

WOE TO YOU!

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Luke11:376-54

1. Jesus was invited to the home of a Pharisee, and His failure to ceremonially wash His hands before the meal led to a confrontation between Jesus, the Pharisee, and a lawyer (scribe, expert in the Mosaic Law) who was present.
2. Jesus used the opportunity to confront the Pharisee's devotion to externals.
3. In the second part of this passage Jesus confronted the so-called experts in the Law for their legalistic misapplication of the Law.
4. Six times Jesus exclaimed, "Woe to you!"
5. The word woe was a primary exclamation or expression of grief.
6. Two questions come to mind.
 - a. What exactly was Jesus' problem with these people?
 - b. Are we ever guilty of the same things?

I. Woe to you Pharisees!

A. Jesus stated that the Pharisees:

1. Focused on external issues while neglecting internal ones.
 - a. The ceremonial law required that a man wash his hands a certain way before he ate, and also, between courses.
 - b. I am not a fan of William Barclay's theology, but his cultural observations are helpful, and so I will quote him here, and several other places in this message.

"Large stone vessels of water were specially kept for the purpose because ordinary water might be unclean; the amount of water used must be at least a quarter of a log, that is enough to fill one and a half eggshells. First the water must be poured over the hands beginning at the tips of the fingers and running right up to the wrist. Then the palm of each hand must be cleansed by rubbing the fist of the other into it. Finally, water must again be poured over the hand, this time beginning at the wrist and running down to the fingertips. To a Pharisee to omit the slightest detail of this was sin. Jesus' comment was that if they were as particular about cleansing their hearts as they were about washing their hands they would be better men."
2. Focused on religious details while disregarding justice and love for God.

NOTE: They were careful to tithe what came out of their herb gardens while neglecting justice (treating others fairly) and the love of God.
3. Focused on pleasing and impressing men rather than obeying and pleasing God.
4. Polluted everyone who came in contact with them.

NOTE: As leaders and examples others felt compelled to emulate them.

B. The Pharisees felt that as long as the externals of religion were carried out that was all that mattered.

C. They did not understand that a person's inward motivations mattered to God more than how they washed their hands and tithing to the exact penny.

II. Woe to you lawyers!

A. Jesus accused the scribes of weighing people down with burdens that they themselves ignored or figured out how to get around.

NOTE: They were not only experts in the law; they were experts in evading their own rules.

B. Barclay gives us several examples.

1. "The limit of a Sabbath Day's journey was about 2,000 cubits (1000 yards) from a person's residence. But if a rope was tied across the end of the street, the end of the street became (an extension of) his residence, and he could go 1,000 yards beyond that; if on the Friday evening he left at any given point enough food for two meals that point technically became his residence and he could go 1,000 yards beyond that."

2. "One of the forbidden works on the Sabbath was the tying of knots, sailors' or camel drivers' knots, and knots in ropes. But a woman might tie the knot in her girdle. Therefore, if a bucket of water had to be raised from a well a rope could not be knotted to it, but a woman's girdle could, and it could be raised with that."

3. To carry a burden was forbidden unless it was carried differently than it would normally be carried. So the lawyers taught, "He who carries anything, whether it be in his right hand, or his left hand, or in his bosom, or on his shoulder is guilty; but he who carries anything on the back of his hand, with his foot, or with his mouth, or with his elbow, or with his ear, or with his hair, or with his money bag turned upside down, or between his money bag and his shirt, or in the fold of his shirt or in his shoe, or in his sandal is guiltless, because he does not carry it in the usual way of carrying it out."

C. It is little wonder that Jesus was grieved by the scribes, and that the scribes regarded Him as an irreligious heretic?

D. Jesus went on to point out that the Jews build monuments to honor the prophets their forefathers had put to death, while persecuting those God was currently sending to them.

NOTE: There are inconsistencies in the lives of many professing Christians today.

1. They claim to be followers of Christ while living lives that dishonor Him.

2. They claim to believe that the Bible is the Word of God while ignoring its clear teachings.

3. They claim to love God while failing to show love towards their brothers and sisters in Christ, as well as concern for those who are not yet children of God.

E. Finally Jesus accused the lawyers (scribes) of misinterpreting and misapplying the Law to such a degree that those who wanted to enter the Kingdom of God were hindered from doing so.

APPLICATION

1. Over the years of my ministry I have met many people who were fixated on externals like carrying the right translation of the Bible, wearing the right clothes to church, tithing to the penny, and faithfully attending every church service, while ignoring what Jesus called the weightier provisions of the Law, justice and mercy and faithfulness. (See Matthew 23:23)

NOTE: I am not suggesting that externals do not matter, but who we actually are, and why we do what we do gives credibility to our lives before God and before others.

2. In Matthew's account of this incident Jesus, quoting from the Old Testament, stated, "You hypocrites, rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you: 8 'THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME. 9 'BUT IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE PRECEPTS OF MEN.'" Matthew 15:7-9