

Text: Luke 11:37-54

Title: Outside or Inside?

Truth: Jesus harshly criticizes externally-focused religion and highlights the critical importance of inner purity.

Date/Location: Sunday July 21, 2024 at FBC

Introduction

In pronouncing the woes on the Pharisees, scribes, and lawyers, the Lord exercises the prophetic office much like the prophets before Him.¹ For people with a bias toward Jesus “meek and mild,” this portion is uncomfortable or unfamiliar. But Jesus is God manifested in the flesh (1 Timothy 3:16), and we know that God’s holiness exercises judgment against sin. Jesus is the second person of the Triune God and has always existed since eternity past. The works of God in the Old Testament are the works of Jesus; the works of Jesus in the New Testament are the works of God (John 5:17-19).

I. Inside and Outside, v. 37-41

- A. Setting: Meal with a Pharisee. Jesus received invitations from sinful people and even ate with them. This does not undercut by any means a passage like 1 Cor. 5:11 which has to do with a disobedient brother whose conduct will sully and endanger the church.
- B. Controversy: The Pharisee who invited Jesus noticed that Jesus did not go through a ritual of washing his hands. The Pharisee’s concern was ceremonial uncleanness, not washing to remove germs or sanitize hands like we do today because of disease. The Law did not require this, but the traditions of the elders (Matt. 15:2, Mark 7:3, 5).
- C. The Bible does not say that the Pharisee said anything aloud, but Jesus knew what He was thinking anyway. Clearly Jesus knew about these rituals, but He chose not to do it on this occasion to give opportunity for his teaching against externalism in religion.

¹ Many of the prophets declared woes: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Amos, Micah, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, and Zechariah.

- D. Jesus criticized the Pharisee for hypocrisy. In fact, He broadened the criticism to the whole class of Pharisees. They had a deep and legalistic concern for outward cleanness but inwardly they were filthy. Their concerns mirror our natural concerns as well because we have a good bit of honor and shame concern within ourselves because of our pride. Are we more concerned about cleaning our house for guests than we are cleaning our hearts for God? Are we more concerned about the family name and reputation than we are of what is truly going on under the cover of darkness?
- E. Jesus taught this Pharisee that since God created both the outside and inside, it is important to focus on inward realities and it is *foolish* not to.
- F. To overcome this misdirected focus, Jesus told him to give alms. In the NKJV it translates “alms of such things as you have.” This does not do justice to the original Greek, nor does it really answer the inside/outside issue. A better translation is to give charitably of “the things inside of you.” Give your heart to God. Expunge greed and wickedness. If you do that, then you need not be troubled about uncleanness of hands when you eat. Defilement comes from within, not from outside.

II. The Six Woes, v. 42-52

- A. What is a *woe*? It is a statement of judgment; a statement of doom; in technical grammatical terms it is an *interjection*; it is an interjection that denotes pain or displeasure, hardship or distress. If someone remains under the pronouncement of woe, eventually they will receive the hardship or distress that is implicit in the warning. Meanwhile, as God’s frown of displeasure hangs over them. Those in Christ Jesus escape that frown and come under the smile of His lovingkindness.
- B. (v. 42) Woe – Pharisees were ignoring the most important things. The Pharisees would worry about tithing the tiniest herbs, mere fractions of an ounce, but they were not concerned at all about love and justice.

Some people nitpick and obsess about the smallest details, often perceiving them incorrectly as well. We must take care of small

things in our service to God, but we need to be *more* concerned with love and justice. Our concern for these things will cause us to overlook minor offenses and unfinished tasks. You might be concerned that something is not done the way you would do it, but in approaching that issue with another person you do not consider how to best love that person. And is it an issue of eternal significance anyway? Maybe keep your mouth shut!

- C. (v. 43) Woe – Pharisees love to be praised by people. This is another pride-driven response in *our* hearts. Many of us want praise from people. We sometimes feign that we do not when we actually do.
- D. (v. 44) Woe – The NKJV has “scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites” like Matthew 23. They are like graves unseen. They had filthy lives hidden and unnoticed by others, not easily detected but just as defiling.

This caused me to consider that we too may have placed so much focus on the external that we forgot the internal. We may not have learned to despise our inward corruption as we ought.

- E. (v. 45-46) Woe – These lawyers loved to make people’s lives difficult by how they interpreted the law and laid requirements on people as to how to obey it. But what was good for the goose was not good for the gander because the Jewish lawyers did not practice what they preached.

The lawyer who argued with Jesus felt that what Jesus said applied to more than just the Pharisees and scribes. Good observation!

