

30. Clean on the Inside

Luke 11:37-54

Luke: A Walk Through the Life of Jesus

Earth is the battleground of a cosmic war that is being fought over God's greatest creation—man. Unseen evil enemies have entrenched themselves behind fortifications set up over thousands of years. They have set themselves up in strongholds composed of systems of thought. Paul the Apostle wrote that we have been given “divine power to demolish strongholds” “...we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:4-5). These systems of thought bind people behind various cultures of deception all over the earth. John the Apostle said, “The whole world is under the control of the evil one” (1 John 5:19). Satan, the unseen evil ruler of the enemies of God, uses systems of thought as a method of control, binding people through fear of falling out of favor with a god that has been set up and keeping people in ignorance as to the character of the True God who loves all of His creation.

Jesus came to destroy all systems of thought that had been set up against the knowledge of God (1 John 3:8). Whoever controls the way you think, controls you; therefore, be careful what you allow to pass through the mind to the heart. “Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it” (Proverbs 4:23). We see one of these systems of thought set up in the time of Jesus, i.e. an alternative religion of works that kept the Jewish people under a heavy weight of rules and regulations, an apostate Judaism. Jesus was advancing on enemy territory and going to various towns and villages on the way to Jerusalem where the religious elites of the day, the Priests, Sadducees, Pharisees, Scribes and Teachers of the Law, were set up behind their religious battlements. They were not ready to give up any territory to the King of Kings. Instead of being intimidated by the religious elite of the day, Christ stood up boldly to destroy their system of thought that held men.

I find the Lord Jesus to be the most courageous individual I have ever known or read about. He didn't shy away from a challenge. He always said what was needed to be said in order to challenge the *status quo*. He wasn't intimidated by anybody. Euripides once said, “A coward will turn away, but a brave man's choice is danger.” Wherever Jesus saw people in bondage to religion, He challenged the practice of the outward form without the inward heart. It's interesting that the origin of the word “religion” lies in the Latin word *ligare*, to bind. People can get so bound up by religion, and Christ has come to set religious people free. “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery” (Galatians 5:1). Sometimes, it is necessary to shock religious people into reality like a doctor in an emergency ward restarts a person's heart by shocking the body. This is what Christ did in the passage we are studying today:

³⁷When Jesus had finished speaking, a Pharisee invited him to eat with him; so he went in and reclined at the table. ³⁸But the Pharisee, noticing that Jesus did not first wash before the meal, was surprised. ³⁹Then the Lord said to him, "Now then, you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness. ⁴⁰You foolish people! Did not the one who made the outside make the inside also? ⁴¹But give what is inside the dish to the poor, and everything will be clean for you. ⁴²"Woe to you Pharisees, because you give God a tenth of your mint, rue and all other kinds of garden herbs, but

you neglect justice and the love of God. You should have practiced the latter without leaving the former undone. ⁴³"Woe to you Pharisees, because you love the most important seats in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces. ⁴⁴"Woe to you, because you are like unmarked graves, which men walk over without knowing it" (Luke 11:37-44).

The Rules of Men

Most people that have little understanding of the New Testament find it hard to get their minds around the fact that Jesus did not prefer the company of religious people. He much rather enjoyed the company of sinners and tax-collectors than men who paraded their standards of law-keeping before others. When invited, though, the Lord never gave up on them, but He sought opportunities to wake them out of their spiritual slumber. A Pharisee was "*a separated one*," a person separated to live a holy life. They were not the upper class. That standing in the Jewish community was reserved for the Sadducees, but to be a Pharisee was a way for one to gain social standing and great respect. There were only 6,000 Pharisees during the time of Christ. Luke writes that a Pharisee invited Christ to eat with him.

The English word *eat* is translated from the Greek verb *ariston*, which tells us that this was a morning meal (more like a brunch) perhaps after the morning prayers in the local synagogue. It is very probable that this conversation followed on from Jesus being challenged after He had cast out the demon that had caused a man to be mute in Luke 11:11-26. To counter the fact that many of the common people were believing in Him, the Pharisees had accused Jesus of using the power of Satan to cast out the demon.

