

Inside Out

Luke: Certainty of the Truth

Luke 11:37-54

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Typhoid Mary

In the early twentieth century, typhoid fever was a major epidemic in the United States. In 1907, Mary Mallon became the first person to be identified as a typhoid carrier. She was an Irish immigrant and a cook in New York City. Many of the families she cooked for became infected with typhoid fever and some of them died. In 1906 one of those families hired a typhoid researcher to investigate the cause of the fever. He believed it all traced back to Mary Mallon. But Mary was adamant that she was not a carrier.

You see, from all external appearances, Mary was in perfect health. She showed no outward symptoms of typhoid. She was what doctor's call asymptomatic. So she secretly kept moving around from family to family, cooking and spreading her disease. Eventually, she was busted and put into prison, then quarantined. While in prison, they did tests and determined that she was a typhoid carrier. She was responsible for spreading typhoid to at least fifty-three people and the death of at least three people. Some believe that she is responsible for the death of up to fifty people.

Mary Mallon is now known as Typhoid Mary. This title is still given to people today; but not to people who are carriers of typhoid fever. The title is given to people who unknowingly spread a literal or a figurative disease.¹

In our passage this morning, Jesus encounters two groups of religious leaders, who are like Typhoid Mary.² From all external appearances the Pharisees and lawyers are perfectly healthy. They look good on the outside. But Jesus knows that they are infected; they're carriers of greed and wickedness. They were deadly.

In Luke 12:1, Jesus says to his disciples, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy." Jesus knew the religious leaders were hypocrites. They posed as godly men, but down deep they were rotten sinners. And their hypocrisy was infectious. It spread like yeast spreads in a lump of dough. His disciples needed to stay away from them. But even more importantly, they needed to beware of becoming like them.

You see, all of us are susceptible to becoming legalistic hypocrites. But legalism is the enemy of true discipleship. Legalism is dangerous and it's deadly.

Luke 11:37-54³

³⁷While Jesus was speaking, a Pharisee asked him to dine with him, so he went in and reclined at table. ³⁸The Pharisee was astonished to see that he did not first wash before dinner. ³⁹And 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. ⁴⁰You fools! Did not he who made the outside make the inside also? ⁴¹But 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. ⁴³Woe to you Pharisees! For you love the best seat in the synagogues and

¹ "[Mary Mallon](#)." Article, Wikipedia (accessed August 7, 2017).

² Hughes, R. Kent. *Luke: That You May Know the Truth*. Preaching the Word. Wheaton, Ill: Crossway Books, 1998.

³ Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version[®] unless otherwise noted.

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

⁴⁵One of the lawyers answered him, “Teacher, in saying these things you insult us also.” ⁴⁶And 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. ⁴⁷Woe to you! For you build the tombs of the prophets whom your fathers killed. ⁴⁸So you are witnesses and you consent to the deeds of your fathers, for they killed them, and you build their tombs. ⁴⁹Therefore also the Wisdom of God said, ‘I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and persecute,’ ⁵⁰so that the blood of all the prophets, shed from the foundation of the world, may be charged against this generation, ⁵¹from 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. ⁵²Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge. You did not enter yourselves, and you hindered those who were entering.”

⁵³As he went away from there, the scribes and the Pharisees began to press him hard and to provoke him to speak about many things, ⁵⁴lying in wait for him, to catch him in something he might say.

This is the Word of the Lord.

This passage is divided into two sections. In the first section, Jesus pronounces three woes to the Pharisees that expose them as legalistic hypocrites. In the second section, Jesus pronounces three woes to the lawyers that expose them as legalist hypocrites. What we learn is that legalism is dangerous and we need to avoid it like the plague. It’s dangerous for seven reasons.

LEGALISM HIDES THE SIN IN OUR HEARTS (11:37-41)

First, legalism hides the sin in our hearts. We see this in verses 37-41.

When Jesus shows up for dinner at the Pharisee’s house, Jesus doesn’t wash his hands. And the Pharisee can’t believe his eyes! He’s astonished. Now some of you moms or grandmas out there may be thinking, “I can understand why the Pharisee was upset; of course you need to wash up before dinner. Was Jesus born in a barn or something?! If you don’t wash, you’ll spread germs.” But the Pharisee isn’t upset because Jesus was eating with dirty hands.

