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## JESUS AND RELIGION

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### Part 51 of Luke's Gospel: Investigating the Man Who Is God

Pastor Mark Driscoll | Luke 11:33-54 | October 24, 2010

*Luke 11:33-54*

<sup>33</sup> “No one after lighting a lamp puts it in a cellar or under a basket, but on a stand, so that those who enter may see the light. <sup>34</sup> Your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eye is healthy, your whole body is full of light, but when it is bad, your body is full of darkness. <sup>35</sup> Therefore be careful lest the light in you be darkness. <sup>36</sup> If then your whole body is full of light, having no part dark, it will be wholly bright, as when a lamp with its rays gives you light.”

<sup>37</sup> While Jesus was speaking, a Pharisee asked him to dine with him, so he went in and reclined at table. <sup>38</sup> The Pharisee was astonished to see that he did not first wash before dinner. <sup>39</sup> 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. <sup>40</sup> You fools! Did not he who made the outside make the inside also? <sup>41</sup> But give as alms those things that are within, and behold, everything is clean for you.

<sup>42</sup> “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. <sup>43</sup> Woe to you Pharisees! For you love the best seat in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces. <sup>44</sup> Woe to you! For you are like unmarked graves, and people walk over them without knowing it.”

<sup>45</sup> One of the lawyers answered him, “Teacher, in saying these things you insult us also.” <sup>46</sup> 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. <sup>47</sup> Woe to you! For you build the tombs of the prophets whom your fathers killed. <sup>48</sup> So you are witnesses and you consent to the deeds of your fathers, for they killed them, and you build their tombs. <sup>49</sup> Therefore also the Wisdom of God said, ‘I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and persecute,’ <sup>50</sup> so that the blood of all the prophets, shed from the foundation of the world, may be charged against this generation, <sup>51</sup> 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. <sup>52</sup> 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.”

<sup>53</sup> 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,

<sup>54</sup> lying in wait for him, to catch him in something he might say.

## RELIGIOUS WOLVES

All right, Mars Hill, we're in Luke 11:33-54: Jesus and Religion. As you find your place, yes, we will whack it like a piñata. There is Jesus Christ, who in the Bible is called the chief shepherd, the good shepherd. Working under Jesus are other shepherds, people who love Jesus and want to take care of his people, called the sheep. In the Old Testament, this would be prophets, priests, kings. This would include, in the time of Jesus, the apostles and disciples who followed him. In our day, this would be elders, pastors, deacons, community and redemption group leaders, people who love and follow Jesus and want to help his sheep.

So Christians individually are referred to as sheep. Churches are referred to as flocks. And so there is the chief good shepherd, there are the shepherds working under him to look after the sheep and the flocks and protect them from the wolves. And the wolves love to lead sheep astray, teach them false doctrine, take their money, abuse them, enslave them through religious rules, ideology, fear mechanisms, and control.

This explains why, throughout the course of Luke's gospel, one of the massive mega themes is the conflict between Jesus and religious wolves. And I use those words synonymously intentionally. They keep coming into the presence of Jesus to pick a fight with him, and today you're going to see them do it yet again, two groups, the lawyers, or scribes, who are the teachers. So they've got my job and they're not doing it well. Pray by God's grace I would do my job well.

And with them are the Pharisees. They're students and those who learn from them and imitate them. So pray for yourself, that you and I would not fall into this trap where I act like the lawyers and you act like the Pharisees. And they come to argue and to pick a fight with Jesus in the presence of the shepherds and the sheep.

And some of you may have been confused reading the Bible because it says repeatedly to be kind and loving and tenderhearted and merciful and nice to

people, and then we see the prophets saying very confrontational things. We see Jesus often times in an argument and in a fight. We see the same thing with the apostles in the New Testament. And here's why. Shepherds are to be kind, tender hearted, Ephesians 4:32 says, to one another. That is, Christians are supposed to be nice to Christians. Christians are supposed to be nice to non-Christians. But sometimes you've gotta be real stern with the wolves, not because you don't love them, but because you also love the sheep. That's why Martin Luther says it this way, "With the wolves you cannot be too severe. With the weak sheep you cannot be too gentle."

## RELIGIOUS PEOPLE CLOSE THEIR EYES

We'll see Jesus today very gentle with the sheep, very firm and stern with the wolves, beginning in Luke 11:33-36, where he teaches us that one of the ways we fall into religion is regarding how we respond to the light. Here's how Jesus says it, "No one after lighting a lamp puts it in a cellar or under a basket, but on a stand, so that those who enter may see the light. Your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eye is healthy, your whole body is full of light, but when it is bad, your body is full of darkness. Therefore be careful lest the light in you be darkness. If then your whole body is full of light, having no part dark, it will be wholly bright, as when a lamp with its rays gives you light."

Jesus is saying here that religious people close their eyes. And here's where he begins. He begins by saying that light should be at the center of our life, and Jesus is the light of the world. And in a day when there was no electricity and once it got dark you went home and there was utter darkness, you would light a lamp and you would put it in the center of your home to illuminate as much of your home as possible. And so you wanted the light, the lamp, to be central, to be preeminent, to be prominent, so that you could see and that darkness would be exposed so you could live in the light.

And this is an analogy of the Christian faith. Jesus is the light of the world and we want the person of Jesus and everything connected to him, the Bible, Bible teaching, study, church, community groups, Christian friendships, to be at the center of our life. Our greatest treasure, our highest priority, our preeminent joy, that Jesus is at the center and that we want him and his truth to illuminate all of our lives, right? Our friendships, our work, our finances, our hobbies, recreation, we want the light of Jesus illuminating all of our life and exposing any of our sin.

And what some people do, and this is how you begin down the path of religion, they want to take the light and cover it. He uses the analogy of under a basket or put down in the cellar basement. These are people who say, "Well, I don't want Jesus in charge of my life. I don't want him in the center of my life. There are certain parts of my life I don't want him butting into, looking at, exposing, confronting, or commanding that I repent of." So Jesus goes off to the side.

