

Luke 11/37-54: JESUS vs RELIGION

Jesus speaks seven denunciations (six woes) against the Pharisees and the experts in the law

The latest in an already long list of brushes with (or refs to) the religious establishment: at the healing of the paralytic (5/27-32); at Levis' conversion party (5/29-31); when questioned about fasting (5/33-39); when the disciples picked corn (6/1-5); at the healing of the man with a shrivelled hand (6/6-11); when testifying about John (7/ 29-30); when anointed by a sinful woman (7/36-50); the prediction that they would play a key role in his arrest, trial and death (9/22); the conversation that provoked the Parable of the Good Samaritan (10/25-37); after healing a mute man, the accusation that he was driving out demons by Satan (11/14-26 cf. Mw 12/24). From these brushes we have already seen some of the characteristics of human religion and those who pursue it: see notes on *Luke 6/1-11: Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath* on p15-17 above (main points listed on p3 below).

For the second time, Jesus goes to dine in a Pharisee's house (v37 cf. 7/36, 14/1). This appears to be after a long spell of teaching (v14-36), which presumably the Pharisees present listened to.

Much of this has to do with the acceptance or rejection of Jesus' words and acts (repentance or the lack of it). The Pharisees' hardness of heart to all the teaching and acts of Jesus sets them up for his rebuke.

v34-35: *"Your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eyes are...bad, your body also is full of darkness. See to it, then, that the light within you is not darkness."*
The Pharisees had failed to heed this warning."

Against the conventions of hospitality, Jesus goes on the attack, exposing the sham of the Pharisees' religion. Then he spurns the chance to be nice to the teachers of the law, and attacks and exposes their fake religion too.

He speaks bluntly and insightfully in condemning falsehood – even though he knew the consequences (v53f).

In all, he identifies and condemns 7 aspects of human religion, 6 of these (3 against each group) with a "woe":

an extreme pronouncement of certain judgement and hopeless misery (cf. Isaiah's 6 woes in ch5&6).

Jesus' Seven Denunciations: The Seven Signs of the Self-Righteousness of Manmade Religion

[Lk11: 7 denunciations (6 woes) || Mw 23: 9 denunciations (7 woes)]

(i) Externals v Internals (v39-41)[|| Mw 23/25-26]

Think that only externals important, or more important than internals => ritualism without reality/repentance.

Mw 15 || Mk 7: What comes out of a man's mouth (heart)(v goes into his mouth) makes him clean or unclean.

(ii) Majors v Minors (v42)[|| Mw 23/23-24]

Congratulate yourself on all the ‘small’s’ you’re doing & think that excuses your lack in more important areas.

(iii) Proud (v43)[|| Mw 23/5-7(&8-12)]

Think you are superior to other men and would like them to think/know it; crave position and recognition.

(iv) Deceived (v44)[|| Mw 23/27-28]

cf. Nu 19/16: you are ‘dead’; but because you and others don’t realize it, you make them unclean and so bring judgement on them.

(v) Hypocritical (v46)[Mw 23/4]

You expect others to be what you are not (what you cannot be, or are not even wanting/trying to be).

(vi) Hardhearted / rebellious (v47-51)[|| Mw 23/29-36]

“generation” (v50,51) = “race”, fallen sinful humanity (cf. 7/31, 9/41, 11/29)

(vii) Blind /deceived (v52)[|| Mw 23/13]

By misrepresenting God & his Word, you have lost the truth that leads to salvation/kingdom – for you & others.

[The 2 ‘extra’ denunciations in Mw 23 not included in Lk 11: v15, v16-22]

Human/manmade religion: the impulse and pursuit of fallen man – at once a search for God and a flight from God; we want to find and know God, and be in the right with him – but our proud sinful nature tells us we must and can do this (and in some cases, have done this) by ourselves (self-righteous, self-justifying).

The power of religion (thus defined) to deceive ourselves and others is astonishing! (*The Deceiver* would love men to think they are safe/saved when they are not.) Here are those that *God’s* people (not heathens!) considered righteous, yet Jesus reserves his strongest words of denunciation and judgement for them: “you are full of greed and wickedness/self-indulgence; full of hypocrisy and wickedness; you foolish people! you hypocrites! (6x) you blind guides! (2x) you blind fools! you blind men! blind Pharisee! you snakes! you brood of vipers!” Jesus says they neither enter heaven themselves nor allow others to. Indeed, they will not escape being condemned to hell themselves and they make others twice as much a son of hell as they are!