The Scriptures say that "He went in and took his place at the table." Tables at that time were in the Roman style called a Triclinium, a three sided table with an opening in the middle for an attendant to place the food on the table. The Triclinium stood about a foot off of the floor and guests reclined on cushions leaning on one elbow while reaching over to dip bread or retrieve more food from the table. This was the kind of table used at the Last Supper, Jesus' last Passover meal.

As the guests arrived, they did the ceremonial washing of the hands before they sat down to eat. Large water jars were kept near the door for ceremonial washing. This was a practice that was not a matter of cleanliness but of ritual and tradition that came about while they lived in the uncleanness of the Babylonian captivity more than 500 years before Christ. Their obedience wasn't to the Law itself, but to an accepted interpretation of that Law called "the Tradition of the Elders." This tradition formed a sort of "hedge" or "fence" around the provisions of the actual Torah, the first five books of Moses, so that by obeying the Tradition of the Elders, one wouldn't break the Law itself. For instance, one of the Ten Commandments was that they were not to work on the Sabbath. So they sat down to define what work was.

The commentator, William Barclay, writes that to walk more than a thousand yards on the Sabbath was seen as work, so the teachers or definers of the law stated that they were law breakers if they walked more than the thousand yards from his home, but if a rope was tied across the end of his street, the end of the street became his residence and he could then go another 1,000 yards further. If he left at any given point enough food for two meals, that point

became his residence and he could go another 1,000 yards beyond that.¹ William Barclay went further concerning the ceremonial laws that were laid down:

To carry a burden was forbidden, but the Scribes and Pharisees held that, “He who carries anything, whether it be in his right hand, or in his left hand, or in his bosom, or on his shoulder is guilty; but he who carries anything on the back of his hand, with his foot, or with his mouth, or with his elbow, or with his ear, or with his hair, or with his money bag turned upside down, or between his money bag and his shirt, or in the fold of his shirt or in his shoe, or in his sandal is guiltless, because he does not carry it in the usual way of carrying it out.”²

I myself have been on an elevator on a Sabbath in Israel, which automatically stopped at every level because it was considered to be work to push the button on an elevator on the Sabbath. Their particular slant is a devotion to the Law and a belief that full observance of the Law will justify them before God. I lived for a time among religious Jews in the Ultra-Orthodox area of Jerusalem where they believe that, if they could get every Jew to keep the whole law for at least one Sabbath, then the Messiah will come! Obviously, this has not yet happened.

Question 1) What dangers do you see in focusing on rules to please God? Why would Jesus ignore the Pharisaic rule of ceremonial washing? What point was He making?

It is possible that Jesus was being set up in order to catch Him out and accuse Him. Also invited to the brunch were teachers of the Law as well as Pharisees (v. 45). It was an elaborate ritual to ceremonially wash one's hands. First, an amount of water set apart as used only for this ceremonial law and equal to one and a half egg cups, must be poured over the hands beginning at the tops of the fingers and running right down to the wrist. Then, the palm of each hand must be cleansed by rubbing the other fist into it. Finally, their hands had to be pointed downward and water must again be poured over each hand, this time beginning at the wrist and running down to the fingertips. To the Pharisee, to omit the slightest detail of this was to sin.

Luke doesn't tell us if the Pharisee in whose house Jesus was reclining said anything when he noticed Jesus' bypassing the line near the door. The Lord just walked in and sat down. The Pharisee obviously showed visible body signals at Jesus' avoidance of the cherished rite of his home. This invitation to brunch might have been for the very reason of trying to find fault with Jesus in order to accuse Him of breaking the Law. Notice verses 53-54 of chapter 11. The intent from that point was to oppose Him fiercely, and their desire was to catch Christ in something He might say. It is important that we see that we cannot approach God by keeping rules. Doing religious works to try to get God to accept us shows a clear disregard and lack of understanding of what Jesus accomplished for us in the finished work of the Cross. Jeremiah the prophet put it like this:

Can an Ethiopian change his skin or a leopard its spots? Neither can you do good who are accustomed to doing evil (Jeremiah 13:23).

