

September 3 Lesson: Jesus Confronts Hypocrisy

**Fall Quarter 2023: God's Law Is Love
Unit 1: Love Completes; Law Falls Short
Lessons 1-4**

**Sunday School Lesson for the week of September 3, 2023
By Craig Rikard**

**Devotional Reading: 1 Samuel 15:19-23
Background Scripture: Luke 11:37-44**

Lesson Aims

1. To recognize the role of the Retribution Principle in our perceptions of suffering and blessing.
2. To recognize those moments when what seems to be a righteous actions conflicts with the higher law of love.
3. To learn from Jesus' encounter with the Pharisee as to how we respond to such moments.
4. To learn the importance of the "Law of Laws."
5. To learn the meaning and consequences of hypocrisy.
6. To learn to live in the beautiful harmony of a pure heart and righteous life.

Supplement to SS Lesson in Teacher's Manual

Context of Luke 11:37-44

Luke

The writings of Luke, the physician, are assigned authority and considered sacred by the early church due to his close relationship with the Apostle Paul. Furthermore, Luke was a thorough writer who researched his material; thus his work was highly regarded. Naturally, Luke did not record every act or word related to Jesus. As John stated in his Gospel (21:25), there would not be enough books to record the vast amount of material. The accounts Luke included were recorded for a specific reason; they possessed an important message to the early church concerning the issues and experiences they faced. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Luke recorded events and passages that add to the writings of Mark and Matthew, the other synoptics. Mark, often referred to as "Peter's Gospel," was written in short, concise form, containing more miracles of Jesus than teaching. Matthew was very Jewish in content, revealing the Old Testament messianic texts Jesus fulfilled. Luke, however, was a Gospel that was inclusive of Jew and Gentile and of man and woman. His Gospel was known as the Gospel of compassion. His Gospel addresses the poor, broken, and outcast. It is also known as the Gospel of the Holy Spirit, and the Gospel that elevated women to a place of importance in Jesus' ministry.

One of the major contributions of Luke's Gospel is that he expresses the tension between grace and law and the inner moral life in contrast to the outer. It was Luke's inspired understanding of grace and the importance of the inner life that gave hope to the masses who realized they could

not obey the Torah in order to gain favor with God. Only God's grace and love through Jesus could make it possible for them to become the beloved of God and servants of the Lord.

As cited above, one descriptive word for Luke's writing is "compassionate." As a doctor, Luke's Gospel consists of more healing miracles than the other Gospels. Most of the healing miracles were for the masses of people. In Judaism, religious leaders taught if one was sick, suffered loss, or struggled financially their pain was directly related to their sin against God. What was the nature of their sin? They violated the Torah. In other words, they deserved their suffering since they could not keep the 612 laws comprising the Mosaic Law. However, in Luke's Gospel, Jesus treats the masses of people as individuals whom God loved. Luke also elevates and values the role of women in the New Testament world. The narratives included in Luke that mention the women Jesus encountered need to be understood within the patriarchal world in which they lived. This understanding helps us understand the radical respect with which Jesus ministered to women.

Luke also enlightens us regarding the role of the Holy Spirit in the ministry of Jesus and the early church. Few single texts illuminate God's will for the church than Luke's introduction to his book of Acts. He wrote to Theophilus that in his Gospel he "wrote of all that Jesus *began* to do and teach." However, Luke's Gospel contains the birth, life, ministry, passion, death, resurrection, and ascension. Thus, it would have proved correct had he written, "I wrote of all that Jesus *did*." Yet, he uses the word *began*. Luke believed the ministry of the risen Christ was not over. The redeeming ministry of Jesus would continue through the Holy Spirit in the Body of Christ - the church - consisting of men, women and youth of every background and station in life.

Therefore, our study text is an inspired account that speaks not only to what Jesus did and said during his encounter with the Pharisee, but it also addresses the ministry given to the early church through the Holy Spirit. The truth that emerges from Jesus' dialogue with the Pharisees concerning the inner life in contrast to the outer remains an important message for the Church and her ministry today.

