

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?*

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!**

In this final section Jesus exposes...

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. ⁴⁸ 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 is 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.