¹ William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible, The Gospel of Luke*, Saint Andrew Press, Edinburgh, 1975. Page 158.

² Ibid.

We cannot change ourselves by doing good works. In the same way that a leopard cannot take away his spots or any of us change the skin that we are given, our inner nature of being a sinful creature remains. The trouble with approaching God on the basis of works is that, in essence, we are saying that the way of salvation that God has instituted for us, i.e. the free gift of God through Jesus' finished work on the Cross, is not sufficient. It does not build up our selfish ego, for we prefer to do things our way. Our prideful nature gets nothing out of Christ's full atonement for sin.

It is no wonder that Jesus would not play along with the Pharisaical religious works of keeping to a bunch of man-made rules. It was all about external things that had no inner heart of love for God or the people He loves. Recording the same meal in the house of the Pharisee, Matthew mentions Jesus as calling them hypocrites six times in Chapter 23 alone. The Greek word translated *hypocrite* was a word that meant an actor on the stage of life. To walk out one's faith by keeping a man-made set of rules was play-acting at religion. I never want my life of service to God to be an act! May it never be, Lord!

The Pharisee was greatly surprised that Jesus had sat while the others were still elaborately letting the water drip with their hands down, thumping each hand with the other fist, and then swapping over and turning their hands around and letting them drip the other way. Jesus told them that God wants inner cleansing, which is of much more value to Him. It is not the externals, e.g. "the cup and the dish," but the inner character, i.e. that of loving God and walking in justice, kindness, and humility. Micah the prophet told them and us:

He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God (Micah 6:8).

One thing that stands out is that Jesus knew exactly what was in their hearts. He saw greed and wickedness in the Pharisee. He is able to look and inspect the inner person that resides in the body of flesh. Nothing escapes His attention. He knows us better than we know ourselves. Let me give an illustration of looking good on the outside but having inner corruption.

The Queen Mary, one of the most beautiful awe-inspiring liners in the world, was brought to Long Beach, California, in 1976, where she was retired after more than thirty-three years of service crossing the Atlantic and bringing many thousands of people back and forth. The Queen Mary's three elliptical smoke stacks—thirty-six feet long, twenty-three feet wide, and ranging from seventy feet down to sixty-two feet in height—were made of sheets of steel over an inch thick. During her decades of service, at least thirty coats of paint had been applied to the massive smokestacks, forming a shell around the steel interior. However, when the smokestacks were removed for maintenance after her decommissioning, it was discovered that they were nothing but shells. When lifted off the liner and placed on the docks, they crumbled! Over the years, the thick steel of which they had been made had turned to rust from long exposure to heat and moisture. The beautiful exteriors of the smokestacks concealed a rusty, crumbly interior that spoke not of beauty and elegance but of deterioration and decay. The external appearance was hiding the internal reality. The Pharisees' lives had become like the Queen Mary's smokestacks; there was nothing of value underneath the exterior that they showed to people.³

³ Illustration about the Queen Mary taken from the Holman New Testament Commentary, Romans, pp. 90-92.

In verse 41, the words “*to the poor*” are not in the original Greek, which literally reads “but rather give what is inside as alms and you will find everything is clean for you.”

Question 2) What does Jesus mean when He says to the Pharisees that giving from the inside would make everything clean to them?

The inner cleansing that Jesus is talking about happens when we see our own selfish heart and begin to walk out the grace of God and the forgiveness of our sin, thus resulting in the cleansing action of giving unselfishly of ourselves to others. The defining sin of the Pharisees was their love of money, i.e. their being “full of greed” (verse 39). God is concerned about the inner motivations of our hearts as much as Jesus was concerned with what He saw in the Pharisees. Why do we do what we do? Is our inner life in harmony with what we show on the outside? What’s the driving force behind why we work as hard as we do? What are we trying to prove? Jesus was challenging the Pharisees concerning, among other things, their motives. Even as He did this, it was out of His tender mercies that He sought to expose their hypocrisy for their sakes as well as for those who were looking at their lives as an example.