Why do you believe it is necessary to know the author of the passages we study? How does better knowing the vehicle God used to record the events in the Gospels help us understand the depth and breadth of the passage's message? Can you recall a time in your study of Scripture when knowledge of the author helped you better understand the intent of a text?

Pharisees

The Pharisees were a small yet powerful legalistic sect of Judaism. At the heart of their belief was the necessity of keeping the entire Mosaic Law, or Torah - even the most obscure of the laws - to gain God's favor. A person's standing with God had everything to do with keeping all the Law. The Retribution Principle is vital in understanding the religious life of the Pharisees. The Retribution Principle is an academic term to express the Old and New Testament understanding of keeping the Torah and its relationship to one's blessed or cursed life. Simply stated, if one kept the Law, they would be blessed, but if the Torah was violated, they would be cursed. This principle plays a major role in the dialogues contained in the book of Job. We also witness an example of this thinking in John's Gospel when the disciples asked Jesus, "Why is

that man blind? Is it the result of his sin, or the sin of his mother or father?” (John 9:1-5). Another example of this principle in the Gospel of Mark is the story of the rich young ruler. According to the narrative, the young man was healthy and wealthy; thus, the disciples concluded he was favored by God. He must be righteous young man! When Jesus answered his question as to how to gain eternal life with the command, “Go sell all you have and give it to the poor,” the text states he walked away sad. The response of the disciples is key to understanding the meaning of this account. They ask, “Then who can be saved?” The young man had all the outward signs of being favored of God. If he, being healthy, wealthy and blessed, wasn’t pleasing God, then who could? Jesus was teaching that favor with God had nothing to do with blessing or suffering. It had to do with one’s inner life of love.

Do you recognize a belief in the Retribution Principle today? Was there a time in which we suffered that we immediately asked, “Why God?” Did we believe we must have done something to merit the suffering? Was there a time in which we believed we must be blessed because of our good behavior? Does the existence of the Retribution Principle in our thinking and belief have any bearing on how we view the suffering in the world? On how we perceive the wealthy?

It was customary for Pharisees to invite noted teachers into their home to dine. There was a certain social status associated with entertaining someone the crowds admired, especially one who claimed to possess knowledge from God. However, from other narratives in the Gospels, Jesus was often invited in order to ensnare him in a violation of Mosaic Law. Certainly, a Pharisee would consider himself smarter than a Galilean itinerant preacher and could entrap him in an infraction concerning the Torah.

Jesus had just shared a discourse on God’s judgement, followed with a teaching of the inner life’s effect upon the outer life and vice versa. If a person’s inner life is filled with darkness, their outer vision will see darkness, and their behavior will engage the darkness. Darkness in one’s heart will seek darkness and embrace it. In embracing the darkness, their actions will be in concert with that darkness. However, if the inner spiritual eye is a vision of light, it will see the light, love the light, and embrace the light. That light will govern their outer life. Simply stated, the inner life will determine our outer life.

Can you recall other accounts in the Gospels when an attempt was made to entrap Jesus in a violation of Mosaic Law? What was Jesus’ response? In the account of picking and eating corn on the Sabbath (Mat. 12:1-2), does obedience to outer Law conflict with a higher Law?

A Life of Two Choices

Lesson of the Dinner

It did not take long for the Pharisees to accuse Jesus of violating the Torah. Again, to violate the Torah was to sin against God. It should first be noted that Jesus almost certainly intentionally did not wash his hands. To wash one’s hands before a meal was customary for the Jewish people and a sign of spiritual purification. However, Jesus knew that the washing of hands symbolized an

issue much deeper than simply cleaning one's hands in order to eat. Washing one's hands was a religious requirement in keeping the law, and thus pleasing God. Washing the hands was an act of spiritual purification. After mingling with crowds in the markets and other places one's hands most certainly touched a defiled item or defiled person. Thus, washing the hands created spiritual purity. When one washed their hands, they believed they were rendering themselves pure in order to receive the food from God.