For some of you, this means you go to church rarely, read the Bible rarely, you really don't want to hear it, you don't want to listen to it, you're not really open to it, and you're trying to get Jesus off in the corner. And Jesus remains Lord. That means he is in control and command. And then he goes on to say that, because of this, the light of God still does come to us. He speaks to us through our conscience, the Holy Spirit, Christian friends, Bible teaching. The light still shines despite our efforts to cover that light.

And what some of us do then is unconscionable. We close our eyes. We don't look at the light, the truth, the person, the work of Jesus. "I don't want to see the truth. I don't want to see my own sin. I don't want to see the parts of my life that are not yielded to God. I don't want to know the areas that Jesus is asking me to repent, to change, to learn, to grow." We intentionally close our eyes.

Where in your life are you trying to get Jesus removed from? How is Jesus revealing himself in your life and how are you responding? Is it with eyes open, saying, "Jesus, whatever you have. Whatever you say, whatever you want, that's true. I want my life to be illuminated. I want my sin to be known and revealed. I want you to have your way with me. My whole life belongs to you"?

Or is it, "I close my eyes"? And see, this is not acceptable. This is not actually excusable. This is conscious rebellion. And this is what happens for people who know what Jesus says and they just don't like it. They just don't like it. And so Jesus is teaching this and religious people are present. People who are trying to get him off into the corner. People who have, spiritually speaking, closed their eyes to him.

## RELIGIOUS PEOPLE MAKE RULES FOR GOD

And so the conflict escalates, and we then see that religious people proceed forward to make rules for God. So, in closing their eyes to God, they want to replace God, act like God, make rules in addition to the rules that God made. The law of God in the Old Testament contains 613 laws and the religious people decide, "We need more."

Here's what happens. Luke 11:37-41, "While Jesus was speaking, a Pharisee asked him to dine with him, so he went in and reclined at table." Let me just say this. We've already seen in Luke's gospel Jesus on occasion does hang out with sinners, people with nefarious reputations, gals in clear heels, guys with nine millimeters in their strap, people who just got done being extras in hip-hop video. Those are the kinds of friends that Jesus has, right? And people can't figure this out because he rolls by in the Escalade, and, you know, they hear the bass and Jesus is, you know, waving out the window on the way to eat dinner with these people at the club.

And the religious people are like, "Where is he going? He said he was God. What is he doing in the entourage? Why are they going to the club?" And Jesus tells people, "Yes, I am friends with sinners. I have meals with sinners. I don't approve of their sin. I don't participate in their sin. But I'm here to love and to serve them." It's like looking at a doctor saying, "What's wrong with that doctor? Why is he always with sick people?" Because he's a doctor and he's trying to help them and he's the only one who can. So Jesus is with sinners, and the religious people just don't get it.

Not only does Jesus hang out with sinners, he hangs out with religious people as well. So the religious people, the Pharisees, they invite, "Would you like to come to our party and have dinner with us and our team?" Here's what's shocking to yours truly. Jesus goes. I totally get that, "Hey, you want to

hang out with these guys, eat chicken wings, throw darts?" "Yeah." "You want to come to our religious party?" "No. I don't. There will be no darts, no chicken wings. Somebody's going to pray in King James for 27 minutes before we can even eat whatever slop you put in front of me. Then we're going to argue about all kinds of theological things that probably don't matter. "And at some point, we're going to get into head coverings. No! I don't want to go." [Congregation laughing] "I would rather take a ball-peen hammer to my frontal lobe than go to dinner with the religious people. I can't find my suit. It's not going to be fun at all."

Here's what's awesome about Jesus and convicting to me. He hangs out with religious people too. That's pretty fantastic. Jesus loves everybody. He's even nice to the wolves for a little bit, and then it gets pretty intense. Let's keep reading. "The Pharisee," verse 38, "was astonished to see that he did not first wash before dinner." All of you Purell fans, buckle up. Here we go! [Congregation laughing]

Verse 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. You fools!'" That's a big statement. Jesus says elsewhere, "Don't call someone a fool!" Apparently, unless they're a fool. [Congregation laughing] "'Did not he who made the outside make the inside also? But give as alms those things that are within, and behold, everything is clean for you.'"

Where's Jesus? The religious people's home, having a party with all of the religious people. And just so you know, these guys are impossible. One commentator says, rightly, "It's like having a Bible study with the Internal Revenue Service." Right? These are the guys, when it comes to the Bible, they make the rules about the rules. They interpret the rules. They enforce the rules. And if you find a way to work through the rules, they change the rules. These guys are impossible. They're impossible.

And Jesus goes to dinner with them. I think they want him there, maybe, to elevate their social status, but secondarily maybe to also argue with him and show him a few things and teach him a few truths. Oh, it's going to go bad for them. And the way it's set up with religion is it's a shell game. They win, you lose. There is no way for it to come out differently.

And here's the problem. Religious people make rules for God. If you're at Mars Hill, we love Jesus, we believe the Bible. Everything the Bible says, we believe. We also believe you shouldn't add to it. That's what Proverbs 30:5-6 says. "Do not add to his word or he'll rebuke you and prove you to be a liar." Right? It's not like God wants you to add to his laws, but that's what religious people do.

And one of the rules they had made was this. You have to wash your hands before dinner. Now the Bible never says, "Thou musteth washeth thine hands." It never says that. But the religious guys got together and said, "Well, you need to wash your hands before dinner and that's what the Lord says, thus saith the Lord. It's equal to the Bible. We will enforce it as such. Jesus, welcome to our house for dinner." They all sit down at dinner. All of the religious people are looking. And Jesus is going to break one of the rules. Awesome.

