

Have you ever been invited to someone's home to dine only to find out the host wanted to find fault in you? That was Jesus' experience in this passage, but He turned the tables and made some accusations of His own. 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.* Luke 11:37,38 A Pharisee approached Jesus while He was teaching and invited him to table fellowship. Dining together in the East was a casual time of conversation over a meal. But this would not be a casual conversation.

Pharisees were men who sought to keep every detail of the Laws of Moses and the oral laws which they considered a hedge around the Law to keep them from accidentally violating it. Those who applied to become Pharisees had to first show their dedication to keeping the Law for an entire year. Then they would pledge their sincerity to keep the details of the Law and would become a part of this select group. The demands were so difficult that there were never more than seven-thousand of them in all of Israel. They wore special robes to set themselves apart from the masses whom they called "sinners".

Some people looked on them with envy and others with disgust, but few doubted their love for the Law and efforts to keep the details of it along with the oral traditions. One of those religious traditions is to pour water over one's hands before dining. It had to be done in a specific way or the hands were considered unclean (Yadaim 2.3) Even today the orthodox do this before eating. The Pharisee was shocked to see that Jesus didn't do this basic religious requirement. Jesus seems to have intentionally neglected this to try to open the eyes of the Pharisees and scribes to the fact that their traditions and pride in keeping them had become more important to them than the reason behind the rituals.

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?* Luke 11:39,40 In response to their shock that Jesus didn't wash his hands, Jesus told them that their religious routines were meaningless if they didn't apply the significance behind the routine. They had a special way to wash the surface of their hands, cups, and dishes. This signified the importance of being clean from the world's contamination. But they didn't make the connection. They had what was referred to in the previous passage, "bad eyes." They were full of greed. Pharisees tended to be the upper class who could afford to tithe, pay for sacrifices, and give alms. They could afford the robes the Pharisees wore. But they were not satisfied with their abundance, being inwardly greedy for more. **Their giving hid the love of money in their wicked hearts (Matthew 15:7-9¹; Isaiah 29:13²).** Their tithing was done out of the pride of being better than the "sinners", all the while they schemed to gain more wealth, even harming others in the process (Matthew 23:14³). We know this group was responsible for trying to trap Jesus in His words and wanted to see Him killed.

This sin of loving money and having a greedy heart is a problem of every level of society and every manner of employment, from janitor to preacher to CEO. Our religious actions can hide the greed in our hearts. This attempt to hide our greed is foolish because the One who made the outside made the inside too. God sees our hearts (1 Samuel 16:7⁴). We aren't fooling Him. What good does it do to fool man, when we know God sees through our hypocrisy?

⁴¹ *But give as alms those things that are within, and behold, everything is clean for you.* Luke 11:41 This corresponds with Isaiah 58 which is about true fasting. God's heart is generous and concerned for those in need (Isaiah 58:6,7⁵). If we care for others and give of our time and our love, the things we value within our hearts, then there is no need to go through rituals to remind ourselves to be generous. Jesus was insinuating that He didn't need the reminder of washing His hands because His heart was generous and pure.

The later manuscripts added give alms "to the poor". Jesus may have meant to give as alms the things their hearts were greedy for. In other words, forsake your sin of greed and everything will be clean to you (Matthew 6:24⁶). Either interpretation is true and applicable to us today.

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.* Luke 11:42 Jesus continued by pronouncing three woes upon the Pharisees and three upon the lawyers. To declare a woe over someone meant to lament and denounce their condition (See Isaiah chapters 5 and 6). It would be like saying, "How terribly sad that your condition is so deplorable!" The reason for the first woe was that while they were detailed in their tithing down to counting leaves on mint and all the other herbs in their garden, they neglected the more important things such as justice and the love of God.

When religious people are hypocrites, those who observe them might think that religious faith is just a cover for greed and therefore to be rejected. **Turning people away from God by our denial of justice and lack of expressing the love of God is one of the worst things that we can do.** We who bear the name Christian must be just and loving in all our dealings or our actions or words may give an excuse to others to not have faith in Jesus. The Pharisees actions had made many Jews skeptical about God's Laws. People may have thought that only the rich were blessed enough to keep them all.

The Pharisees were neglecting Micah's summary of the Law which they knew quite well, Micah 6:8. ⁸ *He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?* Perhaps that was the verse to which Jesus was alluding (Amos 5:21-24⁷).

