

w e e k 7 : *Jesus despises hypocrisy*

Scripture to Read: Luke 11:37-54

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. 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? 41 But give as alms those things that are within, and behold, everything is clean for you.

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. 43 Woe to you Pharisees! For you love the best seat in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces. 44 Woe to you! For you are like unmarked graves, and people walk over them without knowing it.”

45 One of the lawyers answered him, “Teacher, in saying these things you insult us also.” 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. 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. 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. 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.”

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.

Summary of Luke 11:37-54

A Pharisee who had invited Jesus over for a meal is horrified because Jesus did not ceremonially “wash” before eating. In response exposes the insincerity and inconsistency of the Pharisees: the detailed outward observance that left the heart untouched, the piety that boosted self-importance, the pollution that appeared as clean and wholesome.

Scripture for Memorization and Meditation

“Now you Pharisees cleanse the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness.” [Luke 11:39]

Questions for Personal Study and/or Group Discussion

- Jesus refers to the Pharisees as “fools” and is accused of insulting people in this incident. Do we ever possess the right to speak to people in a similar way? If so, what limits or qualifications might there be to such a right?
- What is the underlying error of the worst of the Pharisees?
- Think about Jesus’ command in v.41: “give as alms those things that are within.” What does that command mean about true piety and purity?
- Make a list of the “woe” statements Jesus makes. Which of these woes strikes closest to your own conscience as you examine your life?
- What do learn about tithing and giving from v.42?
- Who are the Pharisees in today’s society? Who are the “lawyers” who load heavy burdens on people’s backs but don’t themselves lift a finger to shift them? Think about examples in the religious and the political spheres of life.
- What is Jesus saying in v.47-48 about the Pharisees’ building projects for the tombs of the prophets (think “renovation”)? Jesus sounds like an Old Testament prophet in this passage. What implication should we draw from this passage about how they will treat him (see v.53-54)?
- In v.52 what is being “locked” by the Pharisees?

Tips for Parents with Young Children

The church meeting at your supper table. The following steps are “field-tested” ideas to help direct theological discussions between parents and their children while also building the children’s theological vocabularies so that they are increasingly familiar with biblical concepts. Remember: a brief, God-focused time together is better than a long, task-oriented time in which everyone is miserable.

Step 1. Eat with your entire family regularly.

Step 2. Mom and Dad sit next to one another to lead the family discussion.

Step 3. Open the meal by asking if there is anyone or anything to pray for.

Step 4. Someone opens in prayer and covers any requests. This task should be rotated among family members so that different people take turns learning to pray aloud.

Step 5. Discuss how everyone’s day went.

Step 6. Have a Bible in front of the parents in a translation that is age-appropriate for their reading level. Have someone (parent or child) open the Bible to the assigned text and read it aloud while everyone is eating and listening.

Step 7. A parent then announces the lesson’s “Word of the Day,” reading the corresponding definition and/or paraphrasing the meaning at an age-appropriate level.

Step 8. Use some of the discussion questions if your children are older (i.e., junior high and up) and/or the tips for young children if those are more suitable.

Step 9. Let the conversation happen naturally. Listen carefully. Let your children answer the questions. Fill in whatever they miss; lovingly and gently correct whatever they get wrong.

Step 10. If the Scriptures convict you of sin, repent as you need to your family, and share appropriately honest parts of your life story so the kids can see Jesus’ work in your life and your need for him too. This demonstrates gospel humility.

Step 11. At the end of the meal, ask the children if they have any questions for you.

The discussion questions and tips are offered to help you and your children grow in relationship with each other and with Christ. They are meant to be supportive and not constraining. Therefore, do not feel bound by any questions or pressured to follow the steps too rigidly. Follow the Spirit’s leading and don’t be a religious parent who is rigidly inflexible and who makes this time together drudgery rather than delight.

If you miss a night, or if conversation gets off track, or if your family occasionally just wants to talk about something else, don’t stress—it’s inevitable. For your children, the point is to learn what they are thinking about God, to help them know and love Jesus as God and Savior, and to teach them how to articulate and explain their Christian faith. For parents, the point is to instruct children and each other, thereby creating a family culture in which every member freely and naturally talks about God and prays to him together. In short, the goal is that your family would open the Bible and grow in love for Jesus, one another, your church, and the world.

Finally, remember that family Bible study requires a sense of humor, so make sure to have some fun, enjoy some laughs, and build some memories.