You see, the Pharisees had created a bunch of rules and rituals for washing your hands, and washing the dishes, before you eat. And they believed these rituals made you religiously clean. But these rules weren’t found in the Bible (cf. Mark 7:5). And Jesus refuses to follow their legalistic rules.

Jesus knows what they’re thinking. They’re thinking he’s not acting like a good religious Jew. He knows they’re judging him, because that’s what legalists do! And so he says to them, “Now you Pharisees cleanse the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness. You fools! 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.”

The legalists think that Jesus is unclean because he didn’t follow their man-made rules. But he turns it on them. He shows them that they’re the ones who are unclean spiritually. He says, “Your dishes may be clean, but your hearts are filthy! They’re full of greed and wickedness. You may follow religious rituals. You may even give your alms to the poor. But you do it all out of a sinful heart.” Jesus is saying to them, “If your good deeds don’t come from a good heart then they’re not good deeds.”

Do you see how easy it is for external works to cover up our internal condition—to hide the sin in our hearts?

What if people could see *your* heart? What if they could see the real you? What if you were turned inside out? If your inside could be seen on the outside? That's a pretty scary prospect, isn't it? It's so scary that we spend so much time trying to cover up who we really are. We cover up in the way we dress, in what we say, in what we do, you name it.

But Jesus wants us to know something today; the One who made the outside made the inside also. God sees it all. He sees the outside and the inside.

And unless our insides are clean, it doesn't matter what we do on the outside; it won't be pure. If our hearts aren't pure, none of our deeds will be pure either, not even the most religious deeds we do.

Friends, God wants to deal with our hearts first and foremost.

LEGALISM MAJORS ON THE MINORS (11:42)

So external legalism hides the internal sin of our hearts. That's the first danger of legalism. The second is this. Legalism majors on the minors. This is seen in the first woe pronounced against the Pharisees in verse 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."

Normally, when we think of majoring on the minors, we think of people who focus on a secondary doctrine more than a primary doctrine; they focus, for example, on the timing of Christ's return more than the gospel. But here, Jesus is talking about something a little different.

Again, the Pharisees are focused more on their external works than the internal condition of their heart. They're focused on getting every detail of their giving right, but they're neglecting justice and the love of God. They are majoring on their giving. And they are minoring on love.

Giving is a good thing. But just because someone gives a large portion of their income away that doesn't necessarily mean they're generous. Being generous comes from the heart. It comes from a heart to do good to others because you have a deep sense of all the good that God has done for you. It comes out of a love for others that's motivated by God's love for you.

What about you? When you do good works are you missing the heart of God? Are you missing those who are hurting and in need?⁴ If so, you're probably majoring on the minor of your external works instead of majoring on love.

LEGALISM SEEKS MAN'S APPROVAL (11:43)

The Pharisees weren't giving out of love for others and they weren't giving in response to God's love for them. If Tina Turner were to ask them, "What's love got to do with it?" they would have to say, "Love had nothing to do with it." It had everything to do with looks. It had everything to do with the way they looked to others.

⁴ Bock, Darrell L. *Luke*. The NIV application commentary. Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 1996.

This leads us to the third danger of legalism. Legalism seeks man's approval. This is found in verse 43, "Woe to you Pharisees! For you love the best seat in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces."

The Pharisees did good works not out of love for God and others, but out of a love to look good. Again, their motivation was external instead of internal. They wanted to be noticed and recognized. So they practiced their good deeds before men.

In Matthew, Jesus says, "Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others... But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing..." (6:1-3).

If we are doing good things out of a good heart, out of love for others and a deep sense of God's love for us, then we will be content to receive recognition from God. But legalists are arrogant and want to seek attention from man.

One writer says, "Social acknowledgment is one of the strongest motivating factors in human behavior, and no less so for those whose recognition is supposed to come from God rather than society."⁵ I think he's right.

What is motivating your good deeds? Is it God's love and acceptance or is it man's approval?

LEGALISM LEADS TO DEATH (11:44)

Everything we've seen so far has shown us that legalists prioritize the external over the internal. Now, in the third woe, Jesus lets us see just how dangerous this really is. We learn that legalism leads to death. Look at verse 44, "Woe to you! For you are like unmarked graves, and people walk over them without knowing it."

