

June 16<sup>th</sup>, 2024 – (full notes)

## “Woe to You Pharisees: Part One”

Luke 11:37-54

**Read Luke 11:37-41....** Jesus just finishes His instruction about Light and Darkness; God’s Children verses those belonging to the Evil One, Satan. A Pharisee invites Jesus for lunch and Jesus accepts; but when the Pharisee notices Jesus has not performed the normal ceremonial washing prior to the meal, he is surprised that Jesus had not observed the cleansing according to the “tradition of the elders.”

Who were the “elders”? The elders were the adult men, usually older, who were responsible for making decisions in a local family or village. Although the term elder could refer to someone older, most often it referred to a man who was recognized as a leader in a local community.

We see an example of elders as leaders in **Genesis 50:7**, “So Joseph went up to bury his father, and with him went up all the servants of Pharaoh, the elders of his household and all the elders of the land of Egypt.”

In **Exodus 3:16** Moses was instructed, “Go and gather the elders of Israel together and say to them, ‘I am indeed concerned about you and what has been done to you in Egypt.’” Later, in **Exodus 12:21**, “Moses called for all the elders of Israel and said to them, “Go and take for yourselves lambs according to your families, and slay the Passover *lamb*.” I

In **Numbers 11:16**, God told Moses, “Gather for Me seventy men from the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people and their officers and bring them to the tent of meeting, to take their stand there with you.”

Elders held a recognized place of leadership throughout the Old Testament era, including the Israel’s return to Jerusalem under Ezra and Nehemiah.

In the New Testament era, elders continued to lead in communities, and in many cases they served with pastors in local churches. Qualifications for elders who teach, lead, and govern, in the church, are given in **1 Timothy 3; Titus 1**.

Back to **Luke 11:38...** The “washing” spoken of here was as follows: someone pours water over your hands, with your fingers pointing up, allowing the water to drip off at the wrist; then, water is poured over your hands with the fingers pointing down; after which each hand is rubbed with the fist of the other hand.

The Law of Moses gives no instruction about washing hands or body prior to eating, except for priests who are washing before eating holy offerings at the Temple, if they had become unclean (cf. **Leviticus 22:1-9**).

The “elders” of Israel had added hundreds of “to-dos” that were not given by God; these additions given orally, were eventually written down in the Mishna (the book of Jewish religious law, which was considered to be supremely authoritative). And so, man’s laws are added to those of God’s Word.

This is now and has always been a problem, as can be illustrated by the following religious groups who, although they use the Bible, they add additional teachings and requirements based on human instruction, not God’s; and so, it becomes the Bible plus something else that was not given by God.

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**Mormons** use their Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and Pearl of Great Price, which teach that Jesus was the older brother of Satan, and He became a god, and they teach that we also can become a god. **Jehovah's Witnesses** use their New World Translation of the Scriptures that teaches Jesus was not God, but instead was Michael the Archangel, in the flesh. The **Church of Christ, Scientist**, uses their book Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures, in order to teach that Jesus is not eternal or sovereign, nor is He One with the Father. **Seventh Day Adventists** use their book, Conflict of the Ages by E.G. White, which teaches that Sabbath-keeping was not abolished or fulfilled when Jesus was nailed to the Cross, and therefore, those who don't keep the Sabbath are condemned to hell.

No wonder Paul exhorts us (**Colossians 2:8-10**), “See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ. For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority,” (**16-17**), “Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day— things which are a *mere* shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.”

Back to **Luke 11:39**... Speaking of the spiritual uncleanness of the Pharisees, who took great confidence in their rituals and law keeping, so as to look like they were righteous before God, Jesus confronted their unbelief and their lack of justification before God; for their religious acts were nothing more than an external coverup of what was really inside their hearts.

See **Mark 7:3-8**, “(For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands properly, holding to the tradition of the elders, and when they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they wash. And there are many other traditions that they observe, such as the washing of cups and pots and copper vessels and dining couches.) And the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, ‘Why do your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?’ And he said to them, ‘Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, ‘This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’ You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men.”

