

# WHEN RELIGION IS EXPOSED | Luke 11:37–54 | PASTOR MARK BOFILL | 01/25/25

\* I. Cleanliness Without Conversion (37-41) | II. Concern Without Compassion (42-44) | III. Critics Who Close the Way (45-54)

**INTRO:** In (Luke 11:14-36) we were challenged with **A Light Response**, where Jesus addressed a multitude of people. – **As Jesus continues**, our passage today specifically addresses two kinds of people from the crowd... **Pharisees** and **Scribes...** both of which are known for their **RELIGIOUS ARROGANCE!**

- Generally speaking, **RELIGION** is a system of beliefs, practices, and values relating humanity to the supernatural or ultimate reality. – **BIBLICAL RELIGION** is a heart-transformed relationship with God, characterized by faith, obedience, and loving service to others, as seen in (Jam 1:27) Pure and undefiled religion BEFORE GOD and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.
- **God knows those who HAVE a right relationship with Him**, those who practice **PURE RELIGION**. However, He also KNOWS those who PRACTICE RELIGION as a PRETENSE.

And so today we will learn what happens **When the Light of Christ shines on Religious Hearts...** It **EXPOSES Hypocrisy**, **Confronts Pride**, and **Calls God's people... especially leaders ...** to Authentic Obedience. – I've entitled this sermon: **WHEN RELIGION IS EXPOSED... \***

**I. CLEANLINESS WITHOUT CONVERSION (37-41)** – *Luke records another account of Jesus' dealing Pharisees (cf. 7:36-50).* – In this case, **one INVITES** Jesus to dinner. / **READ:** From this reading Jesus makes clear that **PHARISEES** of His day are known for their focus on Outward Cleanliness while neglecting Inward Transformation. – *In this instance we see...*

**A. A Religious Offense Revealed (37-38)** – As the **INSINCERE INVITATION** is extended to Jesus (37), **Jesus ACCEPTS the Pharisee's invitation to dinner** – Notice: Though he was His enemy, He didn't hate him in return! (*Love your enemy* Matt 5:44)

**1. Concern Exposed (38a):** Many religious Jews **wash their hands** before and after ceremonies in very specific and strict ways. – This Pharisee **was astounded** that **Jesus DID NOT** observe ceremonial cleansing before the meal. – We must understand that these washings were not for physical cleanliness (hygiene) but for ceremonial purity (tevilah). They symbolized a state of being **"set apart"** for sanctity.

- **Transition from Priestly Law:** While the O.T. primarily commanded such washings for priests before temple service, **Pharisaic Tradition** extended these strict purity standards to the common dining table.

**2. Common Scenario (38b):** **Jesus addressed this spirit of legalism before in** (Matt 15:2), when His disciples were rebuked for not washing their hands, thus **"Violating the Tradition of the Elders."** – But here, **Jesus used His non-compliance to EXPOSE the same "legalistic mindset."** – He **KNEW** that **TRUE PURITY** is an internal condition of the heart, not an external ritual performed for status.

- If these religious leaders were **as concerned about cleansing their hearts as they were about their hands, they would be more godly men!** *This is why...*

**B. A Piercing Rebuke Given (39-41)** – Jesus knew what the **condescending countenance** of this Pharisee meant, so **He EXPOSED the heart of the matter** with **AUTHORITY**, **"Then the LORD said..."**

**1. He Rebukes "his" Focus on Outward Cleanliness (39)**

- **Outwardly** – The outside of the cup speaks of his concern to Appear More Righteous before others
- **Inwardly** – The inside of their cup speaks of the Condition of his Greedy and Wicked Heart.

**2. He Reminds "Them" (40), i.e., All Pharisees**...that *God created both the outside and the inside*. – David explained, *Behold, You desire TRUTH in the inward parts, and in the hidden part You will make me to know wisdom*. (Psalm 51:6). – Knowing this should cause us to *pray like David* (tt. Ps 139:1-6) *God has perfect knowledge of man...*

**3. He Knew their Reasoning and He knew their Hearts! (41)** – That is why He called them **"Foolish Ones"** they were without reason, i.e., *illogical*. – He then instructs them to be Right and to be Real in Heart, by... **"Giving alms"** with the right motives. {Grk *eleemosune*} = to give mercifully (cf. Isa 1:10-17; 58:4-8).

