

The previous section was about two groups of people who utterly rejected Jesus, either out of arrogant superiority or cynical skepticism. In this passage we have two more groups of people who reject Jesus because they feel no need for him. They turn, rather, to their own religious works, their moral performance, their own strength of wisdom, perception, and will as the means by which God would call them good and acceptable.

Yet, Jesus has another word for those who would feel that He is unnecessary because of one's own moral performance: Woe! Doom! You are doomed if you believe that His work and word is unnecessary for salvation. You are doomed if you feel that your "level" of obedience or works or faith in God is enough. Doom awaits you if you feel that your adherence to the Law will save you and you have not been perfect in it! What Jesus is not saying is that the Law is inadequate for salvation. If one perfectly loved God and neighbor, the summation of the Law of God, then one would be perfectly acceptable in God's sight. The Law is not flawed in this sense. The problem lies not with the Law, but with the failing heart and will of Man. Jesus points out to the Pharisees, not that the Law is insufficient, but that they are insufficient. They claim to be just, but actually are unjust. They claim to give to God, yet they deny His Word. They claim to serve Him, yet love power and honor for themselves. They claim to be alive, yet are full of dead man's bones and lead others to death as well.

Now, the Holy Spirit of God did not merely inspire Luke to write this down so that we would know the historical situation in which Jesus lived, or understand the enemies of God who desired His death (although this gospel does do that), but rather the Spirit desires to show us a mirror of our own hearts in this. He is always revealing in the text two primary things: 1) the nature of the human heart and its need, and 2) the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ and His supremacy. The Scripture tells us that "all things were created by Him...and through Him and for Him." (Col 1:16) All things, every moment, every historical event down to the most minute is made for Jesus. It is not merely all of Scripture that is about Jesus (and surely this is the case), but all of history is for Him and moving toward Him as well. Thus, this interaction with the Pharisees and Scribes show us more of who Jesus is and more of whom *we* are, for our nature is not somehow different than these men, it is strikingly similar. Though we may not tithe mint and rue specifically, the purposes and desires of their hearts are the same as ours, and we would be utterly foolish to miss this point. Remember, Jesus is showing us what it means to receive Him as King, as Lord, as Savior. What does it mean to follow Him? It means that without Him we are utterly destitute and with Him we are humble receivers of God gracious gifts, not a result of our works, but of His grace.

## 1. Jesus is Inconsiderate of Pretense

### a. Jesus was invited by a Pharisee for lunch

#### i. Pharisees were a group of lay persons who were separatists

1. They were so concerned for the purity of Judaism that they adhered to very strict rules and regulations designed to keep them from even remotely crossing any boundaries
2. In so doing, however, they also avoided the intention behind the Law, which was to drive them to see their desperate need and cry out to God for mercy
3. Think of these guys as right or left wing political action groups – judging everyone else who is different and making their differences very public

#### ii. This lunch was not private, but open for public viewing

#### iii. Thus, the confrontation that occurs, and the accusations that are made are not private, but quite public (which is why the Scribes complain)

### b. He does not "first" wash his hands before dinner

#### i. This was a calculated affront - it would be public and would be problematic to those who followed the Mishnah, or the standard interpretation of the Law (called "the fence to protect the Law")

1. The Mishnah had 7 pages of instruction "how" to wash your hands before a meal - SEVEN!!!

#### ii. This is likely because Jesus knew that this invitation was not one of benevolence or good faith, but rather was an attempt to judge him or set him straight about some of his teaching

1. We see this in the word "seeing" - they were watching him, spying him out to see what he would do
2. We also see it in their reaction to his rebukes - they start setting traps to condemn him in the eyes of the people
- c. This "astonishes" the Pharisee (same word used of people's response to Jesus' exorcism of the demon in v14)
  - i. The Pharisee is just as shocked by Jesus' non-washing as the crowds were at the mute man speaking!
  - ii. This hand-washing was important to them, every important!
    1. The fact that Jesus refuses to do so is an affront to them immediately.
- d. Pretense and Self-Righteousness *always* compares itself to others in order to judge them "good" or "bad"
  - i. In this, there is no need for a mutual Savior, but rather dependence upon one's own moral performance
- e. If this story is a mirror to us of our own propensity to make extraneous rules and expect others to live by them as well, how do we respond when God confronts something very important to us?