Monday: Read Luke 11:37-41. The passage says that Jesus **reclined at table** at the Pharisee’s house. In formal dining, guests reclined on a couch that stretched around three sides of a room. The host took the center seat at a U-shaped series of low tables, surrounded by the most honored guests on either side, with the guests’ heads reclining toward the tables and their feet toward the wall. Drawing or acting out the story or letting your child retell the story in his/her own words is a fun way to make the story come alive in your child’s mind.

Tuesday: Read Luke 11:37-41. Ask your children what it would be like if the outside of their favorite drinking cup were cleaned while never cleaning the inside. Make the connection for them about the difference between looking godly on the outside while not loving God on the inside.

Wednesday: Review what your children learned in Wednesday Night Connection. Spend some time together praying for FPC, its leaders, and your friends at church.

Thursday: Read Luke 11:42-44. Talk about each of the three pictures Jesus gives us of pretending to honor God on the outside, while rejecting him on the inside.

Friday: Read Luke 11:45-54. Focus on v.46. Help your children understand the picture of loading someone down with heavy burdens while refusing to help them carry it. Explain to them that people who tell them what to do (parents, teachers, church leaders) are supposed to love God and obey him as well.

Saturday: Quiz your children on Catechism questions or Bible memory verses they are learning. Pray for Phillip and Grant, who are preaching tomorrow. Also, pray for the Sunday School teachers and for the musicians and choir members who serve us each Sunday.

Sunday: Before you leave for church, explain to your children that their ministry at church is to welcome new children, help their Sunday School teacher, serve others, and worship God in the service. After church, discuss with your children what they learned and what you learned.

Notes and thoughts...

Reclined to eat? The passage says that Jesus **reclined at table** at the Pharisee's house. In formal dining, guests reclined on a couch that stretched around three sides of a room. The host took the center seat at a U-shaped series of low tables, surrounded by the most honored guests on either side, with the guests' heads reclining toward the tables and their feet toward the wall. Many people in the Middle East and rural India still eat in this manner.

Was Jesus against hand washing? The issue here is not hygiene, but religious purity. Jesus is not breaking the law of Moses but rather later Jewish traditions that prescribed ritual washing of hands, utensils, and furniture (see Mark 7:2-4). By his example, Jesus implies that his disciples can ignore these extrabiblical traditions involving ceremonial cleanness.

Spotless on the outside, filthy on the inside: While seeking external purity, the Pharisees were oblivious to the corrupt condition of their hearts. Keeping the traditions that they had added to Scripture was like cleansing the **outside of the cup** but leaving the **inside...full of greed and wickedness**.

Who were the Pharisees anyway? The Pharisees resided primarily in Jerusalem (but see Luke 5:17) and were divided into at least three schools: the disciples of Shammai, Hillel, and Gamaliel. These schools were especially concerned about the proper administration of the temple.

The disciples of Shammai, who represented the more conservative wing of the group, were dominant before the destruction of the temple in a.d. 70 (Mishnah, *Shabbat* 1.4). But Hillel, representing a more liberal interpretation of the Jewish Scriptures, had moved from Babylon to Jerusalem about a generation before Jesus, and gained wide influence as well.

Gamaliel, the son (or grandson) of Hillel, was a renowned teacher of the law in Jerusalem. The apostle Paul had been a disciple of Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). Gamaliel is remembered for his wisdom (Acts 5:34) and careful management of the Jewish calendar. Most Jews followed a lunisolar calendar, which consisted of 12 lunar months, totaling 354 days. Every three years or so a thirteenth month had to be added, in order to bring the average total days of the year up to the 365.25 days of the solar year. Otherwise, the seasons would not have matched the festivals and sacrifices in the temple. Gamaliel determined when to add the thirteenth month (Mishnah, *Rosh Hashshannah* 2.8; *Sanhedrin* 2.6). Ironically, if the Galatian Christians had adopted the calendar of Jewish religious holidays advocated by Paul's opponents (Gal. 4:10), they would have found themselves under the authority of his old teacher!

These three schools attempted to shape the religious life of the ordinary Jew through the dissemination of their traditions (Matt. 23:15; Mark 7:1-13; Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 13.297). Galilee was also a part of their mission. The Jerusalem Talmud

(*Shabbat* 15d) claims that Johanan ben Zakkai, a disciple of Hillel, spent 18 years—probably from a.d. 20 to about 40—teaching in the Galilean town of Araba (or Gabara). So Johanan and Jesus were teaching in Galilee at the same time.