- He emphasized that **TRUE CLEANSING** flows from **Generosity and Mercy** that come from a transformed heart... **It was a call to Righteousness!**

**P/A – Outward Cleanliness Without Conversion of Heart = Dead Religion!** – **Illustration:** A freshly painted house with a crumbling foundation *looks fine* until the walls begin to crack. (*Religion cannot support inward decay*)

- Examine whether spiritual habits flow from love or routine
- Ask Yourself: *Is Christ shaping my heart or just my behavior?*

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*Jesus is not done with Pharisees, now He exposes their...*

**II. CONCERN WITHOUT COMPASSION (42–44)** – **READ:** The Pharisees could not see that their **Religious Pride Distorted Godly Priorities!** – So, Jesus provides **THREE WOES** to demonstrate how they excelled at details but Failed at Devotion. – Jesus' WOES were not the language of personal irritation but of Divine Warning and Condemnation. – *Matthew's account records eight woes!* (Matt 23:13-39)

**A. Woe for their Misplaced Precision (42)** – The *"spices and herbs"* mentioned were meticulously counted for tithes by "their own interpretation" of Law (cf. Lev 27:30; Deut 14:22-29; 26:12-15). – **In (Matt 23:23-24)** Jesus identifies them as **BLIND GUIDES... who worked hard to strain out a gnat but instead swallowed a camel**. – Jesus also **rebukes them** for their **Selective Obedience**, as the *"passed by justice"* and *"true love for God"*

- (Hos 6:6) says, *For I desire mercy and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings*.

**P/A** – *We then must be careful even to show Justice, Mercy, Faith and Love for God*. – *When our hearts are right with God, our Tithes and Offerings are accepted by God!*

**B. Woe for their Misguided Ambition (43)** – They desired **Prominent Recognition**... loving Honor and Status before others. – *The best seats...* i.e., **up front in a semi-circle for all to see!** – And *special greetings in marketplaces*.... using their spiritual position to gain celebrity status, to affirm their greatness.

**C. Woe for their Hidden Corruption (44)** – The word **"hypocrites"** refers to an actor, someone playing a part! – **Jesus unveils** how wicked the scribes and Pharisees were, even though they put on a **spiritual front**.

- They **Appeared Religious** but actually defiled everyone they came in contact with. – *"You are like Graves"...* is an appropriate term for them. – According to (Num 19:16), anyone who **touched a grave** was ceremonially unclean for seven days. As a result, *Jewish tradition taught that walking over a grave* ceremonially defiled a Jewish person, even if they didn't know it was there!

**P/A** – *The scribes and Pharisees were Concerned for Themselves... Not God's Glory!* – They concealed their inward corruption well, **but their Unseen Influence defiled others!** – No wonder Jesus rebuked them three times with a WOE! – (Heb 4:13) says, *"...there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account."*

- **Spiritual Influence should guide others toward Christ, not self!**

**III. CRITICS WHO CLOSE THE WAY (45–54)** – **READ:** At this point a **CERTAIN LAWYER** took offense to Jesus' Reproach (45) because He included **SCRIBES** as **Hypocrites** also. – They too were to be **EXPOSED** for their Religious Hypocrisy. – These **Lawyers Possessed Scripture** and **were Considered Experts** in **Tradition** and **Interpretation of the Law**, but **THEY ALSO restricted access to God!** – Their leadership was a **Burden** for people rather than **Blessing** them...

- **FYI – Spiritual Leadership Bears Weighty Accountability!** – Leaders are called to model behavior, uphold doctrinal truth, and prioritize the spiritual welfare of their followers, all while **knowing their stewardship** is under divine scrutiny. – (James 3:1) *"My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment."* Also, (1 Cor 4:2) *"Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful."*
- Jesus accused these **LAWYERS** of **Abusing their Power and Authority** and pronounced **THREE SPECIFIC WOES** on them also (46, 47,52)....

