

Luke 11:37-54—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.

It is a popular objection raised by many against Christianity—“You call yourself a Christian, but I see how you live; I’ve seen you sin; you’re a hypocrite and the church is full of hypocrites.” Indeed, you will find hypocrites in the church. But, you will find hypocrites in all walks of life. Lately, we’ve seen flagrant examples of hypocrisy in the world of politics and mass media.

While there are certainly hypocrites in the Church, the statement that the church is full of hypocrites is false. Rather, “the church is full of sinners” is a statement of truth. In fact, entry into church membership requires an admission that one is a sinner and is saved from sin, death, and judgement only through the work of Jesus Christ. A hypocrite, on the other hand, is pretentious. They claim to be something

they are not. A hypocrite claims to be more righteous than they actually are. A hypocrite will apply his standard of righteousness to others, but not to himself. In this passage, Jesus addresses two groups of people, Pharisees and Lawyers and though He does not use the term hypocrite, He clearly describes hypocritical behavior. In their hypocrisy, these men, claiming a flawless righteousness before God, hinder people from entering the Kingdom of God. Six times in this encounter, Jesus pronounces woe on the Pharisees and Law experts. Instead of being blessed by God, as they suppose, these religious leaders are cursed by our Lord. And in a remarkable statement, Jesus proclaims that the blood of the prophets from Abel to Zachariah will be charged to this generation, the generation represented by the men who hosted Jesus at this dinner.

This passage serves as a check on our own lives, to beware of the judgmentalism of the Pharisees and to renew a commitment to living before our neighbor empowered by the grace of God. A true believer understands that they are a sinner saved by the mercy and grace of God in Christ and this understanding leads to true humility and the extending of grace to others.

A DISINGENUOUS INVITATION

Vs. 37—While Jesus was speaking, a Pharisee asked him to dine with him, so he went in and reclined at table.

Gracious hospitality is something commended even commanded by God, but this is an invitation born out of hostility, not hospitality. The context indicates that this invitation to dinner comes while Jesus has just declared condemnation on this generation. The Pharisees have asked for a clear sign that Jesus is the Christ of God. Jesus responds by calling that generation evil. That this was not a sincere friendly invitation is seen in verse: 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.***

These religious leaders were looking for some bit of evidence by which they could clearly condemn Jesus.

Contrast this meal with a meal to which Jesus invited Himself. Jesus was entering the city of Jericho and the crowds gathered, as usual and a little man climbed a tree to get a better look at the Lord Jesus. ***Luke 19:5-10—And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today.”*** ⁶ ***So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully.*** ⁷ ***And when they saw it, they all grumbled, “He has gone in to be the***

guest of a man who is a sinner.”⁸ And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, “Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold.”⁹ And Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham.¹⁰ For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”

In this instance you see the distinction between the judgementalism of the Pharisees and the grace of Jesus. The people grumbled because Zacchaeus was a sinner; he was a tax-collector, a collaborator with the Roman oppressors. There was no hope for him. This conclusion reflected the influence of the Pharisees. Now, notice the response to the grace of Jesus—joyful faith, and repentance; this was evidence of this sinner’s salvation. This should be the response of everyone who receives from the heart the call of Jesus, to believe in Him and turn from sin.

BACKGROUND OF THE PHARISEES AND SCRIBES

A scribe was a professional who copied the texts of the Old Testament. Because of this many of them were lawyers, too, that is so-called experts in applying the Law of Moses. A Pharisee was a person who held to the theological tenants and creeds that were reflective of God’s Law. Many Scribes and lawyers were Pharisees, though the Apostle Paul, whose profession was a tent maker could call himself a Pharisee of Pharisees.

The Greek, “*Pharisaíos*” transcribes an Aramaic word meaning “separated.” This particular sect, or party of Judaism found its origin in the time after the exile where there was a call to separate from the pagans in the land. This party of the Pharisees is found in the intertestamental period where the priests seemed to be more focused on political power and social standing than the Law of God as they faced oppression of the Greek tyrant Antiochus Epiphanes.

You could say the Pharisees were the Puritans of their day in the 2nd Century BC. Many of their creedal statements of faith were good and true but over the years traditions were added in the commentaries on the Law which obscured the true law and word of God.

HYPOCRITICAL BEHAVIOR

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.

Their focus is on the visible behavior, but not the motives of the heart.