The Pharisees also had considerable influence over local scribes, who would preach in the synagogue according to their interpretations (Matt. 7:29; 23:1–2; Mark 2:16). When the Pharisees in Jerusalem were alerted by some scribes that Jesus was preaching a new teaching with authority, they sent a delegation, which, after observing some alarming behaviors, attributed his miraculous power to Beelzebul (Mark 3:22; 7:1). Since the Pharisees were highly respected by the people, the accusation may have had devastating consequences for Jesus' mission (cf. Matt. 11:20–24). The Pharisaic tradition was pragmatic and relevant to the needs of the time. For instance, the Law of Moses requires all loans to be forgiven in the sabbatical (seventh) year (Deut. 15:2). The intention was to provide relief for borrowers, but the reality was that lenders refused to give loans near the seventh year. Hillel addressed the problem by establishing the *prosbol*, a contract that requires a borrower to pay back a lender even in the seventh year (Mishnah, *Shabbat* 7.1). His school was also highly pragmatic (at least for husbands wanting a divorce) when it came to rules for divorce, interpreting the ambiguous phrase in Deuteronomy 24:1—“some indecency in her”—as allowing a husband to divorce his wife for almost any reason, including burning his dinner (Mishnah, *Gittin* 9.10). However, the school of Shammai interpreted the law more narrowly, allowing divorce only in the case of adultery.

The Dead Sea Scrolls accuse the Pharisees of being “Seekers of Smooth Things,” that is, passing on easy interpretations to the people (e.g., 4Q169 Fragment 1; cf. Isa. 30:10). While Jesus too was vulnerable to this criticism in some areas of his teaching, especially his indifference to matters of ritual purity and Sabbath observance, he is even more stringent than Moses when it comes to justice. Instead of recommending the *prosbol*, he flatly commands his disciples, “do not refuse the one who would borrow from you” (Matt. 5:42). Concerning divorce, he adopts a similar position to the

school of Shammai, but also notes that divorce was not God's original plan and is not required (Matt. 5:31–32; 19:9).

The difference in stringency can be further illustrated by the summations of the law provided by Hillel and Jesus. Hillel says, “What is hateful to you, do not to your neighbor: that is the whole Torah, while the rest is commentary thereof; go and learn it” (Babylonian Talmud, *Shabbat* 31a). Jesus says, “So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets” (Matt. 7:12). We find the negative wording of Hillel's teaching in earlier Jewish writings (*Tobit* 4:15; Philo, *Hypothetica* 7.6–8). Jesus' summation is more challenging, requiring nothing less than a universal love for all people, including one's enemies (Matt. 5:44).

However, despite the curious quality of some of their tradition, the Pharisees were especially scrupulous to maintain a righteous status before God. Many were probably like Paul, who claimed that as a Pharisee he was “blameless” as to the Law of Moses (Phil. 3:6). While many Jews tithed, Pharisees even tithed their garden herbs (Matt. 23:23). While others fasted periodically, they fasted twice a week (Mark 2:18; Luke 18:12). They also maintained purity at their meals to the point of “straining out a gnat” from a cup (Matt. 23:24; cf. Mark 7:4), and they avoided sharing a table with “sinners,” those like tax collectors who habitually broke the law (Mark 2:16; Luke 7:39).

All three expressions of piety come together in the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector (Luke 18:9–14). Jesus depicts the Pharisee as distinguishing himself from the tax collector because he fasted and tithed in order to retain a righteous status before God. Elsewhere, Jesus affirms tithing but claims the Pharisees neglect the “weightier matters of the law”—justice, mercy, and faithfulness (Matt. 23:23).

The Pharisees took their personal relationship with God seriously, in part because they believed that the resurrection of the dead was a reward for living a righteous life (Josephus, *Jewish War* 2.163; *Jewish Antiquities* 18.14; Acts 23:8; *Aboth of Rabbi Nathan* 5A). But Jesus says, “For I tell you, unless your righteousness

exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:20). On another occasion, he tells the Pharisaic teacher Nicodemus that he needs to be “born again,” or “born from above” (*anōthen*, John 3:3). Despite the blameless way of life many Pharisees pursued, such effort, in Jesus' view, was not enough: like all people, they needed to repent and believe in the gospel. From this perspective, Paul could anticipate being found by God, at the resurrection, “not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ” (Phil. 3:9).¹

¹ Note in *ESV Study Bible*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2008), 1799-1800.