To understand this properly, we must understand that the Lord is not talking about lawyers who simply explained the Law of Moses. The whole legal “industry” of that era was built around a set of traditions that were outside of the Bible. The traditions were held so dear and in such high regard that they even *replaced* the word of God. Mark 7:1-8 and Matthew 15:1-9 show this. The same thing happened in the generations after Jesus ascended to heaven (Col. 2:8) and it happens today.

- F. (v. 47-51) Woe – Likely the Lord refers to the whole bunch of the scribes and Pharisees. This woe has to do with the idea that they

build memorial tombs for the prophets, while it was their fathers who killed the prophets. The act of building these tombs was not inherently bad because you could build a tomb to honor a prophet killed by your forefathers and express a good heart in so doing. But the Pharisees and scribes were more like their forefathers than they were like the prophets! This is what made the building of the tombs just so much more hypocrisy on their part.

God was very patient and sent many prophets and later apostles to reveal His message to the people. But they killed and persecuted them, with the result that God would pour out judgment on them as a corporate solidarity with their forefathers in the guilt that they all shared. Although they did not “do” the act of killing a prophet several hundred years ago, they had the same hatred in their hearts that their forefathers did. This hatred led them to kill Jesus and to persecute the later apostles and prophets. This includes the blood of Abel to Zechariah,² covering the span of the Old Testament. They would suffer the penalty of their error—and they did both in history and will in eternity if they did not repent.

G. (v. 52) Woe – the lawyers again. They hid knowledge by twisting the Scriptures around so that people thought it was impossible to understand them. They were hiding the word of God instead of publishing it.

Our kind of church exists in part because this problem is pervasive. Because of pride, humans love to claim they have esoteric knowledge that most people do not have. This makes them feel superior and, in some cases, allows them to wield power over others. Those who can read are able to pull the wool over the eyes of those who cannot read. Those who have insider information can get a leg up on those who do not.

Like the constant dripping of mineral-rich water from a cave ceiling builds stalagmites and stalactites, false teaching if repeated over a

² This Zechariah was probably the prophet we know of from Zechariah 1:1. There is another Zechariah who died similarly in 2 Chronicles 24:20-22. Note particularly verse 22. As he died, he called on God to repay his persecutors.

long enough time in your life begins to add material to your belief system.

Instead, we try to translate the Bible clearly and explain the Bible carefully to untangle your brain from any faulty accretions that have found their way into your beliefs. We try to interpret the Bible simply, plainly, directly, and show what it means and how it applies. It is our heartfelt desire not to add nor to subtract from Scripture. As interpreting a text in the study and explaining it in the pulpit is a human enterprise, it is impossible to get it completely correct. That fact, however, does not excuse us from working hard at it. We try to let the pure water of the Word of God run over your life—instead of adding crusty masses like the cancer of false teaching that covers up the true teaching.

A life of filthy morals will reduce and almost entirely take away your ability to understand the Scriptures. It is bad enough to have *someone else* lock you out of the Bible by hiding it or not translating it or twisting its interpretation. But it is a tragedy of another order if you lock *yourself* out from the Bible.

The terrible impact of what the lawyers did in obscuring God's truth was to hinder those entering the kingdom of Christ. They themselves did not go in either.

III. Hate-Filled Response, v. 53-54

- A. What Jesus was saying was correct. The Pharisees and scribes and lawyers were doing all those things, *and* pretending to be righteous, *and* harming the people they were supposed to help by feeding and leading. They were no better than the Israelite “shepherds” of old (Jeremiah 23:2). They were to lead people *to* the Messiah, but instead they led them directly *away* from Him.
- B. Instead of repenting, they began to “assail Him vehemently.” They began arguing with Him about various things, and trying to catch Him say something they could use (twist) to accuse Him of breaking the Law.

Conclusion

It would be hard for any normal human to survive under such scrutiny. In this case, the perfect Lord never said anything amiss, but that did not stop His opponents from lying about Him to achieve their murderous goal in the end. Woe to them indeed.

This all is a convicting truth. How much are you like a Pharisee in your heart? How much of that sin nature hangs on in your life, in rebellion against your good Father? Do you wrongly prioritize some things in your life so that internal matters are eclipsed? Do you love the praise of people? Is there hidden filth in your heart? Do you have more in common with your sinful forefathers than with the prophets they persecuted? Do you keep the Word from others?

Or are you genuinely concerned with *inner* religion, as some used to call it, *piety*? Inward purity. Love for God and neighbor. Service for God and neighbor.

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