Why does the Bible give the Pharisees so much space? What is their relevance to us today if they no longer exist – or do they? Jesus’ words are infallible and correctly mirror the judgements of the Father (Jn 5/30). So – and this is a sobering thought – we too would be the target of those words if and to the extent we are a Pharisee!

The Pharisees (‘separated ones’) were a strict sect (a faction/party within Judaism) which emerged in the 2C BC. Unlike the Sadducees, who were members of priestly families, the Pharisees were made up mostly of ordinary Jews. They were therefore not as prestigious as the Sadducees but were far more numerous. They kept closely to the Mosaic Law, but they embellished the Law with countless other rules, which they believed built a ‘fence around the Law’ so that by keeping these rules people would

be in less danger of disobeying the actual Law of God. They saw themselves as a cut above everybody else and tended to look down on those that did not keep their rules as ‘sinners’. But many of them were no doubt pious men, faithful to God and his Law, the backbone of their synagogues, and upholders of truth and righteousness in society.

Given this, why was Jesus so hard on them? Why did he never affirm them or give any hint that they were appreciated or needed? Why rather did he reserve his harshest and most sustained criticism for them?

For the Pharisees, everything was about outward appearance and behaviour only, adherence to all the externals of the Law and their rules. They had forgotten that the Lord looks at the heart (1 Sa 16/7). Thus sin was only a matter of what you do or don’t do, not what you think or feel. They thought that what went into a man (food) made him clean or unclean, not what came out of a man (from his heart – i.e. what was in his heart). They were thus oblivious to sin of the heart (and disliked it intensely when Jesus touched on this). Because outwardly they did not sin, they had no sense of their own sin (not once in the Gospels is there a recognition of their sin). They lacked any kind of objectivity about themselves (as they truly were, as God saw them). There was no sense of their inward sin; they were blind to the sinful assumptions and motives of their heart and mind. And so they were deceived (blind), hard-hearted and unteachable about themselves – and judgemental towards others.

Jesus attacked them (unlike the ‘sinners’ they despised), and warned both his disciples and the crowds against them, because, for all their appearance of godliness, they actually did great harm: they put themselves and their followers beyond the reach of God’s conviction and so beyond the reach of God’s salvation – proved by their missing the Messiah they claimed to long for right under their noses – and so led them to hell! They shut the kingdom of heaven in men’s faces (cf. Christians who deny others the blessing of God by turning them against certain meetings/moves/churches). Sinners don’t send an innocent man to the cross: religious people do!

The Pharisees were unable or unwilling to believe because of their pride. Jesus explained their unbelief in a question: “How can you [could you possibly] believe if you accept praise from one another, yet make no effort to obtain the praise that comes from the only God?” (Jn 5/44) They preferred the compliments, admiration and adoration of people; glory from man rather than the glory (opinion) of God. It feels better for a while – but at the end of the day one who makes this choice may pay for it dearly and suffers for it bitterly – forever.

This is why Jesus was so ‘hard’ on the Pharisees – and why we need so violently to root out the Pharisee in us!

This is why the Ultimate Man set his face so uncompromisingly and fiercely against human, manmade religion.

The disciples pick corn

- Delight in adding man-made rules to God's law
- Make rules inflexible/absolute v sensible/general
- Man made to serve rules v Rules made to serve man
- Rules even bigger than God (God ruled by them)
- Religion is nothing more than man-made rules
- Religion always wants to find fault with others
- Religion condemns the innocent

A man with a shrivelled hand

- Are always looking for a reason to accuse
- Observing a rule more important than to do good, save life
- Believe they have the right to condemn those who break rule
- Are unable to celebrate God's person and work because their position is undermined
- Religion looks for a reason to accuse, even when there is none
- R says it's more important to keep the rules than end suffering
- R says everybody must be, think, speak and do like us
- Religion gives you the license to do evil and right and yet be convinced you are serving God's cause

Gospel: Do you recognize a Pharisee in yourself? Have you been pursuing a manmade religion (even a 'Christian' one) in order to justify yourself? It may have been sincere but we cannot find God this way. In fact, it will ultimately take us away from God and shut heaven in our face. We must admit we cannot make ourselves righteous, and put our faith in the One who was perfectly righte.