## 2. Pretense Panders to Pride

- a. Hypocrisy - cleaning the outside but dirty inside
  - i. You are concerned about the exterior appearance of cleanliness
  - ii. Yet, you are wicked – greedy in your heart
    1. This word "greedy" is the word for robbery or plunder
    2. Jesus is accusing these men of hearts that desire more and more and are willing to harm and steal to get it
  - iii. Thus the problem is not the external washing of hands, but the internal cleansing of the heart which approaches God with nothing but need (gospel of grace)
    1. Then everything will be clean
    2. When you know mercy from God, you extend mercy to others – forgiveness by God, extend forgiveness to others – love from God, extend love to others
  - iv. The solution for them to remember God's mercy and grace toward them *and set these things in their hearts* to give "alms" or "charitable gifts" to others in need
    1. Then everything that God blesses them with will be clean, both inside and out
- b. Heartless Legalism - neglecting God's justice and love for mere ritual
  - i. They tithed (tenth), even from their garden herbs!
    1. They should have done this – it is good to tithe
  - ii. The problem was that they neglected the weightier things
    1. "strain at a gnat while swallowing a camel" (Matt 23:24)
    2. They tithed from their greedy wealth, but neglected justice
    3. Rather than care for the widows, the poor, the powerless and helpless, they gave 10% of the wealth that they gained by taking advantage of these powerless
      - a. "devoured widows houses" (Luke 20:47)
      - b. These guys loved wealth, power, and position more than they loved the mercy of God and His people
  - iii. Self-sufficiency seems to be the underlying problem with the Pharisees
    1. Self-sufficient in their wealth, power, and prestige
    2. Self-sufficient in their moral performance
    3. They had no need of Jesus as Savior, King, or Redeemer – they were trying to fit him into the category of mere teacher, sage, or prophet
    4. AND HE WOULD NOT BE CATEGORIZED AS SUCH

- c. High-Minded Pride - seeking the highest positions of power/honor
  - i. While neglecting justice, they love to be recognized as important by others
    - 1. This is the reason for the washing, not for purity or out of purity of heart, but rather to be recognized as holy, to be noticed as morally superior, to be honored as honorable
  - ii. The heart's desire to be recognized as valuable and important *because of one's performance* is a plague upon every human heart
    - 1. It's not a matter of being good, but rather of being *better* than another person – comparison which condemns or coddles
    - 2. When we compare ourselves favorably we condemn others for their lack of performance
    - 3. When we compare ourselves unfavorably we coddle the superior person with excessive adoration and treat ourselves with excessive self-pity
  - iii. The problem is not in the recognition (the seat of honor or greeting in the market), but rather *the love* of such
    - 1. Again, it is a misplaced affection, an over-desire for a good thing, which then becomes an ultimate thing by which we measure our goodness in comparison to God and to others and judge our righteousness or acceptability therein
    - 2. The major problem with this is that Jesus becomes unnecessary
      - a. He is either unnecessary because I measure up in my own eyes
      - b. He is unnecessary because I'm too big of a failure – self-pity
      - c. He either doesn't need to rescue me or I am unrescuable and the result is either arrogant judgmentalism or hopeless despair, neither of which really have any room for Jesus
- d. Hidden Corruption – corrupting others through deception
  - i. Like tombs which are hidden (deception)
  - ii. Defile many who walk on them unknowingly
  - iii. This is because self-reliance and self-sufficiency is against God – it is rather making oneself out to be God and thus making God unnecessary
    - 1. Comparison for the purpose of condemning is completely unlike God, who gave Himself for the sake of humanity
    - 2. Greed and self-seeking power is completely unlike Christ, who left the riches and honor of heaven, the greatest seat of honor, to take the least place of humiliation and shame – death on a cross – for those who were absolute and utter moral failures

### 3. Pretense Excludes Hope for Moral Failures

- a. The Scribes, or “lawyers”, were different than the Pharisees in that they were a class of experts, professionals
  - i. Thus, it was their profession to know the Law of Moses and they were seen by the people as the experts in the Law
  - ii. Thus, they held great sway as to the interpretation of the Law for the people and great power and influence over the people as well
- b. Their expectation and demand that others live up to a Law that they pretended to meet would keep people from receiving God's mercy in Christ Jesus
  - i. They implied that the means to God's mercy was found in doing righteous works, while they themselves were not measuring up
  - ii. Thus, they excluded any hope for moral failures, but rather burdened the people with fear and a moral performance with no hope of attaining
- c. Abusive Judgmentalism - setting high standards for others, but not helping them meet them