**A. Heavy Burdens Without Help (46)** – i.e., **"Lording it over them"** – In (Matt 23:2-3), Jesus taught, **"The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. 3 Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do."**

- These Lawyers **loaded people** with **Extra-Biblical Traditions** but **offered NO GRACE of aid!** – They **Considered themselves Elites (critics)**, who would not even lift a finger to keep their own laws. – These **Lawyers were Lords of the Loopholes**... therefore, **Jesus pronounces a Guilty Woe upon them.**

They made religion **Oppressive** rather than **Restorative!** – It closed the way to God's Kingdom!

**B. Honored Prophets Rejected! (47-51)** – These leaders prioritized **the Honor of dead prophets**, building their Tombs, but they rejected their message. In (Matt 23:30), Jesus mentions what **they falsely declared**, **"...If we had lived in the days of our fathers we would NOT have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets."**

1. They were **Just as their fathers! (47-48)** – The NLT is much clearer using modern vernacular: **"What sorrow awaits you! (WOE), For you build monuments 'for the prophets' your own ancestors killed long ago. <sup>48</sup> But in fact, you stand as witnesses who agree with what your ancestors did. They killed the prophets, and You join in their crime by building the monuments!"**

2. They were **accountable to God for Their Actions (49-51)** – In His infinite wisdom, **God sent Prophets and Apostles, knowing that they would kill some on them.** – **Jesus addresses this in The Parable of the Wicked Tenants (or Vineyard Tenants)** (Matt 21:33-46; Mark 12:1-12; Luke 20:9-19). – **The parable describes tenants** who beat, stoned, and killed servants sent by a vineyard owner, and finally **killing the owner's son**, symbolizing the religious leaders' rejection of prophets ...and **EVEN Jesus!**

- The Bible teaches that blood must be atoned for (Gen 9:6a), **"Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed..."** – Every drop blood shed from Abel to Zechariah would be required of them
- Jesus specifically mentions that **the people listening** were also **responsible** for such a violent history against the messengers, because **THEY HAD NOT REPENTED!** – **Judgment** took place during their generation as pronounced, when the **Temple was destroyed in A.D. 70!**

**P/A – Context Reminds Us (33-36)**, that **Accountability of every person** is always **according to the measure of light received!**

**C. Hiding Access to Truth (52-54)** – **Jesus now presents their incriminating adjudication** along with the **third WOE**. – The Lawyers veiled God's way of salvation, by **Taking away the Key of Knowledge: HIS WORD!**

**1. They Held the KEY of Knowledge (52)** – The phrase, {GRK. *klesis - gnosis*}, refers to the **UNLOCKING** of God's Revelation, **which is the Correct Interpretation of the Old Testament**. – **This KEY** points to salvation through Jesus Christ (cf. Rev 1:18; 3:7).

- **The Action:** The religious leaders **Hid the Key** by distorting the truth and preferring their own traditions over the revelations of God's plan! – This why when **Jesus appeared** *they did not receive Him!* (John 1:11) – **They locked up the truth and threw away the KEY!**
- **The Consequence:** **By rejecting Jesus**, these leaders failed to enter the kingdom themselves and **Actively Obstructed Others** from accepting the gospel. – **Illustration:** A locked door with a sign that reads "Entrance" offers no help to those outside! – **Ironically, the MASTER KEY was right in front of them!**
- **The third "Woe"** was a condemnation of their **legalistic, hypocritical leadership** that substitutes human rules for divine truth.

**2. Their Harsh Rebuke and Rejection (53-54)** – As Jesus Exposed Their Religious Practices, they immediately **responded with Intense Hostility**, surrounding him and bombarding him with questions to trick him into saying something that could lead to his arrest, **which exposed their true hearts**.

- **Danger of Legalism:** This passage warns that a focus on outward religious rules (legalism) **can blind people to the love of God** and turn them into enemies of the Messiah.

**CLOSING APPLICATIONS:** *Jesus Exposed the Religion of the scribes and Pharisees* so that we can learn from their mistakes! **Are you Real or Religious?**

- **Prioritize Internal Purity Over External Rituals:** True holiness is about a pure heart, not just a polished appearance.
- **Practice Compassionate Justice, Not Legalistic Burdens:** Real faith actively lifts burdens and loves people, it doesn't create rules that crush their spirit.
- **Seek Genuine Humility:** Guard against arrogance by not seeking public recognition or elevating yourself above others. Actively cultivate a humble heart that loves God, rather than a prideful heart that craves human applause.