Let's say, for example, there's a big bowl of mashed potatoes. And there's the Lord Jesus Christ, God in human flesh, and with his dirty, unclean hand, he gives that look to all the Pharisees and slowly moves his hand toward the bowl of taters and puts his hand in the bowl of taters and takes the taters to his divine mouth and consumes them to the glory of God and the joy of all people. Oh, and the Lord Jesus would have looked at them and said, "This is why I made taters. I knew I was coming and I wanted to eat me some taters." [Congregation laughing] "Mmm. Love me some taters."

And all the religious people are scandalized! Jesus put his hand in the tater bowl. That's like a double dipper! "You can't do that, Lord!" Right? The double dipper is you put the chip in, eat the dip, double dip the chip. Oh, no! You cannot do that! So all of a sudden, the religious people are mortified. "Oh, no! He's defiled our taters! What will we do with the taters? He's touched the taters. What will we do?" Jesus would have said to them, "Would you like some taters? I will serve any of you taters that you like."

This would be like Jesus getting invited to, let's say, a state dinner at the White House. And he shows up in flip-flops and sits down and reaches into the salad bowl to get himself some salad. Can you imagine the response? Can you imagine the security? "We have fingers in the bowl. I think we're going to need to Taser the Lord. He has touched the salad." Why does Jesus—is he just being mean? Is he being rude? Is he being disrespectful?

There's a serious theological point behind all of this. What he's saying is this: "I don't acknowledge your rules. Your rules are religious. Religion is ridiculous. No to your rules. I wrote this book. It has plenty of rules. You don't get to write a book and add it to my book and include your rules alongside of mine."

Now, had Jesus showed up at the house and it went a little different, and they had not said, "Thus saith the Lord," but they simply would have asked him, "Jesus, welcome to our home. My name is Hank. This is my wife Harriet. Harriet's a germaphobe. She's really worked hard to cook some taters. We have this thing called a spoon and we have this other thing called a sink. And Lord Jesus, we know it's not necessary, but out of love for my wife, could you please wash your hands and use this spoon?" Do you think Jesus would have? Sure. Sure.

But as soon as the guy looks Jesus in the eye and says, "The Lord wants you to wash your hands." Jesus is like, "I kind of know who the Lord is and since I'm here, I'll tell you what he's thinking." And Jesus is confronting their religious system because in their religious system what they're saying is, "Jesus, you can't put your fingers in the tater bowl because that will make you unholy." Any religious system that causes you to be holier than Jesus is wrong. Right? These guys are trying to be holier than Jesus. That's the problem with religious rules.

## RELIGIOUS RULES

And so what he says is two things are wrong with religious rules. Number one, they're all about the external, they're not about the internal. Here's the truth, friends. You really don't know if somebody loves God unless you talk to them. You just don't know. And so, I would tell you this. Don't judge

someone by where they are, get to know them and judge them by where they've come from.

I had this recently at Mars Hill. Somebody came up to me and, you know, they're new to Seattle. They came from the deep south and we love people in the deep south, but they came up to here, the great left coast, right below the Canadian atheists, where things are not exactly the buckle on the Bible belt, and they were freaked out. They came in after the service, like, "We kind of liked the service, Pastor Mark, but we were freaked out because, before the service, people were out smoking and then they came up and led worship." And that really freaked them out. And I said, "What were they smoking?" They said, "They were smoking cigarettes." I said, "That's amazing. That is such tremendous progress. You should have seen—" [*Congregation laughing*] "Before they were on the worship team, they were not smoking cigarettes. That's Mars Hill progress! They're on the sanctification trail. They're doing so good!" Right? "You get to know them and where they came from, you'd be encouraged. Hey, they're making progress."

But see, if you only look at the external, you don't get to know the internal, you could misjudge someone. "Oh, guys have long hair or they have a Mohawk, they have a brohawk, they have a fauxhawk." I don't know. Whatever, you know? "Oh, look at that gal. She shouldn't be wearing those clothes." She has clothes! It's a huge improvement. I mean, she's doing better. You know? Pray for her, encourage her, buy her a sweatshirt. She's doing better. She's doing better. You can look at the external.

Oh, and the big one too, is, you know, "Christians, oh, tattoos, they have tattoos. They have tattoos. They shouldn't have tattoos." Why should they not have tattoos? "Well, the Bible says don't have—" The Bible says in the Old Testament, if you're a priest, from the line of Aaron, part of the sacred order who's made it onto the team, you shouldn't get a tattoo that identifies you as a member of another religion that worships a false God. So if that's you, fine. Everybody else, pfft, whatever. Whatever. Okay?

But you can look at the external and judge and Jesus says, "Get to know the heart." There are people who don't—you know, tattoos, piercings, hair cut, whatever. You look at them, you say, "Oh, they don't look like they should look." Get to know them. What's going on inside? Have they met Jesus? Do they love Jesus? Are they changing and growing and maturing? Then we should be rejoicing.

And, in 1 Samuel 16:7, this is exactly what God says. He says, "People look at the outside. I look at the heart. I get to know who somebody really is and where they're really at." Religion can't judge the heart. It can only judge the external appearances. And as a result, it often judges wrongly. Often judges wrongly.

Secondly, the problem with religious rules is that religious people have preferences that they raise to the level of God's laws. Is it a sin to have preferences? No. It's not a sin at all. Mac, PC, Chevy, Ford, right? DH, no DH. Preferences. It's okay. It's okay. But don't lift your preferences up to the point of God's law. See, the Bible's up here. Our preferences are way down here. And what the religious people do, they like to move their preferences up to the level of God's law.

So let's use a few examples. Alcohol, okay? You may say, "I don't drink because I come from a family of alcoholics and I see a lot of abuse of alcohol." Great! That's your preference. When you lift it up and you say, "Jesus turned water into grape juice," now you're messing with the Bible. We say, "No, well don't say that because that's not true." Jesus turned water into wine. Jesus didn't want anybody to get drunk. Jesus didn't want anybody to abuse alcohol. Jesus doesn't want anybody to disobey the law. Jesus doesn't want anybody to drink and drive. Jesus doesn't want anybody to cause anyone else to stumble. But let's not take your preference and lift it up to the point where you are changing what the Bible says so that it works for you.