Three Woes to the Pharisees

Jesus then went and spoke the truth about their practices that will go against them in the judgment:

Woe to you Pharisees, because you give God a tenth of your mint, rue and all other kinds of garden herbs, but you neglect justice and the love of God. You should have practiced the latter without leaving the former undone

The Lord is not censuring them using the word “woe.” The word was used as an expression of grief or regret; “woe” means alas. He is so saddened by what he sees. They thought that they were on their way to heaven, but the enemy had deceived them, for not only were they not entering, but also they were hindering others from entering the Kingdom of God (verse 52). How sobering!

Question 3) Did Jesus fault the Pharisees on their scrupulous tithing or compliment them? Where did he find fault with them? (11:42)

Imagine what it was like to be a Pharisee. He was in the practice of whenever his wife wanted to put some garden herbs in the dinner, he would separate one leaf of mint from every ten to give to the Levites as their portion. The Mishnah, a commentary of the Oral Law, stated that rue, goosefoot, purslane, hill-coriander, celery and meadow-eruca were exempt from tithes (a tithes means a tenth), (Shebiith 9:1), but the Pharisees went ahead and tithed them, anyway.⁴ The tithes was for the upkeep of the work of the ministry. He told them not only to leave the former (the tithing) undone but also to practice justice and the love of God. Think what could be done if the majority of the church gave a tenth of their wages to the Church to which they belonged. Imagine

⁴ R. Kent Hughes, *Preaching the Word, Luke Volume Two*, Published by Crossway Books, Wheaton, Ill. 1998, p. 23.

what could be done in countries that are crying out for the support of native workers to be able to give their full time to winning the lost. It has been estimated that, in the United States, more money is spent on bubble gum in a year than is sent to other countries to seek to win them to Christ.

The Pharisees were so exacting in the giving of their tithe, but when there were needs even in their own families, they were stingy. God had commanded them to take care of their fathers and mothers, but they made up ways around the Scripture so that they did not have to take care of them. They were masters at not opening their pockets to the needy around them. “But you say that if a man says to his father or mother: ‘Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is **Corban**’ (that is, a gift devoted to God)” (Mark 7:11). Our faith should be expressed first of all in our homes and families. If we are different at home than we are in front of our Christian friends or in church, then it is nothing more than play acting on the stage of life.

The Lord continues on the theme of the outward show:

Woe to you Pharisees, because you love the most important seats in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces (v. 43).

They loved to sit in the best seats in the synagogue. Maybe to us, it would be like sitting on the stage where everybody can see that we are highly respected. They were pursuing the adulation of men. The praise of men is a snare to be avoided. We are to be wary of all men speaking well of us (Luke 6:26). The enemy of our souls would love to trap us in the sin of pride, something that is easy to see in others but very difficult to see in ourselves. Seek for opportunities to counter the sin of pride rearing its ugly head by serving others in ways that are not seen by men.

²So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. ³But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you (Matthew 6:2-4).

Jesus carried on with another woe:

Woe to you, because you are like unmarked graves, which men walk over without knowing it (v. 44).

William Hendrikson, in his commentary entitled *Exposition of the Gospel according to Luke*, helps us understand this verse:

According to a Jewish custom, just before the arrival of vast caravans of people traveling to Jerusalem to attend the Passover, graves were whitewashed. The reason this was done was that they might be clearly visible, so that no one would ceremonially defile himself by walking over a grave.

