



The Gospel According to Luke Wk. 58 “When Religion Gets in the Way” By Pastor Jody May

Luke 11:37-53 ESV

Woes to the Pharisees and Lawyers

³⁷ While Jesus was speaking, a Pharisee asked him to dine with him, so he went in and reclined at table. ³⁸ The Pharisee was astonished to see that he did not first wash before dinner. ³⁹ And the Lord said to him, “Now you Pharisees cleanse the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness. ⁴⁰ You fools! Did not he who made the outside make the inside also? ⁴¹ But give as alms those things that are within, and behold, everything is clean for you.

⁴² “But woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and every herb, and neglect justice and the love of God. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others. ⁴³ Woe to you Pharisees! For you love the best seat in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces. ⁴⁴ Woe to you! For you are like unmarked graves, and people walk over them without knowing it.”

⁴⁵ One of the lawyers answered him, “Teacher, in saying these things you insult us also.” ⁴⁶ And he said, “Woe to you lawyers also! For you load people with burdens hard to bear, and you yourselves do not touch the burdens with one of your fingers. ⁴⁷ Woe to you! For you build the tombs of the prophets whom your fathers killed. ⁴⁸ So you are witnesses and you consent to the deeds of your fathers, for they killed them, and you build their tombs. ⁴⁹ Therefore also the Wisdom of God said, ‘I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and persecute,’ ⁵⁰ so that the blood of all the prophets, shed from the foundation of the world, may be charged against this generation, ⁵¹ from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who perished between the altar and the sanctuary. Yes, I tell you, it will be required of this generation. ⁵² Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge. You did not enter yourselves, and you hindered those who were entering.”

⁵³ As he went away from there, the scribes and the Pharisees began to press him hard and to provoke him to speak about many things, ⁵⁴ lying in wait for him, to catch him in something he might say.

Introduction: The problem with Ritualistic Christianity

1. Confronting the Empty and Morally Blind.



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At the beginning of our story today Jesus has been asked for either a late lunch or early dinner, whatever one it is, it is a formal meal, at the table, to be reclined at. The dishes are put in place, the food is ready, there is no more prep work to be done and yet a **discussion begins over and extra handwashing**. The host of this meal is shocked that Jesus has not done like he did **(explain of extra washing)**.

The man that asked Jesus, is a Pharisee, no stranger to us but let’s take a moment here to remind ourselves who this person represents. In that country at this time there are between 5-6k of these individuals scattered throughout the Jewish settlements. The root of the word *Pharisee* means ‘separated’ (detached) meaning these guys are separated ones, probably in all areas, from the Sadducees, the Romans, the Herodians, and even the common people, their name was to cause you to look at them differently than you did anyone else.

They followed in addition to the written law, a way of life that came from oral traditions; *Halakah* – supposedly going as far back as Moses himself. This tradition was passed down and lived out to fulfill the command of God.

This outlook may be illustrated by the statement of Siphra to Lev. 11:44 (39a), “ ‘Be holy ones (qedošim) for I am holy’ (qadoš), that is: ‘As I am holy (qadoš) so should you be holy ones (qedošim); as I am a separated one (paruš) so should you be separated ones (perušim).’ ” The Mekilta on Ex. 19:6 is similar: “ ‘You should be to me a kingdom of priests, a holy nation:’ ‘Holy’—holy, hallowed, separated from the peoples of the world and their detestable things.”¹

He was usually a layman without extra biblical education, but there were those that sought out rabbinical training and they would become the scribes or the lawyers which you also met in our story today.² Their goal was to replicate the laws of temple purity in the home.³ This is what they sought emulate in the towns, a pseudo-priesthood, to be admired for their separateness while offering leadership for the common man. I guess the closest thing that you could compare

¹ Wyatt, R. J. (1979–1988). [Pharisees](#). In G. W. Bromiley (Ed.), *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Revised* (Vol. 3, p. 822). Wm. B. Eerdmans.