- i. Here there is the lack of mercy and the abuse of power
  - 1. They abuse their power and influence by using their “expertise” to burden the people with laws excessive and heavy, yet they themselves will not live according to them at all
  - 2. They show no mercy to the people whom they burden by helping them in any way
    - a. This shows a deep lack of justice, a great unconcern for God’s people, and a desire for mere power and recognition rather than to teach or build others up
- ii. This lack of mercy is the complete opposite of God Himself, who even in the denunciations of a stubborn people always offered hope through repentance and met His people quickly with mercy when they expressed need
  - 1. Hosea 11:7-12:6 – “How can I give you up, O Ephraim?...My heart recoils within me; my compassion grows warm and tender”
  - 2. Romans 15:7-9 – “Welcome one another as Christ welcomed you...for Christ became a servant...so that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy”
- d. Animosity Towards Truth - rejecting God's messengers while building their tombs
  - i. They claim to honor God’s messengers, yet they hated their message and despised them to their deaths
    - 1. They are like their fathers who killed God’s messengers, the arrogant rebels against God
    - 2. God is now revealing His greatest revelation of Himself through His Son, and they will kill Him and thus all the blood of the prophets will be required of that generation to whom the Son is revealed
    - 3. Reject Jesus – reject all the prophets and stand guilty of executing not only God’s ambassadors but God’s greatest revelation: His only Son
  - ii. Jesus is showing the absolute hypocrisy of these experts of the Law who do not follow the greatest parts of the Law: Love God and Love Neighbor
  - iii. Jesus fulfills all that these prophets promised from God
- e. Access Denied - taking away saving knowledge from the people
  - i. Their sin is so great that Jesus considers it as heinous as robbing God’s people of the access to knowledge of God!
    - 1. They are enemies of God and of His people by their deeds
    - 2. They are deceiving people and keeping them from truly knowing God *because they refuse to truly know God*
  - ii. Jesus is the knowledge of God
    - 1. If you see Him you have seen the Father
    - 2. In Him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge
- f. Both the Pharisees and the Scribes’ response to Jesus’ warnings reveal their true hearts:
  - i. They would rather provoke Him and trap Him through trickery and deception than humble themselves to listen to Him, learn from Him, and in repentance entrust themselves to Him

#### 4. The Gospel is Hope for Moral Failures But Woe to Pretentious Panderers

- a. The Gospel of JC is That God Justifies *the Ungodly* in Christ Jesus
  - i. One of the foundational truths of the Gospel is that you cannot, are not able to perform well enough to place yourself in God’s favor. There is nothing that you can do to make yourself good.
  - ii. So, God, in His great mysterious love, has done it for you (Rom 3:23; 5:6-10; 6:23)
    - 1. **Romans 5:6-10** For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. <sup>7</sup> For one will scarcely die for a righteous person - though perhaps for a

good person one would dare even to die - <sup>8</sup> but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

- b. Christianity is the only religion/worldview where God justifies unworthy moral failures:
  - i. Romans 8:1-4
  - ii. Galatians 3:11-14

“The heart of most religions is good advice, good techniques, good programs, good ideas, and good support systems. These drive us deeper into ourselves, to find our inner light, inner goodness, inner voice, or inner resources.

Nothing *new* can be found inside of us. There is no inner rescuer deep in my soul; I just hear echoes of my own voice telling me all sorts of crazy things to numb my sense of fear, anxiety, and boredom, the origins of which I cannot truly identify.

But the heart of Christianity is *Good News*. It comes not as a task for us to fulfill, a mission for us to accomplish, a game plan for us to follow with the help of life coaches, but as a report that someone else has already fulfilled, accomplished, followed, and achieved everything for us.”

-Michael Horton, *The Gospel Centered Life*

- c. When you can recognize and accept that you are a moral, ethical, personal failure who needs a moral, ethical, personal rescue then Jesus comes in to rescue you and to dine with you
  - i. Understanding this, at the heart level, is what leads us gospel-centered relationships.
    - 1. There is nothing within any of us that makes us better, or more important, or more significant, or more acceptable to God because we are all saved completely by His grace!!!
    - 2. There is nothing within any of us that makes us worse, or less important, or less valuable, or less significant, or less acceptable to God, either!!
  - ii. 1 Corinthians 1:30-31; Christ Himself is our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, redemption
- d. If you will not recognize and accept your need for absolute rescue, then Jesus has nothing to offer you of any substance
  - i. You are doomed to stand before God on your merits, and your pretense will be laid bare before all (Luke 12:1-4)
  - ii. So don't pretend that your righteousness is sufficient or that you need, both past and present and future, Jesus any less than anyone else

The reason that hypocrisy and pretense receive a warning of doom from Jesus is not simply because it is a failure of authenticity or of righteousness, but rather because it authentically self-righteous *and this is completely unlike God*. The God of the Bible did not preen in His holiness or parade His righteousness, but rather planned from before the foundations of the world to send His only Son, the divine and glorious God, from the comforts and power of the throne to the weakness and humiliation of the cross. Jesus left His riches above to become poor so that you might be rescued and blessed with the riches of the presence of God. It is like God to humble oneself, to give up the seat of honor because your need is not for the applause of the crowd on the stage of achievement, either moral or psychological. You are deeply loved and accepted in the Beloved Christ, the Son in whom the Father delights. In this truth there is no room for pretense, and no need to impress anyone, but merely the praise of the One whom has called you out of darkness and into His marvelous light.

You see, the cure for pretense is not authentic self-dependence but rather authentic Christ-dependence, the humility that recognizes our desperate need and comes to Christ with no righteousness of our own by which to barter for salvation but with empty hands and hearts by which we might receive the bread from heaven, the water of life, the blood that cleanses and the Spirit that transforms. And the amazing hope for moral failures is that God provides all that is necessary for such wondrous gifts out of sheer love for humbled people on whom He has set His mercy. He gives freely to those who see their real need and He gives superabundantly to those who close to Him to depend upon Him.