Consequently, how dare Jesus neglect to wash his hands! The crowds that followed Jesus consisted of the sick, the poor, and, God forbid, women. In the eyes of the Pharisees, if anyone needed to wash the defilement from their hands it was Jesus. Most often Jesus washed his hands; it was a custom he observed. The Pharisees may have sought a means of trapping Jesus in the issue of washing one's hands. However, I believe in this case, the Pharisees did not initially "set up" the washing of hands to snare Jesus. I further believe Jesus wanted the conversation that occurred. Jesus most likely intentionally did not wash his hands.

He was dining with those who considered themselves right before God, more righteous than others because they kept the ceremonial aspects of the law. Jesus believed those at the table washed their hands for a good purpose. Cleanliness was important, and it was important to consider the issue of defilement. However, Jesus also believed some or all of their hearts were impure. Jesus' action was saying, "You judge me as unclean for not washing my hands. I am unclean to you because of the people I've touched. I touched the sick, the poor, the suffering, the brokenhearted, and the lost. I did not wash my hands to be right before God, I touched the people God deems precious, and I touched them with the redeeming love of God, and thus my hands may be sanitarially unclean, but my heart is pure." "My inner life and motivation have deemed my hands spiritually clean and my actions pure." Righteousness for Jesus was not about outwardly keeping the law, it was about keeping the purpose and intent of the law.

What do you believe was the reason behind Jesus not washing his hands? How did the custom of washing hands serve as a great doorway into a discussion of outer purity in contrast to inner? Can you share a time when your outer behavior may have appeared impure, but your heart was indeed pure? Do you think Jesus was saying, "Forget about washing your hands from now on, just keep your heart pure"? Or, do you think Jesus would encourage both?

The Real Substance of a Pure Heart

When one studies the belief system of the Pharisees, we might find surprising their understanding of Deut. 6:4 in contrast with Jesus' interpretation. The verse, known as the *Shema*, reads, "Thou shalt love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength." This Law was considered so important in Judaism that every gate into Jerusalem and every door post into their house housed a canister containing the scroll of the *Shema*. We enter in the spirit of the *Shema*, and we go forth in the world in the same spirit. Jesus in no manner lessened the importance of this Law. Jesus' teaching of this Law transcended the manner in which the Pharisees interpreted it. The Pharisees believed the way one loved God with all their being was by keeping the Torah. Thus, keeping the *Shema* had everything to do with how one lives their outer life. Again, it meant to keep all the law resulted in the blessing and righteousness of God, and thus any failure revealed a failure to love God with all one's being, and thus suffer the

consequences. Since none could keep the entirety of the Torah, most felt judged by God. The Pharisees prided themselves on keeping the Torah, memorizing it, and outwardly doing the things that appeared to be obedient, even though their motivation could be selfish and impure.

Over the years, this understanding of the Shema led to a class system and an economic/power structure. The average Jewish person depended upon the religious leaders teaching them the Law, and their need to memorize the Law for themselves. The blue-collar Galilean people struggled to keep all the Law and thus always felt “less than” or beholden to the religious leaders. Jerusalem and the surrounding area to the south of Israel was considered to be the religious/intellectual center of Judaism. In Galilee to the north, people fished, built, and engaged in needed trades. The need of the Galileans to know the Torah endowed the religious leaders with tremendous power and wealth. No Galilean worker could ever sit in the high seat at a banquet for they were reserved for their spiritual leaders. The reason Jesus claimed his yoke was easy and his burden light was related to the burden placed upon the masses of people by the religious leaders.

Jesus offered grace, forgiveness, and the power to live all of the Torah. Instead of 612 Laws he offered one. When people failed to obey this one Law, they still could find forgiveness, grace and renewal. The one Law read, “Thou shalt love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and your neighbor as yourself.” When one failed at love, one could find forgiveness. One learned to rise from the mistake and take another step toward the love God wills for all. This one Law was the Shema. The Shema for the Pharisees possessed the hope of pleasing God through obeying the Torah. The Shema for Jesus offered all the hope and awareness that they were loved dearly by God, and in loving one another with all our being, we are in essence loving God.