But since they were still under the Law, Jesus added that He was not saying that they should not keep the Law. It was not wrong to count the herb leaves and give a tenth to God, for tithing was still a part of their covenant with God. Tithing of herbs was going beyond what was required.⁸ That is a good thing. But when the New Covenant comes, the law of love for God and others will be written in their hearts and there will be no need for the many reminders in the Old Covenant and oral laws (Jeremiah 31:33,34⁹). Giving will

be from the heart, both to the "storehouse" and to those we know are in need (Malachi 3:10¹⁰).

⁴³ *Woe to you Pharisees! For you love the best seat in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces.* Luke 11:43 The second woe dealt specifically with pride. There were special seats of honor reserved for the Pharisees. In another incidence, Jesus mentioned how they love being in the most important seats near the host when there is a feast (Luke 14:7¹¹; 20:46¹²). They also enjoyed people going out of their way to greet them in the marketplaces with greetings of honor and praise. This revealed their love of the honor of men. Give honor to whom honor is due (Romans 13:7¹³; 12:10¹⁴), but a heart that craves that honor is forgetting the most important honor that comes from God alone (John 5:44¹⁵; Romans 2:10,11¹⁶). People seek one or the other, but never both. Everything we have is a gift from God (James 1:17¹⁷). What does any fallen human have to be proud of? God gave us only one reason to boast.²⁴ *but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the LORD.* Jeremiah 9:24 The Pharisees and many people today have missed the only real reasons for boasting: knowing God and the things in which He delights.

⁴⁴ *Woe to you! For you are like unmarked graves, and people walk over them without knowing it.* Luke 11:44 The third woe was because of the Pharisees' deception of the public. While displaying themselves to be bastions of righteousness and holiness, they were inwardly rotten, comparable to an unmarked grave defiling those with whom they came in contact. Jews considered themselves defiled if they touched a dead person (Leviticus 21:1-4¹⁸,11¹⁹). On the feast days of Israel, graves would be whitewashed so people would not accidentally touch them (Matthew 23:27²⁰). Jesus compared the Pharisees to concealed graves that were polluting all who hear them without even realizing they had become defiled. In another passage, Jesus called the Pharisees whitewashed graves, bright and white and clean on the outside but rotten within. The unmarked grave was an even more severe analogy for it included the fact that they were stealthily defiling others with their evil hearts. That is ironic because the Pharisees wore clothing that set them apart and declared, "Don't touch me or you might contaminate *me*." But the reverse was true. They were defiling others with their teachings and prideful examples.

We leave our fingerprints on each other's souls, for Christ or for unbelief. Therefore it is imperative that our thoughts, our desires, our actions have roots in the faith we confess with our lips. Hughes, Kent, Preaching the Word - Luke, Volume II: That You May Know the Truth.

⁴⁵ *One of the lawyers answered him, "Teacher, in saying these things you insult us also."* Luke 11:45 Many of the lawyers were Pharisees, but that was not always the case. Perhaps the scribe thought that by saying that Jesus had insulted them Jesus would then clarify that their study of the Law made them different. They so fastidiously studied the Law to help everyone understand what was required that perhaps they thought they were better than the average Pharisee.

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. Luke 11:46

The first woe to the lawyers, also called scribes or experts in the Law, was for the way they interpreted the Law and oral traditions so strictly that it was burdensome. They made the Law a burden when it was intended to be a blessing by adding 6000 extra rules supposedly to keep others within the bounds of the Law. At the same time, they were skilled at finding loopholes for themselves.

One area of their traditions that Jesus often defied was the Sabbath regulations. Jews were to do no work on the Sabbath. The lawyers defined work into 39 categories with numerous sub-categories. You could only walk a certain number of steps from your home. You couldn't carry anything heavier than a dried fig. If you set the fig down and picked it back up it was considering doubling the weight and thereby breaking the Sabbath. You couldn't light a fire. Even today in Israel there are Shabbat elevators that stop at every floor, because to push a button for your floor causes electrical current which is considered lighting a fire.

Jesus was speaking to the lawyers who laid these burdens on the people but made no attempt to encourage or help them with ways to deal with these burdens. They had made the faith a drudgery of rule keeping for the entire nation. Woe to us if we do the same. In Christ we have freedom to do as the Spirit of God leads us.