Jesus was saying that somebody should have whitewashed the Pharisees! What a terrible indictment of them! They claimed to be the most holy people in Israel, but Jesus is saying that they were the means of spiritual contamination for the nation. In those days when a person touched anything dead, he was ceremonially unclean and had to be kept separate from the congregation for seven days (Numbers 19:11-22). The Lord was saying that an impartation of corruption was happening with people that had contact with the Pharisees. Matthew records Jesus as saying to them, “You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when you have succeeded, you make them twice as much a child of hell as you are” (Matthew 23:15). Every one of us are influencing others in some way. We do not realize how much other people’s lives have touched us in different ways, hopefully, more for good than bad.

Question 4) Can you think of someone (outside of this room) who has influenced your life for good? What did they do that made you want to be like them?

Three Woes on the Experts in the Law

At that point, one of the other religious people around the table, a Scribe or expert in the Law, spoke up:

⁴⁵One of the experts in the law answered him, "Teacher, when you say these things, you insult us also." ⁴⁶Jesus replied, "And you experts in the law, woe to you, because you load people down with burdens they can hardly carry, and you yourselves will not lift one finger to help them. ⁴⁷"Woe to you, because you build tombs for the prophets, and it was your forefathers who killed them. ⁴⁸So you testify that you approve of what your forefathers did; they killed the prophets, and you build their tombs. ⁴⁹Because of this, God in his wisdom said, 'I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and others they will persecute.' ⁵⁰Therefore this generation will be held responsible for the blood of all the prophets that has been shed since the beginning of the world, ⁵¹from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who was killed between the altar and the sanctuary. Yes, I tell you, this generation will be held responsible for it all. ⁵²"Woe to you experts in the law, because you have taken away the key to knowledge. You yourselves have not entered, and you have hindered those who were entering." ⁵³When Jesus left there, the Pharisees and the teachers of the law began to oppose him fiercely and to besiege him with questions, ⁵⁴waiting to catch him in something he might say (Luke 11:45-54).

The experts in the law were the ones who had defined all this rule keeping for a fence around the Law of God. They sought to clarify the Law of Moses by adding so many additional rules and regulations. The problem was that the common working person had given up trying to please God because the rules seemed so meticulous with over 6,000 or so additional fence rules that hindered normal working life. For instance, R. Kent Hughes, in his commentary on the book of Luke, tells us about the carrying of a load on the Sabbath:

To ensure that no work was performed on the Sabbath, the Mishnah listed 39 classifications of labor, with each category capable of endless subdivision. For example, one of the thirty-nine categories forbade the carrying of burdens on the Sabbath and

hedged it with minute prohibitions for every occasion. This section declared that anything equal to or heavier than a dried fig was a burden. So it was permissible to carry something that weighed less than a dried fig on the Sabbath. But if one inadvertently put it down and then picked it up, he would be counted as doubling the weight and thus breaking the Sabbath!⁵

The example that Jesus gives is to lift our loads onto Himself and for Him to come and live within us and be joined to us as the head of the body. When we come to Christ and learn of Him, we find rest in Him:

²⁹Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰For my yoke is easy and my burden is light (Matthew 11:29-30).

A yoke was a wooden bar that joined two animals together as they plowed the fields. The yoke would keep one animal from getting too far ahead. It would also be a means of training a new animal, i.e. being yoked to another who had been working for some time. When we become Christians, we are spiritually joined to Christ (1 Corinthians 6:16), but His burden is light and not a heavy thing. Many people feel a big relief that comes to their lives upon receiving Christ. The experts in the Law had placed heavy burdens on people, and Christ has come to give rest to our souls.

In their pride, these religious leaders of the day were hindering others from finding the truth of the Messiah by locking up knowledge of the Word of God.

Woe to you experts in the law, because you have taken away the key to knowledge. You yourselves have not entered, and you have hindered those who were entering (v. 52).

It will be terrible on the Day of Judgment for those who have not entered into the Kingdom of God, but even worse for those who have hindered others from entering. What is the key of knowledge? I believe it to be the Scriptures. The religious elite of the day had kept the Scriptures from the people because, in their minds, only those that had been trained for years could understand the Scriptures. We forget that the ministry of the Spirit of God is to reveal the Scriptures. He is well able to open our minds that we may understand and know the Truth just by simply reading the Word of God. John the Apostle wrote:

But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth...as for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you (1 John 2: 20, 27).

