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Holiness That Isn't – *Luke 11:37-54*

Introduction – Some say that the Pharisees and scribes were the most respected religious people of their day. The proverbial saying was that if God only saved two men, one would be a scribe and the other, a Pharisee. But Jesus, one eye looking at the crowds longing for Jubilee, the other eye set towards Jerusalem and then to the world, was about to shatter that notion.

Dining with the Dirty (vv37-41) – Jesus is invited by another Pharisee to come and dine with Him (this didn't go well the last time, you recall – 7:36ff). It is doubtful that the Pharisee had real pure intentions in offering this meal seeing where the end of the conversation led (vv53-54). He may have invited many other Pharisees, scribes, and lawyers for just the purpose of getting Jesus away from the influence He was having on the crowds and into a place to test Him.

Clean Hands, Dirty Hearts – Jesus refused to follow the traditions of the Pharisees on this point – and obviously to make a point. And it wasn't that He didn't like traditions (Jesus attended synagogue, celebrated Hanukah, and followed other extra-biblical traditions). But this was a tradition-gone-to-seed. Ceremonial hand-washing (something commanded of priests before they entered the Temple) had become required of all faithful Jews as a sign that they were clean and separate from the rest of the unclean world. But Israel had been made separate to be the people that welcomed in the Messiah. Here He was, and they were doing just the opposite. Their "*greed and wickedness*" was probably two-fold: First they envied the growing popularity of Jesus. Secondly, they had used their place of influence over Israel, not to serve, but to flaunt and take advantage for themselves.

No Flattery (vv40-41) – Jesus is no flatterer, especially when the gospel is at stake. He calls these conservative, bible-believing expositors of the scriptures fools and hypocrites. Later, near Jerusalem, He will give a more extended condemnation very publicly (Matt 23). Here, in this home, He seems to plead one last time with them to "*give alms of the things inside of you* (my translation)." External religiosity will save no one and God will not be mocked.

Mixed Up Measurements (v42) – When the emphasis is on pleasing men and keeping the externals clean, the standard of holiness has to change. This is because we can only measure things like a tithe (and apparently they kept a very detailed, public record). It is so much tougher to measure your mercy, your justice, your humble walk with God. Yet, these are the marks of true holiness (Mic 6:8, James 1:27). It doesn't matter what you give; if there isn't gospel-love it amounts to nothing (1 Cor 13:3).

To Be Noticed (v43) – If holiness is measured by externals, then my goal becomes being noticed as holy by others. They need to become impressed with my holiness, and so I start looking for what I need to flaunt, and I learn to do so openly or subtly, whatever the society demands.

Defiling Many (v44) – There is a false holiness, a way of living, that is like an unmarked grave. If a Jew touched a grave he was declared unclean, so it was important for tombs to be clearly marked. The Pharisees and their teaching were leading people into uncleanness. What defiled the people was their lack of charity, which they passed on to others.

When Jesus Offends (v45) – Of course, Jesus is never actually surprised by the responses of those hearing Him. It turns out He meant to offend these Pharisees, and the lawyers too – He almost seems to say, "Oh, thank you for reminding me..."

Burdens Too Hard To Bear (v46) – There is a way of interpreting and applying the scriptures that makes life impossible. This was what the oral tradition of the Pharisees had become – incredibly detailed in the technicalities of holiness. Quite the opposite, we are to be a people who preach a gospel like Jesus (Ex 33:14, Matt 11:28-30). Jesus wore the yoke that He calls us to put on with Him.

Murderers of the Prophets (vv47-51) – They were just like their forefathers, murdering the messengers of God. Yet, they built monuments to those same prophets – for at a distance it was easy to venerate them, if only for public-relations sake. In our day, what would Calvin, Luther, or Tyndale and Knox, think of the use of their names? And what would we, who use those names, do if those "prophets" showed up in our midst, with all of their biting sarcasm, maverick tendencies, and controversial teachings?

Hiding the Keys (v52) – The gospel is and always has been a gospel of grace (Rom 4:3). Twisting this truth in the name of holiness, we can easily fall into the sin of judging others' sincerity and hearts; we start coming up with all sorts of steps to prove whether you really are a Christian. It is important that we understand, theologically, the doctrine of *justification by faith*. But we must never forget that genuine saving faith has been expressed as simply as "*Jesus, remember me...*" (Luke 23:42) or "*God, be merciful to me, a sinner*" (Luke 18:13). And when we hold the keys of the kingdom with such sour-puss faces that we are known to have, *biting and devouring one another*, is it any wonder that no one is entering?

A "Holy" Response (vv53-54) – The Pharisees were lying in wait for Him, seeking to catch Him. When your attitude before the Prophet of God is to catch Him up, something is deathly wrong. Down through the centuries, many martyrs have been put to death for faithfully standing against the religiously-accepted ones. Men would lie in wait, seeking to catch them in something, anything - not because their hearts were seeking righteousness. Their hearts were seeking self-justification.

This Generation (v 51) – It is important to notice Jesus' reference here again to "*this generation*." It would be "*this generation*" that would murder the final Prophet and it would be "*this generation*" that Paul would warn had filled up "the measure of their sins" (1 Thess 4:15-16) and would see the full wrath of God befall them.

But What About Us? – The kind of holiness that Jesus gives is a yoke of mercy. It is a yoke that changes the heart and then the actions, inward and outward. It is a different kind of righteousness in that it enables you to obey the law from the heart out of a love for God (1 John 5:1-5). To not be a Pharisee, today, means to be concerned with reality, not appearances. It is a holiness, a grace, that enables a follower of Christ to see his obedience and long for more obedience as the fruit of that grace. *drh – June 18, 2006*