I have heard some pastors declare new laws that burden those who rely on their interpretation of God's Word. "If you don't do such and such you aren't a real Christian," they say. And so, people go around either burdened or feeling guilty they have not kept the new laws. Jesus' yoke is easy, and His burden is light (Matthew 11:28-30²¹). Our light burden is to love God and our neighbor, delight in the Word (Psalm 1:2,3²²), fellowship with the family of God (Hebrews 10:25²³), and commune with God in prayer (Colossians 4:2²⁴). Jesus has set us free from the Law so that we can walk with Him in the Spirit.

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. Luke 11:47,48

The second woe was directed toward the lawyers' attitudes toward the prophets. In Jesus' era the bones of those buried inside Jerusalem were being moved outside the city limits. New tombs for those who had been buried in Jerusalem were under construction outside the city. How this implicated them in their fathers' murder of the prophets I'm not clear. We can say for certain that they had the same attitude as their fathers toward the present-day prophets John and Jesus. It is easier to show honor to dead saints than to respect living ones. They would have agreed with their fathers' murders of prophets had they lived in those days. We know that because they were trying to shut up the present declaration of the Word, and they distorted the recorded Word with their many rules. J.A. Fitzmeyer said that in essence Jesus was saying, "You build great tombs to insure that the prophets will never return to trouble the living." The lawyers would have considered this the worst possible insult as they saw themselves as guardians of the Word of God. Jesus was saying that instead of guarding the Word of God they were turning it from a blessing into a burden.

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. Luke 11:49-51 The truth of what Jesus declared about their hearts and actions will be evidenced in how they treat the present prophets and apostles. They would make sure that Jesus was executed. They would hound the apostles and martyr many of them. Did they remember what Jesus had told them or were they so self-deceived that they justified their actions?

Why would they be charged with the blood of all the prophets? They had the written record of all that they said. They were witnessing the fulfillment of their words. They heard the greatest prophet of all, John the Baptist, and they hardened their hearts and clung to their power and prestige. The Messiah was giving them a severe warning that they would kill even Him, the very Word made flesh, for they would not let His words penetrate their hard hearts. They would literally murder the Word.

Jesus could foresee the destruction of Jerusalem. He knew judgment was coming and yet, these keepers of the Law would not hear the Law which they held in such high esteem. All the honor they clung to would vanish with the temple in the Jewish revolts.

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.” Luke 11:52 If the previous woes weren't enough, Jesus added one last devastating claim. The lawyers thought they were in the know. If anyone knew the truth of the Word, they thought they did. Jesus said the opposite was true. They not only did not understand what the Scriptures were about, they took the key of knowledge from the nation. We can see why Jesus was so upset with them. The people trusted them to deliver the Word and help them understand it. But instead the very ones the people trusted to help them understand the Word took the key of knowledge away from them.

And what is the key? It is that all the Scriptures are about the Messiah. Every pattern points to Him, all the prophecies, all the wisdom, in every part of what we call the Old Testament points to Jesus. Is the majority of today's clergy any different? I have sat with representatives from four branches of the church and had them mock my belief that what Jesus said was true, *²⁷ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.* Luke 24:27

Some pastors preach what people want to hear, self-help, how to be liked, how to get ahead, how to whatever... and throw in a little Jesus on the side. Woe to them! **It is all about Jesus. It's not about politics or position or numbers or a bigger better anything. It's about Jesus! Exalt Him.** He gave His all and we owe our all to Him. That's the key! Pastors must preach the unadulterated Word, or they will be held accountable. (See Colossians 1:25²⁵) Pastors are told to preach the Word (2 Timothy 4:1,2²⁶) not their favorite topic or pet theory or personal experience unless it aligns with the Word.

Every believer must take the key when they read the Bible and see Jesus. We must read to diligently understand the immediate context as well as the context of the book and how it fits with the whole Bible. Study the Word, but then read it as if it was spoken to

you. We must let the Word speak to us to change us. Hear God speaking to you. Study guides, commentaries, and Bible studies can help, but the Word is the key and the Word is Jesus (John 1:14²⁷). Let the Bible be your lifelong study of Jesus, your lifelong love, your lifelong guide through life.

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. Luke 11:53,54 Pride wounded, they tried every way possible to trip Jesus up. The wording in verse 54, “lying in wait,” is that of hunting a wild beast. They failed in all their attempts because of the wisdom of the Spirit in Jesus. Their soldiers had to say, “No man ever spoke like this man!” (John 7:46²⁸) They would have to hire liars to distort what He said to bring a false conviction (Matthew 26:59,60²⁹). Their actions proved that what Jesus was said about them was true.