When Jesus reclined to eat, he had not washed His hands. The astonishment of this Pharisee reveals his judgmentalism and this gives Jesus the opening to describe their hypocrisy. 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.***

It is a reality of human nature to be accepted, liked, and even praised by those around us. The Pharisees focused on behavior that they deemed reflected God’s law and His favor upon them. Outwardly, they presented an image of righteousness, but inwardly sin still reigned and ruled their hearts; they were self-centered. The matter of washing before eating was arbitrary and not a part of God’s Word, yet Jesus is condemned for not washing his hands. But the LORD who created the hands created the heart and soul of man too. A cup or plate clean on the outside but dirty on the inside is repugnant and not acceptable. So, what good is it to have clean hands, but a filthy, greedy heart? Jesus’ charge here touches on the matter of giving alms to the poor. Give from within a pure heart, a heart of compassion and not just to be seen as a righteous person to receive praise. In the matter of giving, don’t broadcast your actions, but don’t even let your left hand know what the right is doing; give in secret and not to be seen

They missed the deeper points of God’s Law

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.***

The Pharisees go to great lengths to demonstrate that they are eager to please God and this is seen in the matter of tithing. Now the Law doesn’t mention mint, rue and every, herb—these were additions according to tradition. So when Jesus says you ought to have done these, he means yes, honor the law of tithing, but do not neglect the matters of justice and love. Tithe, but also look out for the poor and the oppressed, the widow and the orphan. Don’t let anyone take advantage of them.

They relished public attention. 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.”*

Seats of honor and greetings with lavish praise were important to these men. This reveals a pride that is not the result of Godliness. Jesus, calls them unmarked graves. According to the law of Moses to touch a dead body would make one ceremonially unclean, by extension to walk on a grave was to touch the dead. So, when caravans of people would come to Jerusalem, people would whitewash graves to avoid the risk of travelers walking on these graves becoming unclean and missing out on the ceremonies. This is a harsh statement. Jesus is saying that these people are spiritually dead within and those who come in contact with them are defiled.

THE LAWYER'S ARE OFFENDED

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.

As I have said, the party of the Pharisees arose out of the scribes. Not all Pharisees were scribes, but it was likely that most scribes were Pharisees. So, they are offended by these three woes directed at the Pharisees. Jesus address the next three woes to them.

They burden the people—These burdens consisted of the many regulations by means of which the ancient rabbis, and the law-experts after them, had buried the law of God and deprived men of their liberty and peace of mind; ordaining, for example, that picking and eating heads of grain on the sabbath, and rubbing them with their hands amounted to reaping and threshing; that healing a person on the sabbath was wrong unless that individual's life were in immediate danger; and that ceremonial washing (or rinsing) of the hands in connection with every meal was required of everybody. These law-experts had themselves mastered the art of avoiding these very burdens. They did not permit themselves to be hamstrung by their own regulations, did not even touch these burdens with one of their fingers.

Matthew 23:1-12—Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, ² "The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat, ³ so do and observe whatever they tell you, but not the works they do. For they preach, but do not practice.

Baker New Testament Commentary - Baker New Testament Commentary - Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke.

How important to consider our own lives, to see if our profession matches our walk with the Lord. If we are honest, what believers profess to be the true and

right way to live is something we don't always practice. So when we address other's behavior we need to be mindful of our own.

GUILTY OF THE BLOOD OF THE PROPHETS

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.

No doubt this statement was of great offense to these self-righteous men. How could they be guilty of the blood of prophets who were killed long ago? In building the tombs for these holy men they acknowledge and consent to their actions.

By this time, it was acknowledged that many of the prophets who were killed by the ancient Jews were speaking the Word of God and those who persecuted them were wrong. This generation should have learned this as the years went by.

That they possessed the same character as those who rejected and killed the prophets is seen in that they wanted to kill the Christ, of God. Whose Word did the OT prophets speak? The Word of God as inspired by the spirit of Christ. The Words of the Prophets are the Words of Christ; these men are looking to kill the Christ. Instead of unlocking the Scriptures to the people, the Law experts have taken it away and lost it.

Be careful how you live, how you speak about others. Be gracious in your judgments and ask God to help you to be a peacemaker.

D. James Kennedy used to respond to the charge that the church is full of hypocrites by saying: "There's always room for one more. Why don't you come and join us?" Then he would say, "If you find a perfect church, please don't join it, because you would surely ruin it." Sproul, R.C.. Luke: An Expository Commentary (p. 342). Reformation Trust Publishing. Kindle Edition.