² Ibid. 823.

³ Ibid, 823.



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them to were your local officials and politicians and tv preachers, that were in places of high visibility and esteem.

It is important to note that the Pharisees were not necessarily disliked by the people. Even though their teachings were hard to emulate, the life they chose hard to do, it seems the people raised them to a stance of local heroes that were favored by God, to stand for them. It was most likely that this perception, this position in life, is why they got so mad at Jesus, because it was exactly what Jesus condemned them for (just think about the current national political scene).

³⁹ ... “Now you Pharisees cleanse the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness. ⁴⁰ You fools! Did not he who made the outside make the inside also? ⁴¹ But give as alms those things that are within, and behold, everything is clean for you.

Jesus, looking down at His empty plate, makes the statement **that they are way TOO CONCERNED about the outside of the plate**, instead of the side you eat off of. Jesus, again in grace, offers them truth, **give or work at presenting your life from your heart, be concerned at what comes from there**. When that happens, your heart will be cleaned, because neither you nor God want to serve the world from a dirty plate. But you see **for the empty and morally blind person their attention is only on the byproduct of the hands not the heart**. Jesus’ ancestor, taught them this, he knew not to trust the work of his hands:

Psalm 139:23-24 ESV

²³ Search me, O God, and know my heart!

Try me and know my thoughts!

²⁴ And see if there be any grievous way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting!

- **King David**

This morning, let me challenge you before we move on, is your prayer like David and begs God to know your heart, to see past your actions, desires correction from God, OR are you like this Pharisee that never contemplates your heart



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because you think your actions prove that you are morally superior to someone else?

2. The Dangers that come from being Morally Blind.

⁴² "But woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and every herb, and neglect justice and the love of God. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others. ⁴³ Woe to you Pharisees! For you love the best seat in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces. ⁴⁴ Woe to you! For you are like unmarked graves, and people walk over them without knowing it."

These Woes, they are reminiscent of the OT prophetic utterances against those that were far from God. Here **Jesus, by His words elevates Himself over the Pharisees**. He is placing Himself above their status their esteem, and He is doing it in such a way that He is **cutting the legs** out from under them to keep them from doing it again. If this guy didn't like Jesus to begin with, he for sure doesn't like Him now.

These three woes what do they mean –

- 1st one shows their ability to be meticulous about **the things that don't matter**. Tithing on a plant that no one cares about instead of caring for others. If you loved God and gave justice to your people, your offerings would reflect it, they would show why we give to God, out of love, but right now your offerings show you give out of fear.
- 2nd this second Woe shows why you like to be meticulous in everything you do, because it gets you the best seats in the house. Because **of your love for prestige**, it will cause you to lose any real esteem from another person.
- 3rd instead of giving your people a hand up, you bring them down. Like when someone walks across an unmarked grave, over the dead, **you make others unclean by your association with them**. You are the dirtier person, not the average joe schmo.

It makes me think about the customs we have in the evangelical traditional south that we elevate so that people can see we have had a proper upbringing: take



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your hat off inside, hold the door open for ladies, say mam and sir to your elders, here’s the deal. If we taught our children to fear God and others, to love them first above themselves, then you know what comes after that, the thank-yous, the mams and sirs, the holding of the doors and the establishment of proper etiquette again. **Manners will almost automatically follow the heart that is concerned for others... (Manners for me became a way to hide my sin)**

Jesus nails the problem down for us in John when giving commentary on what the Pharisees do.

John 5:44 ESV

“How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?”

This sin is Glory seeking, are we getting the praise we think we deserve!?

Here’s the question we all need to ask ourselves this morning? Where are we seeking to raise our religious levels? What behaviors, what acts, what public demonstrations do we perform so that others will think more of us? What is it that we spend our time doing so that we can get public favors in return, a compliment, a place of honor among those we live?