There's a great irony in this passage. The Pharisees think Jesus is unclean because he won't follow their man-made rules. But Jesus is the Holy One from God. It's the Pharisees that are unclean and impure. The Pharisees see Jesus as a threat to their ministry. But the Pharisees are a threat to eternal life for anyone they come in contact with.

In the Mosaic Law, we learn that if a Jew had any contact with a dead body, including a grave, they would be unclean for seven days (Lev. 21:1-11; Num. 19:11-22).⁶ Jesus is saying that the Pharisees are dead spiritually—they're like graves. And anyone who comes in contact with them will become unclean. But the Pharisees are like *unmarked* graves. If you just look at the outside, you'd think they're super religious. You'd never know that underneath there's nothing but decaying bones.

So their legalism is insidious—it's stealthy and works its death and decay slowly. Some of you here know how subtle, yet deadly, legalism can be. It's a slow working disease. You can live under its oppression for years and not be aware of the damage it's causing. When you're following a legalist, you may think you're following God, but you're really being led over an emotional and spiritual cliff.

⁵ Edwards, James R. *The Gospel According to Luke*. The pillar New Testament commentary. Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 2015.

⁶ Edwards

Darrell Bock is a professor at Dallas Seminary. In his commentary on Luke, he describes the experience of one of his students at a very legalistic college. I bet there are a number of you here who can relate.

[The college] had a student demerit system for everything. Students received demerits for walking on the grass. At night, boys and girls were required to walk at least three feet apart on campus. A certain number of demerits led to a letter to the pastor, then a second level to pastor and parents, and then finally to expulsion. In other words, three strikes and you were out!

One student apologizing to a professor for a prank pulled in class asked for forgiveness but received a lecture that he would never amount to anything and never be a success in ministry. The professor refused to talk with him after his confession.

Bock goes on to say,

Something is wrong when grace is elevated as the central message of God's Word and little grace is evidenced in actual practice. While these rules may have been well motivated, many of the students suffered great emotional damage. It is difficult to appreciate grace and forgiveness while living the Christian life in such a scorecard environment. Legalism is like carbon dioxide suffocation; it kills slowly and sometimes very subtly.⁷

For those of you here today who have legalistic tendencies, I think it's important for you to know just how dangerous legalism is. It has caused shipwreck to the faith of so many who grew up under its tutelage. Jesus reserves his sharpest rebukes in Scripture for legalists. So, if you have legalist tendencies, be warned.

For those of you who have suffered under legalism, you need to know that legalism is false Christianity. God wants you to know grace and mercy. He wants you to know the love of God. God wants to heal your heart, so that you can serve him out of a heart of love.

LEGALISM GIVES DEMANDS WITHOUT SUPPORT. (11:46)

Let's now look at the second set of woes Jesus directs toward the lawyers, in verses 45-52. Apparently there were lawyers (or experts in Jewish law) who were listening in on Jesus' denunciation of the Pharisees. Since they were the ones who taught the Pharisees how to be legalists, they were insulted. Jesus could have denied that he was insulting them, or he could have defended himself. But instead he launches three woes against them as well.

Some of you here may think that the way Jesus is talking with the religious leaders is unloving. We live in a day when almost any confrontation is viewed as a violation of love. But loving your neighbor and loving your enemy doesn't mean that you say what they want to hear. It means that you'll tell them the truth. One writer says, "The greatest violence of the love ethic is not confrontation, but indifference." Jesus wasn't indifferent to the hypocrisy of the religious leaders.⁸ He knew it was dangerous. And so, in love, he confronted them.

The first thing he says to the lawyers teaches us that legalism gives demands without support. This is found in verse 46, "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."

⁷ Bock

⁸ Edwards

The lawyers were quick to teach and give commands, but they did nothing to help people make progress in their faith. They were quick to tell others what to do, but they did nothing to support them in doing it. And worst of all, they didn't model in their lives what they called others to do.

These lawyers are like a bad coach in the weight room who gives a severe workout regimen to his student. He keeps loading the 45 lb. plates onto the bar. It's up to 300 lbs., and he tells his student to start lifting. But the coach has never lifted 300 lbs. in his life. And now he's not even willing to spot the guy he's given the workout to. And then he criticizes him when he can't lift it.