The plain reading of the Scriptures will be enlightening to our hearts, but the Pharisees withheld the reading of the Scriptures to the ordinary people. The same thing has happened throughout history; the truth was withheld from people or distorted. Even in this present day, many countries still have limited or no access to the Scriptures due to government control or the threats from

⁵ R. Kent Hughes, *Preaching the Word, Luke Volume Two*, Published by Crossway Books, Wheaton, Ill. 1998. Page 30.

radical religious groups. We can see how the Pharisees in Jesus' day were challenged by the truth that Jesus taught and His obvious spiritual authority, which He demonstrated through His words and through His miraculous works. He was a threat to their religious system, and He was a challenge to their *status quo*. They also had something to lose in the area of their ego, i.e. their spiritual pride. Imagine how they felt as Jesus lifted the cloak of their spiritual façade to expose, in His words, their greed and wickedness!

He was grieved that others were being given a false image of Who God the Father is and a false set of standards that was impossible to achieve, which resulted in turning people away from God instead of showing them the ways of God and the heart of God. It grieved Jesus that people were being prevented from having the key to knowledge and entering into truth.

Religious corruption did not end there. In the Church, also, the heart of the Pharisee is alive and well. In the Middle Ages, for example, Scriptures were actually banned from the general populace. Why would that be? This was done for the same reasons. Many reasons may have been given by the religious elite of that day, but pride and the desire for power and control have been just as strong in those days as in the days of the Pharisees. Fast forward to this present day, many are unaware of the great sacrifice made by many to make the Word of God available to men and women. Here are some quotes taken from history from various manuscripts during this time:

- **Decree of the Council of Toulouse of 1229:** “We prohibit also that the laity should be permitted to have the books of the Old or New Testament; but we most strictly forbid their having any translation of these books.”
- **Ruling of the Council of Tarragona of 1234:** “No one may possess the books of the Old and New Testaments in the Romance language, and if anyone possesses them he must turn them over to the local bishop within eight days after promulgation of this decree, so that they may be burned...”
- **Proclamations at the Ecumenical Council of Constance in 1415:** Oxford professor, and theologian John Wycliffe, was the first (1380 C.E.) to translate the New Testament into English to “...help Christian men to study the Gospel in that tongue in which they know best Christ’s sentence.” For this “heresy” Wycliffe was posthumously condemned by Arundel, the archbishop of Canterbury. By the Council’s decree “Wycliffe’s bones were exhumed and publicly burned and the ashes were thrown into the Swift River.”
- **Fate of William Tyndale in 1536:** William Tyndale was burned at the stake for translating the Bible into English. According to Tyndale, the Church forbid owning or reading the Bible to control and restrict the teachings and to enhance their own power and importance.

It is my personal belief that the same demonic rulers, principalities, and powers that held sway over the religious elite of the day are the same powers that influenced these decisions. This same enemy is still around today. Religious spirits rise up against truth and still attempt to drown or veil the truth of God’s word. Jesus would have the same words to say about this now as He did when addressing the Pharisees of His day. I do not ever want to take for granted the fact that I

have the liberty of studying God's word. We have a continual feast ever before us in His word!

When you are able to stop and take a look at your inner life, is there more than Sunday meeting paint? Do you feel that you have good solid steel that will not crumble under the first sign of stress? In times of reflection on the state of your inner being, are you happy with where you are at right now? We can have as much of God as we want. He is always waiting for us to come boldly before His throne and find grace to help in time of need. Read the Scriptures, and ask that the Spirit of God would reveal Christ, and light and love will flood your hearts.

Prayer: Holy Father, please come and take off me any heavy weight of religion. Help me to live a life of freedom in Christ. Amen.

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Illustration about the Queen Mary taken from the Holman New Testament Commentary, Romans, pp. 90-92.