Jesus’ understanding of the Shema was radical. He claimed if one lived the Shema, they maintained righteous obedience to the entirety of the Law and Prophets. It was the Law of Laws. There was no greater Law and no greater requirement. Jesus taught that when one chooses to love God with all their being and their neighbor as thyself, they do not have to worry about violating the Torah. When people love, they do not steal, they do not covet, they do not kill, they care for the orphans and widows, etc. Still, not everyone can love God perfectly or another in like manner. However, for the heart that longs to love, forgiveness is offered, and empowerment through the Holy Spirit to grow in that love is bestowed.

While in college in the early 70s, I was introduced to the concept of “situation ethics.” This ethic meant that whatever situation we find ourselves, we are to do the best thing we can. However, situation ethics are totally subjective. I am to decide what “I” think is the right thing. However, we do have an ethic that fits all situations. It is the Shema. We are called to do the most loving thing possible in every situation. However, that love is defined and expressed by God through Jesus Christ. Often, to do what Jesus would do or say is very different from what I might choose. The Christian life is a journey of love through Jesus Christ. It is not that we loved God first, but that God loved us first. Our living the Shema is a “response” to God’s loves for us, and a desire to embrace and enact that love in every moment. John Wesley wrote that we are to be “perfect in love.” Wesley was speaking of our journey toward the perfect love of the Shema.

Jeremiah the prophet proclaimed there is coming a day when a new covenant would be written in the heart. Jesus was the fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy. Jesus moved the Law from outside ourselves into the heart. Jesus said, "I did not come to abolish the law, but to fulfill it." Jesus fulfilled the entirety of the Law by living that one Law of love and imparting that love to us through the Holy Spirit.

During the dinner with the Pharisee, Jesus offered a glimpse into this radical change of personal righteousness and spiritual purity. When loving with all one's being would walk so far it would journey to the cross, we witnessed the Shema in its perfection. His resurrection revealed this love is eternal, indestructible, and let loose upon the world.

Can you articulate the difference in understanding the Shema in relation to the Pharisees and Jesus? How does the Law of Laws, the Shema, become a law for every situation? How does living in the Shema allow one to keep the Torah? How does Jesus' teaching of the Shema relate to Jeremiah's prophecy of "a new covenant written on the heart"?

Examples in the Text of the Fallacy of Choosing to Believe Outer Obedience is Sufficient to Lead a Godly Life

The following examples are found in the Three Woes in our text. In the first, Jesus warns the Pharisees that God sees through their generosity. Jesus' judgement concerning mint, rue, and other garden herbs reveals the spiritual shallowness of the Pharisees. The Torah offered specific laws regarding the offering of a tenth of one's income and blessings. Yet, a situation arose concerning the herbs. How do you measure a tenth of mint, rue, and herbs? It was almost impossible to do so; therefore, there was no rigid law related to tithing on these assets. However, the Pharisees gave what they considered a tenth of the mint, rue, and herbs in a public manner as a way to show their piety and godliness.

Why was this a shallow gesture? Mint, rue, and garden herbs grew abundantly even with human nurturing. In making such a public gesture of their righteousness, Jesus confronts them for ignoring the weightier matters of justice and the love of God. Not giving the herbs would have mattered little to the poor and needy. However, God's justice, mercy, and love would have made all the difference in the world! Yet, these were ignored while engaging in such shallow giving.

Jesus then offers the second "woe." The Pharisees only sat in the high places at banquets and in synagogue. The reason Jesus offered such a stern warning was due to the fact that the Pharisees believed they deserved such demonstrations of prestige and status. It was this arrogance that led them to "love" these high places. They not only loved these public affirmations of their importance and piety, they also loved the manner in which the masses greeted them in the marketplace. The greeting in the marketplace and other places was "Rabbi." Therefore, we can imagine their chagrin when people addressed Jesus in such a manner. Again, their love of outward expressions and affirmations of their piety were common while their concern for the poor and suffering was often rare. Caring for those suffering meant believing they were important to God and loved of God. Remember, the Pharisees would have believed they suffered because of their sin and failure to obey the Torah. In other words, they deserved it. Jesus has again called attention to the heart over outer acts of righteousness void of compassion and love.