How about cigarettes? You see, I'll tell you this. I don't like cigarettes. They're expensive, they give you cancer, and they make me wheeze. I sound like an obscene phone call if anyone smokes around me. I do. I'm like, "Gasp, gasp, gasp." "Pastor Mark, that's unacceptable." "No, you need to stop smoking. This is not flirtation. I'm dying! All right? I'm dying!" So, for me, my preference is I don't like cigarettes. Okay? But I can't lift that up to God's law and say, "Thou shalt not smoke." Because it's not in the Bible. And I can't even manipulate the Bible and make weird arguments, like, "Well, hell is a smoking section." You know? Well, it is. See? You can make an argument but it's not a very good one. What I can say is, "I don't like cigarettes. Feel free to smoke. I don't think it's real healthy for you. Here are all my reasons. Please don't smoke around me. But it's not sin. We're not going to kick you out of the church for it. You're not up for discipline because it's not in the Bible." See? You see the difference?

Okay, we'll do another one: meat. Okay, some of you are vegans, vegetarians. You say, "My preference is no meat. No meat." And I would say, "Okay, great." And you could hold your position. You can have a passionate preference. You can articulate it. Give us all your reasons. Maybe you'll even change our mind and our preference will become your preference because you have some really good reasons for it. But you can't say, "No eating meat." You can't because the Bible doesn't say that. You can't lift your preferences to the point of God's law. And people tend to do this.

We'll do another one because we have nothing else to do, so we'll do this. You've got children. Like, I've got five kids, all right? You need to educate them. Public school, private school, home school, Christian school, what do you do? You can have a preference. You can have a passionate preference. "For my kids, I believe this is best and right." But you can't raise it up to the level of the Bible and declare war over it. And sometimes, like soccer moms do. Soccer moms sometimes on this issue, they turn into cage fighters. They get you in the Muay Thai clinch and they're like, "No, this is the best way to educate the child. This is the best way to educate the child." And you're like, "The Bible says to educate the child, but it doesn't say exactly what method to do that by and I don't care if you're reading from 1 and 2 Homeschoolalonians, it doesn't say that. It just doesn't say that." It doesn't. Some of you are like, "Where is 2 Homeschoolalonians?" Later, okay.

But the big idea is that we can't make rules for God. God makes the rules and those are sufficient. And you can have your preferences. You can hold them passionately. You can have good reasons. You can share those reasons with others. But don't confuse God's principles and your methods. Sometimes there are a couple of different methods to obey God's principle.

So I thought it would be fun to post on Facebook and Twitter today, “Give me all the weird religious rules that you have personally experienced.” And people gave me something like three hundred responses. We’ll see where we’re at right now. This’ll be awesome. All right. You ready? Here’s one. Ryan says, “My family was in a nationwide school and ministry group, the leader of which believed that the wearing of blue jeans gave the impression of rebellion.” Nothing says rebellion like jeans. *[Congregation laughing]* No, think about this. In the ‘60s, people started wearing jeans and now we have terrorism. *[Congregation laughing]* Cause, effect.

It goes on to say that men shouldn’t have facial hair. For some of us, it’s impossible. My mom was a Wookiee, my dad was a Chia Pet. I shave in the morning and by dinnertime I could be in ZZ Top. There’s nothing I can do about that.

He goes on to say that women shouldn’t wear pants and it’s interesting. One woman was posting on there. She walked into a church wearing pants and the usher stopped her and said, “Women are not supposed to wear pants.” So, and for fun, she grabbed—she’s like, “Oh!” And he’s like... He said, “Well, next time you should wear a skirt.” Okey dokey. All right.

Adrian says, “I grew up in a church that focused a lot on what people looked like. I actually remember my Sunday school teacher bringing a brown paper bag to class one morning. She pulled out an apple and an orange and asked us if we could tell the difference between the two. Of course, we said, ‘Yes.’ She then proceeded to tell us how, likewise, you could tell if someone is a Christian in the same way.” By what, pulling them out of a bag?

Here’s an awesome one. Kara says, “We were not allowed to wear black polos at our private school. Any other colors were okay, but not black because, if you wear black, you love the devil.”

Rachel says, “I remember a church that didn’t let boys and girls swim together because the girls could get pregnant.” That’s not how it happens.

Jeff says, “A lady came to a pastor friend of mine and requested prayer for another lady. Upon hearing she needed prayer, my surprised friend replied, ‘Wow, I just spoke with her and she seemed just fine. What’s going on?’ ‘Well,’ the lady said, ‘I don’t think she is saved.’ My friend is now really confused and asked, ‘What makes you think that? She seems to show good fruit, serving here at the church.’ The lady responded, quote, ‘Well, I just found out that she’s a registered Democrat and I don’t see how you can be both a Christian and a Democrat.’” Oh, boy. I’ll just keep going.

Oh, here’s a good one. This one’s awesome. Cassie says, “I have a friend whose parents would not let her trick-or-treat because it was Satan’s birthday.” I am not finished. “And then they had a baby born on Halloween.” *[Congregation laughing]* You can see God in heaven going, “No, seriously, you got to come watch this. This is going to be fantastic.” You can see that woman like, “Argh!” Trying not to have that baby.

Here’s one. Ashley says—this one’s actually sad. “My best friend’s mother-in-law wouldn’t let my friend, the bride, dance at her own wedding reception because they did not believe in dancing, not even slow dancing. And it made the bride cry.” This is the religious mom coming up, “You cannot dance with my son. It could lead to—” “Duh. We just got married. That’s what we were hoping.”

Here’s a kid, Josh. I think he’s a high school kid, like in a public school. He says, “There’s this Seventh Day Adventist kid at my school who says he’ll go to hell if he eats shrimp. So when we have it for hot lunch, he gives it away.” Now, just think about that. Just think about that. “Apparently, he doesn’t care if other people go to hell.”