Jesus’ declarations of woe warn us against religious hypocrisy, spiritual pride, adding our own ideas to God’s Word, and seeing anything other than Jesus as the key to wisdom. Our religiosity doesn’t fool Him. He sees the priorities in our hearts. A credit card commercial asks what is in your wallet, for there is the worldly person’s heart. How much better to ask ourselves what is in our hearts? Do we have a religion or a relationship? Is our religion about us, or are we about Jesus?

Questions

- 1 Why might Jesus have violated the tradition of hand washing?
- 2 What did washing signify?
- 3 Why was their routine meaningless?
- 4 What does “woe” mean?
- 5 What is the worst thing about religious hypocrisy?
- 6 What was the second woe?
- 7 What is the third woe and its implications?
- 8 What are the woes to the scribes? The point?
- 9 Why would they be charged with the blood of all the prophets?
- 10 What are the takeaways for you?

1 Matthew 15:7-9 (ESV)

⁷ You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said: ⁸ “This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; ⁹ in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.”

2 Isaiah 29:13 (ESV)

¹³ And the Lord said: “Because this people draw near with their mouth and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me, and their fear of me is a commandment taught by men,

³ **Matthew 23:14a** Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you devour widows’ houses...

4 1 Samuel 16:7 (ESV)

⁷ But the LORD said to Samuel, “Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart.”

⁵ **Isaiah 58:6-7 (ESV)**

⁶ "Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? ⁷ Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?"

⁶ **Matthew 6:24 (ESV)**

²⁴ "No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.

⁷ **Amos 5:21-24 (ESV)**

²¹ "I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. ²² Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the peace offerings of your fattened animals, I will not look upon them. ²³ Take away from me the noise of your songs; to the melody of your harps I will not listen. ²⁴ But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

⁸ "Rue, goosefoot, purslane, hill-coriander, celery and meadow-eruca are exempt from Tithes" - Shebiith 9:1

⁹ **Jeremiah 31:33-34 (ESV)**

³³ For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. ³⁴ And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

¹⁰ **Malachi 3:10 (ESV)**

¹⁰ Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the LORD of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need.

¹¹ **Luke 14:7 (ESV)**

⁷ Now he told a parable to those who were invited, when he noticed how they chose the places of honor, saying to them,

¹² **Luke 20:45-46 (ESV)**

⁴⁵ And in the hearing of all the people he said to his disciples, ⁴⁶ "Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and love greetings in the marketplaces and the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts,

¹³ **Romans 13:7 (ESV)**

⁷ Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed.

¹⁴ **Romans 12:10 (ESV)**

¹⁰ Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.

¹⁵ **John 5:44 (ESV)**

⁴⁴ How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?

¹⁶ **Romans 2:10-11 (ESV)** ¹⁰ but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. ¹¹ For God shows no partiality.

¹⁷ **James 1:17 (ESV)** ¹⁷ Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.

¹⁸ **Leviticus 21:1-4 (ESV)**

¹ And the LORD said to Moses, "Speak to the priests, the sons of Aaron, and say to them, No one shall make himself unclean for the dead among his people, ² except for his closest relatives, his mother, his father, his son, his daughter, his brother, ³ or his virgin sister (who is near to him because she has had no husband; for her he may make himself unclean). ⁴ He shall not make himself unclean as a husband among his people and so profane himself.

¹⁹ **Leviticus 21:11 (ESV)**

¹¹ He shall not go in to any dead bodies nor make himself unclean, even for his father or for his mother.

²⁰ **Matthew 23:27 (ESV)**

²⁷ "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness.

²¹ **Matthew 11:28-30 (ESV)**

²⁸ Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

²² **Psalms 1:2-3 (ESV)**

² but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. ³ He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.

²³ **Hebrews 10:25 (ESV)** ²⁵ not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

²⁴ **Colossians 4:2 (ESV)** ² Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.

²⁵ **Colossians 1:25 (ESV)**

²⁵ of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known,

²⁶ **2 Timothy 4:1-2 (ESV)**

¹ I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: ² preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.

²⁷ **John 1:14 (ESV)**

¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

²⁸ **John 7:46 (ESV)** ⁴⁶ The officers answered, "No one ever spoke like this man!"

²⁹ **Matthew 26:59-60 (ESV)**

⁵⁹ Now the chief priests and the whole council were seeking false testimony against Jesus that they might put him to death, ⁶⁰ but they found none, though many false witnesses came forward. At last two came forward