The third “woe” is less of a warning than a statement regarding their true spiritual state. The Pharisees were like “unmarked graves which people walk over without knowing it.” To walk over a grave violated the Torah and defiled the offender. In other passages Jesus refers to Pharisees as whitewashed tombs. The tombs appeared attractive on the outside, but inside they still were full of bones. In this verse Jesus is strongly confronting the Pharisees. However they lived in public, without hearts of God’s love they were spiritually dead. Furthermore, their hypocrisy spiritually damaged those who needed spiritual guidance.

In leaving the three woes, it is important to note that Jesus was teaching that one’s belief in self-righteousness through outer obedience and acts of piety did not only damage the Pharisees personally, but their hypocrisy damaged those seeking the Kingdom of God and God’s favor.

Can you recall when a public gesture of generosity on the part of someone left you feeling uncomfortable? What was missing in the gesture? Do you recognize the temptation to love public recognition of one’s spirituality so much the true motivation of spirituality in the heart is ignored? What damage do you think is done when love of what others think of us stands in contrast to what Jesus asks of us? What damage is done to our witness?

Hypocrisy

Few words leave as bitter a taste in our mouth as hypocrisy. For many, hypocrisy is simply understood as living outwardly in a different manner than we claim to believe. Hypocrisy involves deception. Mostly, we deceive ourselves. Hypocrisy leads us to conclude that as long as people see us as people who do good then we are engaging in real spiritual life. On a mission trip to the Yucatan years ago a man, a mason by trade, accompanied us and did fine work. He worked hard and poured himself into his work. However, when not around the Yucatan people he referred to them with the most shameful, ungodly nicknames. It became evident he cared more about his work than the people who needed his work. I remain convinced in his mind he was certainly pleasing God with his voluntary work, though he lacked an ounce of compassion for those whom he served. This is the destructive deception in which we engage in a state of hypocrisy.

We further deceive ourselves regarding our understanding of God, godly grace, and godly love. God’s grace and love are foundational to meaningful Christian life. When we believe God is pleased with our outer behavior, in spite of our inner prejudices, biases and sins, we have moved most deeply into the destructive power of hypocrisy. We in actuality are living in a manner that negates the freedom Jesus brought to the world. Jesus is often understood as the one who redeemed us by forgiving us our sins and helping us do good. The redemption of Jesus certainly involves those actions. However, at the core of redemption is the changed heart. Our motivations are pure when they arise from a transformed, loving heart. When our motivations are pure, our godly actions follow.

We cannot deceive God, who knows our inmost thoughts and motivations. When we begin to believe our outer benevolent work is sufficient to make us right with God, we have fallen for the

same darkness with which the early Jewish Christians struggled. I encourage you to read Paul's letter to the Galatians to understand the severity of believing the outer supersedes the inner.

How do you define biblical hypocrisy? Can you articulate the destruction created through hypocrisy? What are we missing when we choose to believe our outer works matter most? Can you share moments in your life when the temptation to place our outer works over the importance of a pure heart? What in the Beatitudes did Jesus say about those with a pure heart? How does the vision offered to us through a pure heart lead to a contented blessed life?

In the dinner with the Pharisee, Jesus was teaching a great lesson about hypocrisy. The Pharisee could continue his life of believing in his own self-worth because he obeyed the outer traditions, customs, and laws. He could obey the Torah as meticulously as possible, all the while judging those who did not live the outer life he lived. However, Jesus was teaching him it wasn't the outside of his hands and the purification rites that gave him what he truly wanted and needed. He needed to become as one of the masses outside the door, who recognized the impossibility of keeping the Torah and found redemption, liberty and life through accepting the love of God revealed in Jesus. And in response to God's love, they could love all others in like manner. They needed to find the liberty of grace over the bondage of tradition and custom.

Prayer

Almighty God, the Law has revealed to us the high ideals of righteousness. Yet, it has also taught us that we cannot live these ideals alone. We not only desire your forgiveness, we ask for a heart of love. We pray to learn from our failing and to walk forward in greater compassion and understanding. May your Spirit empower us to find that serene harmony of living a life that expresses the love that dwells in our hearts. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

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