There are more. And if I read them, I would need to fire myself. So, here’s the big idea. And you say, “Why do you make fun of religious people?” Because we love them! We love them! And they’re hilarious. And they take themselves so seriously that sometimes we have a little fun to invite them to laugh at themselves and repent of their religion and let go of their rules and let Jesus put his fingers in their taters. Amen?

## RELIGIOUS PEOPLE WANT PRAISE

Well, they don’t respond very well. Jesus continues his conflict with the wolves and he says that the real heart of the issue is that religious people want praise. They don’t want God to be praised, they want to be praised. So he says this, Luke 11:42–44, “But woe to you Pharisees!” Woe is a prophetic word. The Old Testament prophets would say, “Woe!” They were pointing out sin, calling people to repent. He’s going to do this six times.

“For you tithe the mint and rue and every herb, and neglect justice and the love of God. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others. Woe to you Pharisees! For you love the best seat in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces. Woe to you! For you are like unmarked graves, and people walk over them without knowing it.”

He says, “Here’s the problem with you religious people. You’re really committed to the wrong things.” You’re really committed to the wrong things. And I tell you this because some of you are new Christians. Some of you are not all that devoted and you’ll be easily impressed by religious people. “Wow! Look at how zealous they are! They get up early! They stay up late! They memorize stuff! They’ve got all kinds of things to do. They get down on their knees. They face a certain direction. They make pilgrimage. They do all kinds of seemingly holy, important things. Some of them even have uniforms. The guy in charge has got a hat. This seems like a really serious system and I’m impressed by it.”

And Jesus says, “No, let’s unpack it. Number one, they’re prideful and they want you to know what they tithe.” See, what we don’t do is we don’t tell everybody what everybody else tithes. Tithing’s where you give your finances generously to God and his people and purposes. Tithing literally means a tenth. The base tithe was 10 percent, the total tithe in the Old Testament was more than 25 percent, and these guys were so serious about the tithe, he says they tithed out of their spice rack. All right? That’s a religious person with OCD and free time. All right? You go into your spice rack, like, “I don’t know if I gave the Lord a tenth of all my dill leaves.” Well, you’re kind of being a dill leaf when you do that. Right? These guys are serious. They’re really serious. And Jesus says, “You know what though? You tithe out of your spice rack, but you don’t love God and you don’t help people.”

And he says, "It's okay to tithe. Feel free to give. But you're supposed to love God and help people. You don't do that, you miss the whole big idea of what life is truly about."

He says, "In addition, your pride manifests itself that you guys love the seats. You love the good seats." See, in some religions, some organizations, some even, sadly, churches, you kind of pay for your seat. There are actually some religions where you buy season tickets. Kind of like a sporting event. And if you pay a little bit, well, you got to sit in the back. You pay a little more, you sit in the middle. You pay a lot, you sit up front. If you're one of the big donors, you get a seat up front, maybe on a big throne, facing everybody else. You get to wear your best clothes and look all religious and sit up front. "Here are the big givers."

And in that day, that's how it worked. The big givers sat up front, facing the people. And the people could look at them and say, "Oh, I wish I was a big giver. I wish I could sit up front. I wish they gave me a throne. Oh, I wish I was important like that." And the religious people just look all smug and self-righteous.

And you need to know this at Mars Hill. We want you to give, but whether or not you give, the seats are open and the rich and the poor and the young and the old and the black and the white and the wise and the simple and those who give and those who take are all welcome to just sit wherever they want because God is a God of grace and we're a family of love.

And Jesus says, "You know, this whole religious system and pecking order and depending upon where you sit shows where you fall in the organizational chart, it's really nefarious."

Thirdly, he says that pride manifests itself with titles. They love their titles! "We're the Pharisees." So they're more worried about the name of the Pharisees than the name of God. They're more worried about their team, their tribe. You know what? Mars Hill's fine. Reformed theology's fine. Jesus is the only name that really matters. That's the name we want to be known for and that's the name want to make much of.

Number four, he says, "You're all in it for the fame." You love it when you're at the marketplace, which was their equivalent of the grocery store, and everybody walks up, "Oh! Aren't you so and so? Aren't you the really religious one? I saw you up front. I heard that you are giving 34 percent. Nice hat!" Religious people always got a hat, and the bigger the hat, the bigger the guy.

And Jesus says, "Everybody's impressed by this, and you wolves, you're hurting the sheep." See, some people think, "Religion, oh, why do we get angry at religion? Why do we oppose religion? Why do we not support religion?" Because religion doesn't help people. It builds a system that compels them to be like one another rather than like Jesus.

Jesus says this, it's an amazing statement, "Woe to you, for you are like unmarked graves, and people walk over them without knowing it." That's a big statement. Now, in the Bible, Numbers 19:16, it gives us an account where, when a body is buried, we're to honor that person who is deceased and you're not supposed to walk on their grave. It's a respect thing. And if you do, you're declared ceremonially, ritually unclean for a week. And you need to undergo purification rituals and bathing to cleanse yourself, and so you're basically quarantined. So you really don't want to step on a grave. So they would put markers over the tombs and they would wash them white so you could see where the tombs were. And once in a while, people wouldn't do that and you would step on a grave and you didn't know it and it wasn't marked or the tombstone wasn't appropriate, and then all of a sudden you're defiled and you're quarantined and you got a big week of work to cleanse yourself.

Here's what Jesus is saying. Number one, religious people are spiritually dead. Now, that's a very big statement. They are spiritually dead. You say, "But they are physically alive! Look at all the things they're saying and doing and giving." But inwardly—see, externally they're alive physically, but inwardly they're dead spiritually. They don't know Jesus. They don't love Jesus. They don't enjoy Jesus.

And he says, in addition to that, "Not only are you dead, you're defiling other people. You think you're making them clean? You're making them unclean. You think you're making them holy? You're making them unholy. You think you're liberating them? You're enslaving them. You think you're bringing them to God? You're bringing them to hell." I need you believe that about religion.