What this means about us – To feel WORTH we work hard at making ourselves look better than others. That’s our religious system elevating us in the sight of others, **that’s called IDOLATRY**, glorifying ourselves over glorifying God.

What the Gospel has done for us – To be made WORTHY Jesus made Himself to look like us. Elevating God once and for all above all, so that we can see that we are trying to do is pointless...

2 Corinthians 5:21 ESV

²¹For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Jesus bore our true appearance so we can stop trying to mask out hearts!



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Jesus bore the ugliness of our sin, what comes from the inside of us, but as bad as it was that sin could never touch His insides, His heart, we still have a perfect God! That's why we worship Him. His perfection is now OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS (**imputation**) being displayed from a heart that loves Him, because we have seen Him! Now our actions are coming from a clean inside.

Because of this **we can give up self-idolatry**, we can **stop seeking the esteem** of others, and we can esteem and love our neighbors rightly because our religious ritualistic rules mean nothing anymore. There is a price though if you can't, there is a greater judgment for those that just keep getting loss in their religion especially if you are an influencer, a teacher, a leader, a parent...

3. The Danger of causing others to become Blind.

⁴⁵ One of the lawyers answered him, "Teacher, in saying these things you insult us also." ⁴⁶ And he said, "Woe to you lawyers also! For you load people with burdens hard to bear, and you yourselves do not touch the burdens with one of your fingers. ⁴⁷ Woe to you! For you build the tombs of the prophets whom your fathers killed. ⁴⁸ So you are witnesses and you consent to the deeds of your fathers, for they killed them, and you build their tombs. ⁴⁹ Therefore also the Wisdom of God said, 'I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and persecute,' ⁵⁰ so that the blood of all the prophets, shed from the foundation of the world, may be charged against this generation, ⁵¹ from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who perished between the altar and the sanctuary. Yes, I tell you, it will be required of this generation. ⁵² Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge. You did not enter yourselves, and you hindered those who were entering."

Now we come to the guys that have taught and modelled what the other Pharisees are doing. These guys through the construction of more commands and laws have continuously led astray the other Pharisees and they have made connection with God an impossible thing for the common man. **What they did in bringing the temple purity to the towns further away from Jerusalem is that they increased the perceived distance they were from God.** Now the people felt it was impossible to connect with God in between their visits to the temple



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because of what the scribes were teaching them, AND Jesus condemns them for it.

- Woe to you lawyers that give rules that are already being done by you but are impossible for other people.
- Woe to you because you NOW HAVE NO EXCUSE for you have me the light, unlike the previous generations before you (**vs. 47-51**). Your ancestors killed the prophets, those that you built monuments to, but you are about to kill the one they prophesied about, that's much worse!
- Woe to you for not only have you kept yourself out of the kingdom, but you have kept others out.

Echoing what Jesus' brother would write about later in the NT.

James 3:1 ESV

Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.

Family, you don't have to keep up pretenses of being better than others, God knows your heart. But everyone in this room, think about those under you, most of us are parents, are we keeping them from the Kingdom because we are choosing to remain blind? **All of us will be held responsible not just for our own choices but for those that we may lead astray.**

Dads/Husbands/Men and Boys may we all practice the humility that we must model in our leadership and let's stop trying to impress others with our works but let us work to love God and love justice for our neighbors.

Moms/Wives/Women and Girls may you all practice the humility that you must model in your homes in quiet loving submission offering staunch support as your families attempt to live out a God supplied righteousness.



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PRAY

COMMUNION

BENEDICTION

Go in the name of the Father, that allowed His Son to pay for our sin so that in exchange we may have a heart that can reflect His righteousness.

Go in the name of the Son, that took the condemnation of His own Woes upon Himself elevating the Father before our eyes, so we make break away from self-idolatry.

Go in the name and the power of the HS, that causes us to see what Jesus has done for us, empowering our testimonies revealing the Glory of God to our neighbors.