In discipleship, we are called to teach people to observe all that Jesus commanded. We do need to teach and give directives. But then we need to come along side of the people we're discipling. We need to model to them how it's done. We need to guide them as they learn how to follow Jesus. We need to be right there with them, and we need to encourage them.

But how often are we prone to stand back and criticize people's lack of progress without lifting a finger to help? We don't want to get our hands dirty. And it's easier to criticize than encourage. But hands-off discipleship is legalism not discipleship.

LEGALISM REJECTS GOD'S MESSENGERS OF JUDGMENT (11:47-51)

Legalists prevent people from making progress in the faith. They give demands without support. Next, they reject God's messengers of judgment. This is seen in verses 47-51.

The lawyers apparently had a reputation for making monuments out of the tombs of the prophets. They thought they were honoring the prophets by building up their graves and adorning them. But Jesus points out the irony in all of this. It was their fathers who killed those prophets. And they're no different from their fathers.

One commentator gives a modern day example to help us understand the type of hypocrisy that was going on. When Martin Luther King Jr. was alive, the American government did all they could to discredit his character. But once he was dead they declared a national holiday in his honor.⁹ That's what the lawyers were doing. Their fathers had killed the prophets when they were alive. Now their progeny is trying to honor them when they're dead. But the fact is the lawyers were no different from their fathers.

From the beginning of time the legalists killed the prophets. They killed the prophets from A-Z, from Abel to Zechariah.¹⁰ And why did they kill the prophets? Because the prophets spoke of the sin of the Israelites and the judgment that was coming. They didn't like this, because they were self-righteous hypocrites. The prophets also spoke of salvation that was coming. But self-righteous people don't see their need for salvation either. The prophets threatened them. And so they killed them.

And that was exactly what the lawyers were about to do to Jesus. He criticized their legalism and hypocrisy. He spoke of the judgment that would come upon them if they didn't repent of their sins and believe in Jesus. And they didn't like it. So what did they do? They crucified him.

They were no different from their fathers. They were legalists and hypocrites who didn't like God's messengers of sin and judgment.

⁹ Edwards

¹⁰ Garland, David E. *Luke*. Zondervan exegetical commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 2011.

LEGALISM BLOCKS THE WAY TO SALVATION (11:52)

So legalists reject God's messengers. And ultimately, they block the way to salvation. This comes out in the last woe, in 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."

I think "the key of knowledge" is Jesus. The lawyers have no need for the Jesus of the Bible. They study the Scriptures, but they don't see that the Scriptures are all pointing to Jesus (cf. Jn. 5:39). They think that by following the rules that they can be made right with God. But external religion will never make our hearts pure. We must come to Jesus if we want to enter in and have eternal life (cf. Jn. 5:40).

At the end of the day, legalism says that if you follow the rules you'll be saved. But that's not the message of Jesus. That's not the gospel.

Jesus says the only way you'll ever be clean in the eyes of God is if you have a clean heart. You have to work from the inside out. And the only way to be changed from the inside out is to put your trust in Jesus.

The Old Testament prophets spoke of this—they spoke of the key of knowledge—but the lawyers didn't see it. Isaiah 53 tells us that we must look to the one who was rejected by men (Isa. 53:3), we must look to the one who was pierced for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities (Isa. 53:5a), it's only through him that we can be healed of our sins (Isa. 53:5b), all of us are like sheep who have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all (Isa. 53:6).

Isaiah sounds very similar to Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:21. "God made [Jesus] to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor. 5:21). We must look to the Jesus that the legalists rejected and crucified. We can't look to our own good works. It's only through the sinless Savior Jesus' death on the cross that we can be cleansed from our sins (Acts 15:9). We're called to look to him in faith.

We *are* called to do good works, but our good works don't make us clean. Jesus makes us clean on the inside. Only then will the things we do on the outside be pure.

The legalists take away the key to knowledge—they take away Jesus. And without Jesus there's no salvation. That's why legalism is dangerous and deadly.

Don't be infected by Typhoid Mary. Don't be infected by legalism. And don't infect others with legalism. Don't be a disciple of legalism. And don't make disciples of legalism. Cling to Jesus, to what he's done for you. And call others to do the same. That's the way of Christian discipleship.