See, some of you see religion and Jesus as almost synonymous. They're antithetical. Some of you would see Jesus plus religion. No, see Jesus plus anything ruins everything. It's just Jesus or religion. It's never Jesus plus religion. How will they respond?

## **RELIGIOUS PEOPLE DEFEND THEIR IDOL**

Now, I'm going to show you in just a moment that people defend, particularly religious people defend their idol. An idol is anyone or anything that is the most important thing in our life. It's where we get our joy, our identity. It's where our money and our time and our talent and our treasure go. It is, to use the first analogy, it's that which is in the center of our life. And if it's not Jesus, I'll tell you what friends, it's going to be an idol. Everyone worships. The only difference is who or what or how or when or why we worship. If you don't worship Jesus, you'll worship someone or something else.

For some, it's the idol of religion. You ever wonder why people so violently defend their idol? It's because they worship it as a god. You're going to see this in just a moment. But religious people defend their idol, and for religious people their idol is religion. You ever wonder why certain churches can't move to another building? Because people worship the building. Why you can't change service times? Because people worship the time. Why you can't change the musical style? Because people worship worship, they don't worship God. Why if leaders leave or move on or go do other things, the people cease even being committed to the church? Why? Because they worship the leader. And sometimes people violently defend their idol. We see this throughout the Bible.

And this is true of those who have hard religion, which is a formal religious system, or sometimes soft religion, which is the worship of spirituality or good works or morality or a cause, and sometimes it's even the worship of deadly things like substances, alcohol, drugs, sex. Have you ever tried to take someone's idol away? You ever taken a bottle away from an alcoholic? They defend it. Sometimes violently. Try to take drugs or gambling or sexual addiction away from someone, they become very passionate, very defensive. They'll shove you away and they'll choose their idol because it is, for them, like a god.

And Jesus here, in love, is giving the religious people a choice. He is saying, "You can have me or religion. Which do you want?" Here's how they respond. And we see that religious people defend their idol. It's a long section, Luke 11:45-54, "One of the lawyers answered him, 'Teacher, in saying these things you insult us also.'" This is fascinating. These religious people have been intimidating people, bullying people, making rules, enslaving people, discouraging people, insulting people. And Jesus comes around and he puts his hand in the tater bowl and he breaks their rules and he tells them they're wrong and they have a little committee meeting.

And one of the wolves walks out and says, "Jesus, on behalf of the committee, I hate to inform you, you've hurt our feelings. You hurt our feelings, Jesus. You've insulted us. I mean, Tom's crying. Tom is crying. His feelings are hurt. His dad was a Pharisee, his granddad was a Pharisee, his great-granddad was a Pharisee. He's really sad. Now, Jesus, we know you didn't mean to offend us. Nobody's perfect. We all say some things we regret. It would be really nice if you would just say you're sorry. Maybe post it on a blog, send out a press release. Write a book, talking about how you're sorry the way you've treated the Pharisees. And because, you know, we're the good people, we would forgive you. So, now's a good opportunity for you to apologize for hurting our feelings."

See, this is what religious people do. They hurt people and when they're confronted, they change the subject from their religion to their feelings. And Jesus loves them enough and those who are watching enough to not allow them to change the subject. How many of you have friends like that? They're overbearing, they're bullying, they're intimidating, they're rule making, they're religious, and when you confront them and say, "This has to stop, it's unacceptable," "You are so rude." Really? See, a wolf who cries is still a wolf. And sometimes wolves want sympathy, but they need to repent. Don't you love Jesus?

"You hurt our feelings. Our feelings are supreme. It's not the truth that's supreme, it's our feelings. No one ever talked to us like that. You seem to think we're wrong. Of course, that can't be what you mean." How will he respond?

"And he said, 'Woe to you lawyers also!'" What Jesus said was, "Oh, I offended you? Did I not offend everyone? Let me fix that." Oh! You've picked a fight with Jesus. "'For you load people with burdens too hard to bear, and you yourselves do not touch the burdens with one of your fingers.'"

He says, "You don't get it, guys! You've been making rules about the rules and intimidating, bullying, enslaving people with your rules. You've got everybody confused. The sheep are absolutely terrified and they're overworked and they're overburdened and I tell you that it's wrong and you talk about your feelings. You don't love me. You don't help people. You're part of the problem, not the solution. You work for the enemy. You don't work for my Father."

Imagine saying—and these are, and there are decent religious people in all kinds of groups. Different religions and different kinds of Christian, religious devotion that's unhealthy and unbiblical. These guys are moral. They're not drunk. They're not committing adultery. They're not stealing. They're not murdering. These are decent, upstanding, moral, religious people. And Jesus says that they're very dangerous.

"'Woe to you!'" verse 47, "'For you build the tombs of the prophets whom your fathers killed. So you are witnesses and you consent to the deeds of your fathers, for they killed them, and you build their tombs. Therefore also the Wisdom of God said, 'I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and persecute.'"

Here's what he's saying: "Guys, this is a really long-standing problem. Physically and/or spiritually speaking, it has been one generation after the next of religion, adding rules to the rules and control to the control and legalism to the legalism and moralism to the moralism. And ultimately, it has to stop. And you guys will look back and say, 'Well, yeah, there was a day when they hurt God's prophets, but we built tombs and monuments and shrines to acknowledge that.'" He says, "All day you can pretend that you acknowledge the sin of the past, but if you're still the same in your heart, you're just going to manifest the same fruit in your life. You're going to do the same thing that was done in the past, where the religious people would rise up and the prophets would come and say, 'Repent,' and the religious people would murder them."

And here comes Jesus, calling the religious people to repent, and they are saying, "We've learned our lesson." And he is saying, "No, you have not." Because what will they do to him? They're going to kill Jesus, just like their spiritual fathers killed the prophets that he sent before them.

