of the council, **a good and righteous man**,⁵¹who had not consented to their decision and action; and he was looking for the kingdom of God. ⁵²This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. ⁵³Then he took it down and wrapped it in a linen shroud and laid him in a tomb cut in stone, where no one had ever yet been laid. ⁵⁴It was the day of Preparation, and the Sabbath was beginning. ⁵⁵The women who had come with him from Galilee followed and saw the tomb and how his body was laid. ⁵⁶Then they returned and prepared spices and ointments.” – Luke 23:50-56 ESV*

Discussion Questions:

1. Can you think of a time in your life when you were especially zealous for something in the spiritual realm only to discover later that your zeal didn't line up with Scripture?
2. Does the story of Joseph of Arimathea change anything about the way you look at other Christians or how you look at wealthy Christians?
3. The Pharisees of Jesus' day were champions of self-discipline, personal sacrifice, and rigid morality. Imagine you were alive back then:
 - a. How do you think you would have responded to their spiritual passion?
 - b. Would you have been inclined to look up to them, be intimidated by them, be repelled by them, or perhaps have some other response.