The Pharisees ask why Jesus' disciples aren't keeping the "traditions of the elders," not the Law of Moses, or the Commandments of God, but the traditions of men. They accuse His disciples of eating with impure or unclean hands, implying that Jesus, as their Master, had taught them to disobey these traditions.

Jesus responds (**verses 6-7**) quoting **Isaiah 29:13**; saying that the actions and words of these hypocrite Pharisees reveals the true condition of their hearts. Their worship was superficial and external, whereas, inside they are full of pride and self-condemnation. The Pharisees and scribes (**verse 8**) had not only abandoned the teachings of God's Word, but they had inserted the teachings and traditions of men in the place of God's commands.

Look again (**Luke 11:39**), Jesus says *they are corrupt and full of robbery* [lit. plunder that they have pillaged from others, for they were damning people to hell with their false religion] *and wickedness* [lit. evil, depravity].

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In **Matthew 23:15**, Jesus says, “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you travel around on sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves.”

In **Matthew 23:27**, Jesus says, “You are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness.”

Look again at **Luke 11:40**... Jesus is addressing His host and the other religious leaders as fools!

David defines what a fool is in **Psalms 14:1-3**, “The fool has said in his heart, ‘There is no God.’ They are corrupt, they have committed abominable deeds; there is no one who does good. The Lord has looked down from heaven upon the sons of men to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God. They have all turned aside, together they have become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one.”

The Jewish Religious Leaders were more concerned about their external rituals and practices than they were about being cleansed of sin and made holy in the sight of God. They were indeed fools!

Paul was a Pharisee, a son of a Pharisee, a Hebrew who was zealous for the Law, and yet, even so, he said (**Romans 2:28-29**), “[A man] is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God.”

See **Philippians 3:1-11**, “Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things again is no trouble to me, and it is a safeguard for you. Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision; for we are the true circumcision, [we] who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh, although I myself might have confidence even in the flesh. If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more: [for I was] circumcised [on] the eighth day, [I am] of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless. But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.”

Paul had credentials of the highest degree, for he had attained the epitome of human greatness, and yet he considered it all rubbish, next to his knowledge of Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.

Back to **Luke 11:40**.... Jesus is saying that these orthodox religious elite, who play at being righteous and serving God, are actually Godless! These men are ignorant, blinded by their hypocrisy, so that they can’t see the vile condition of their own hearts.

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In **Matthew 23:10-11**, Jesus rebuked the false teaching of the Pharisees and scribes, and then (**Matthew 23:12-14**), “[His] disciples said to Him, ‘Do You know that the Pharisees were offended [by what You said]?’ But He answered saying, ‘Every plant which My heavenly Father did not plant shall be uprooted. Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind. And if a blind man guides a blind man, both will fall into a pit.’”

See again **Luke 11:41**... Being charitable, merciful, and caring about others, these attributes and actions should be expressed in the lives of those who belong to the God, especially concerning those who are in desperate need, like the poor, the fatherless, and the lost (**1Peter 4:8**), “Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins.”

The religious extremism of the Pharisees blinded them to the reality that it was more important to God for your heart to be cleansed by God’s Spirit who indwells you, then to perform rituals by which you try to make yourself acceptable to God.

**1John 4:7-11**, “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love. By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.”

If a person is born of God, having been born-again by God’s Spirit, that person will love others; in fact, if we genuinely love God, and have the love of God in us, we will fulfill the supreme commandment of God, which is (**Luke 10:27**) to, “love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and [to love] your neighbor as yourself.”

When a person is living to love God and love others, then all things are clean, acceptable, permissible, even beneficial, because (**Romans 8:1-2**), “There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death,” as Paul declared, the reality is (**Galatians 2:20**), “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me,” and so (**Philippians 4:8-9**), “Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things. The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.”

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