Jesus continues, "'So that the blood of all the prophets, shed from the foundation of the world, may be charged against this generation, 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.'"

He goes to Cain. This is fascinating. Some of you know the story of the Bible. It opens with God creating the heavens and the earth, and then God creating the man and the woman in his image and likeness, and then Adam and Eve being visited by Satan, the serpent. And he tempts them to not worship God, but to form their own religion. Make no mistake about it, Satan from the garden is seeking to tempt our parents to start their own religion, a religion apart from God, a religion where they don't obey his rules, they make their own. They don't live for his glory, they live for their glory. They don't do what he says, they do what they feel is best. Satan is, in the garden, tempting our first parents to establish their own religion apart from God. They join Satan in his rebellion. They form, as it were, their own religion, the man and the woman.

They then give birth to two sons, the first people born in human history, two brothers, Cain and Abel. Jesus here speaks of Cain. Cain and Abel are the first two brothers. One is a worshiper. His name is Abel. One is religious. His name is Cain. They both come to the Lord with an offering in their hand. Their offerings are different, but their offerings are acceptable insofar as what is in their hands in the sight of God. The New Testament reveals really what was happening here, but as we read the account in Genesis, God looks at Cain and he says, "Your offering is not acceptable to me. And Abel's offering is acceptable." The difference being not what is in their hands, but what is in their heart. Abel comes loving God in his heart, and bringing a worship offering in his hands. Cain comes not loving God in his heart, but religiously presenting his worship offering in his hands.

And God basically tells Cain, "Don't try to fool me with religion. It's not just what I see in your hands, it's what I see in your heart." See, some of you would come here and you would say, "I'm doing the religious thing." And God would say, "You need to do it with a worshipful, loving heart. It's the internal and the external that both count." And so God warned Cain, and said, "Cain, sin is crouching at your door. You've got a decision to make. Are you going to deal with the sin in your heart, and jealousy and covetousness against your brother, and a lack of love toward me? Or will you continue to be religious, doing good things out here, but not loving me in there?"

What does Cain do to Abel? What does the religious brother do to the worshiper? What does he do? Cain kills Abel. The religious brother murders the worshipping brother. This is why we do not accept religion as a good thing. Religious people outwardly will have a piety, but inwardly they're dead. And the result is that they work for the cause of death, even sometimes violently defending their religious idol, killing people. Murdering them, like Cain did Abel.

Jesus goes on, verse 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." He says, "You know what? I came to save sinners and there are sinners who are looking to me and may be inclined toward me, but they can't see me because you're in the way. They can't get to me because you're blocking the path. And you're telling them the only way to God is through religion." And Jesus is saying, "I need to get the religious people out of the way so that the sinners can come to me." Religion gets in the way of redemption. Religion gets in the way of redemption.

Now they have an opportunity here. At this point they can repent. "Oh my goodness, we're like Cain. We're like the murderers of the prophets." Instead, verse 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, lying in wait for him, to catch him in something he might say."

"Jesus, we demand you answer our questions. Jesus, we demand that you meet with us. Jesus, we've called in the media. Jesus, we have a conference. Jesus, we order you. We will set the agenda. We will ask the questions. You will answer to us." And Jesus says, "I'm out of here. I don't abide by your rules. I don't play by your system. I don't acknowledge your authority." And he leaves.

And the Bible says at that moment they became critics. "What is he saying? Where is he going? Let's follow him. Let's see if we can quote him out of context. Let's see if we can present him as someone he's not. Let's see if we can find a way to kill him. Then we'll get rid of him and we'll have all the sheep to ourselves." This is very serious business.

## BE PERFECT

Now let me explain this to you. In that day, the Pharisees were considered the holiest men on earth. I mean, this was as holy as you could be. These guys didn't do anything on the Sabbath for fear of disobeying one of the Ten Commandments. These guys tithed out of their spice rack. In an effort to not look at a woman lustfully, they would literally walk around looking at the ground, banging their head into things. These guys were so committed. They learned Hebrew. They memorized whole chunks of the Old Testament law. I mean, they could tell you not only what the 613 laws were, they could probably memorize for you most, if not all, of the 613 laws. These guys were as holy as it gets as far as human religion, works righteousness, is concerned.

And Jesus says something that is terrifying, fascinating, and illuminating in Matthew 5:20. He says this, and this is what sort of undergirds the ongoing conflict with the Pharisees. Jesus says, "Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the Pharisees, you will not inherit eternal life." How many of you are shocked by that? You're like—I mean, how many of you, really, you brought your dill? How many of you brought your dill? You're like, "No, I'm so committed, I went through my spice rack and I'm waiting for you to pass the offering opportunity so that I can put my spice rack 10 percent in." See, you guys didn't even think about that. You're like, "I'm not that committed. Sabbath? What is that? I don't even know what that is. Memorize? No, I don't. I'm not that committed."

This is like going to a fair and there's a ride you really want to ride. Let's call it the heaven ride, for purposes of illustration. And you go up to the guy running the ride and you say, "I'd like to ride the heaven ride." And he says, "Oh, well that's fine. We have a height qualifier. You need to be over a certain line of height, and if you're over that line, you get to ride the ride." "Okay, great. Where's the line? I don't see the line." "Oh, the line's up there. You need to be 127 feet tall to ride the ride." You go, "Well, that's taller than me. I don't know if I could ride the heaven ride and I don't sense a 122-foot growth spurt coming. Has anyone ever ridden the ride?" "Just one guy named Jesus." Nobody else gets to ride the ride.

See, how many of you, you hear this and it echoes the words of Jesus who says elsewhere, "Be," what? "Perfect like your heavenly Father is perfect." See, some of you come here today, you say, "You know what? That's it. I want to ride the heaven ride. I want all of my sins forgiven. I want to spend forever with God. I want him to help me right now and I want him to be with me forever. What do I need to do?" Easy. Be perfect in thought, word, deed, and motive. In the future and the past. That's all. Go do it. You say, "Too late. It won't happen."

And see, the problem with religion is this. Religion sees that we're sinners separated from God. Religion sees that God is holy and we're unacceptable



in his sight. And so then, religion decides, "We need to do something! Something needs to be done!" And then the religious leaders rise up and say, "We'll make a list of rules! And we'll keep score! And we'll teach people! And we'll discipline them and we'll teach them what to do! And they're going to obey all of our rules! And then God will look down and say, 'These are the good guys and these are the bad guys. They kept the rules. They didn't keep the rules. I'll save the good guys!'" That's religion. And it's all about works. It's all about somebody doing something. And it becomes an idol. "God, you're obligated to me because I'm religious, moral, pious, and good. God, you have to love me. You have to save me. You have to forgive me. I'm a good person. I did good things. I'm better than those guys, that's for sure."

## RELIGION IS DUNG

There was a guy who was much like this, lived his life out of this ideology. His name was Saul. He says in Philippians 3, "I'm a Hebrew. I was born from the tribe of Benjamin. I got a pure bloodline. I studied under Gamaliel, one of the leading rabbis. I was at the top of my class. I know Hebrew and memorize books of the Bible. I'm so devoted religiously and zealously to my idol of religion and my performance, my works, my righteousness, my goodness, that I also murdered a deacon named Stephen, who loved Jesus."

And then Saul, later his name is changed to Paul, he met Jesus. And here's what he says in Philippians 3:8, "Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish," or dung, "in order that I may gain Christ." Paul says, "My whole life, all my works, all my religion, all the rule keeping, rule making, rule enforcing, rule interpreting, once I met Jesus, I realized this: It's just a steaming pile." That's literally what the Greek says.

Next time you're at the park, the dog park, you walk out into your yard, you walk out of your condo, dorm, apartment, and there's a little strip of grass and a big steaming pile that somebody's dog left, just remind yourself, "Ah, there lies religion. There lies religion." And some religious people, they get all—I mean, it's amazing. They'll be like, "Well, my pile is more neatly stacked than your pile." So? It's still a pile. "Well, my pile's bigger than your pile." I'm not sure that's a good thing. "Well, I put sprinkles on my pile and pretended it was a cookie." Well, it's still a pile. And religion is nothing but a pile. You say, "One religion's a green pile. One religion's a brown pile. One religion's a dark brown pile." It's still a pile. All a pile. All a pile. And Paul says, "I realized, once I met Jesus, my whole life was just stacking a pile."

So what do you do? Where do you get righteousness? It's Jesus. This is why Jesus so passionately opposes religion. It's Jesus or religion. That's all it is. And religion says, "We must work! Something must be done!" And here's the truth. You and I, everyone who will ever be saved, is saved by works, the works of Jesus. Not our works, his works. Not what we do, what he does. Not the life we live, the life he lives. Religion is right, somebody needs to do something! Religious people come and say, "Here's the list, do it!" Jesus comes in from the cross says, "It is finished." All the work's done.

Jesus takes our sin, dies on the cross in our place, for our sins, as our substitute, rises from death, conquering Satan, sin, and death, really, truly redeeming us from religion, and he gives us his righteousness. We're perfect in Christ. We're forgiven in Christ. We're redeemed in Christ. We're justified in Christ. We're adopted in Christ. It's all of Jesus' work, none of our own. We call this grace. It's a gift. You receive it.

And some of you say, "What, you don't care about holiness? You don't care about discipline?" Sure we do! We want to be holy, not so that God will love us, but because in Christ he does. Not so that God would accept us, but because in Christ he does. Not to earn God's merit, favor, love, approval, and blessing, but because in Christ he's already given us all things. So we want to be holy, not so that God will be pleased with us, but because God is pleased with us in Christ, and if Jesus loves us, we love him, he puts the Holy Spirit in us, he gives a new heart, new desires, new nature. Now we want to obey him. Not out of fear, out of joy. Not so that God will embrace us, but because we already feel his affection. The motivation is completely different than religion. And the result is joy.

And so, for those of you who are here, some of you truly, deeply, thoroughly need to repent of your religion. Enough with the religion. Enough with the rule making. Enough with the self-righteousness. Enough with the boasting. Enough with the bragging. Enough with the judging. Repent of your religion and come to Jesus. And some of you, you're sinners. You know it. Your thing isn't working. Your life isn't working. You know you're not pleasing to God. You know it's not as it should be. But between you and Jesus has been a lot of religious people. And they've blocked the way and they've made it confusing. And, "Do this and don't do that. And stop this and start that." And you're confused and disoriented.

Or maybe you want to get to Jesus, but your fear is, "If I got to be religious, is there a way to have Jesus without religion?" I have good news for you! You can't have Jesus and religion. It's just Jesus. And today, he removes for you the religious people and just opens himself to you. He says, "Come to me, all who are weary and burdened and heavy laden. Those of you who have been carrying that yoke of religion, I'll forgive your sin and give rest to your soul."

So I invite the religious people to repent of religion and get to Jesus, and I encourage the sinners to repent of sin and not become religious, but come to Jesus. Amen? Amen. What good news this is.

Father God, I pray against the enemy, his servants, their works, and effects. Father, I confess publicly, if I had to choose in which direction I would err, it would be the direction of a Pharisee. I would be bold and zealous and disciplined and committed and self-righteous and religious and rule making and condemning. God, at times I know I have been. I pray, Holy Spirit, that you would save me from myself and help me do a better job loving and serving these people that call Mars Hill home. God, for those who are like me and prone toward the default mode of the human heart, what Martin Luther calls religion, I pray God you would convict us of the sin of religion and allow us to repent thoroughly, wholeheartedly. God, for those who they know that they're sinners and they have been turned off because of religion and religious people, I pray now that they would see Jesus clearly and that religion and religious people would not be standing in their way, and that they would come to Jesus in whose name we pray. Amen.

*[End of Audio]*

*Note: This sermon transcript has been edited for readability.*

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