

Deconstructing Unbelief

Luke 11:45-54

June 21, 2020

Luke chapter 11. In our study of Luke's Gospel, we're in Luke 11. You can turn there in your Bibles. We're actually wrapping up a section here, which is about Jesus' confrontation with some scribes and Pharisees, and I'll just take a few minutes here to get you up to speed.

In this final section of the 11th chapter of Luke's Gospel, we find Jesus here in the home of a Pharisee. He has been invited to this home to share in a meal, probably a, a late breakfast or a lunch meal with the Pharisees and his other invited guests. A group of Pharisees and lawyers and servants would be there besides. And things have become rather awkward, you might say, around the lunch table.

The awkwardness started when Jesus had started actually immediately when Jesus entered into the Pharisee's home and instead of lining up to join the handwashing, the purification ritual that the Pharisees and scribes practiced as an established tradition. It almost had the force of law. Jesus walked right past the servants, walked right past them pouring their water and he took a place at the table, sat down, and waited.

Luke tells us in Luke 11:38 that the Pharisees was just astonished at this behavior. He was shocked to see that Jesus did not first wash his hands before the meal. This was an offense. And it wasn't just bad manners on Jesus' part. This was a vio, not just a violation of social expectation, though it was all that. This was a ceremonial violation.

Jesus was bringing, in their minds, he was bringing impurity or uncleanness to the lunch table. The Pharisee, they didn't like this at all. This just wasn't done. As we pointed out, that was Jesus' design. That was his intent to get this man's attention so that he could say this: look at verse 39. Verse 39, "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. 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 to you.'"

As we said to, to this point anyway, Jesus has confronted here the Pharisees' empty ritualism, useless impotent traditions that they practiced. And I'm not going to reproach the sermon, but we noted when we went through this section that Jesus' confrontation was grace. This was love on his part. He was loving the Pharisees. He was loving this Pharisee. He is teaching the Pharisee and all of his gathered guests; he's teaching them the way to true cleanness on the inside.

It's an internal, not an external thing. It's an actual cleanness before God, not just a symbolic cleanness of a ritual before men. This is a cleanness that's accomplished by God in the heart where the, the heart is made clean before God. It's regenerated and given a new nature. This is grace on the Lord's

part as he confronts these Pharisees. He confronts their religion.

And since no one spoke up, evidently, since no one asked to learn more from him about how to have a changed heart, showing that they wanted to understand how to become truly clean, that they were following him and understanding him. No one said how they agreed, and they wanted to go beyond the external so that they could get into the internal before God where everything is clean for you. I mean, what a promise. Since none of that happened, Jesus continued.

He gives three woes. Three pronouncements of judgment upon the Pharisees' what you might call an ornamental religion, a religion just for show. And he starts there in verse 42. "But woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe the mint and the rue and every herb and you neglect justice and the love of God. These you ought to have done without neglecting the others."

So as Jesus diagnoses their hypocrisy, he begins with evidence. He's not just spinning this out of whole cloth, he is, he gives

them evidence. They are preoccupied with minutia in religion. And it's minutia that they came up with on their own. This is man-made stuff. And they completely, in following man-made tradition, they ignore the heart, the real heart of true religion. And that's something God came up with.

They neglect justice, which is love for neighbor and they neglect love for God. If only they'd look closer at the biblical command about giving the tithe. As we talked about last week, they would have discerned that loving God and loving neighbor is the joyful principle that's actually practiced in tithing. Tithing is just a, a manifestation of love for God and love for neighbor. It's a, it's a, c, it's a, it's an occasion for joy, to take what we have and to share it with others and that's what the tithe was meant to do.

They're preoccupied with minutia. Tithing of the condiments on the table. So you gotta ask the question, what is it that attracts them to this externalism? What, why would they give themselves to something as burdensome as this minutia? Tithing of their spices and herbs. I mean, that's gotta get burdensome,

wearisome, tiresome. So why are they so easily distracted from the clearly written actual commandment of God, which is all about joy, all about love for God, love for neighbor? Why would they be enticed into tithing all their herbs and spices in the pantry.

Because of this: External show of religion gets you noticed before men. External shows and displays of religious devotion and piety gets you some respect in public. Look at verse 43. "Woe to you Pharisees! For you," here's what they love, "you love the best seat in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces. You neglect justice and love for God." You don't love God. You actually love the praise of men. "You love the best seat in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces."

This is the essence of hypocrisy in religion. It's wanting the respect of other people. It's posturing so that other people look at you and think, wow, look how in tune that person is. Look how pious that person is. These guys want to be noticed. They want to be respected. They want to be praised by the world.

Their hearts aren't moved by affection for God. They're not moved by love for neighbor. They're moved only by self-love.

And that is the most common and the least refined form of idolatry, which is, boils down to love for self. "They love the glory that comes from man," Jesus said in John 12:43, "more than the glory that comes from God." And ironically, in spite of all the time and attention and fastidious devotion to detail and remaining ritually pure, ceremonial, ceremonially clean in all these handwashing and tithing and all the rest, the Pharisees, verse 44, they are as defiled and as defiling as an unmarked grave.

"Woe to you! For you're like unmarked graves, which the unsuspecting people walk over them without knowing it." They walk over it, might have, as we talked about last week, on their pilgrimage to Jerusalem and they're going there to participate in a, a weeklong or more of feasting and joy before God. If they walk over an unmarked grave, they're defiled, Numbers chapter 19, I believe it is, for seven days. They can't even participate in the feast. Can't draw near. Completely unaware.

The Pharisees moved about freely. Kind of like someone who's maybe in our society asymptomatic with Covid, moving around freely infecting everybody. And these guys infect everyone with the contagion of their false religion. By their teaching, by their example, they are spreading soul-damning religion of externalism, Pharisaism.

And so in just a few minutes, with just a few sentences here, Jesus has really diagnosed and exposed Pharisaic hypocrisy. He's exposed its empty ritualism by pointing to the evidence in verse 42. He's revealed its idolatrous heart in verse 43. And he's warned everybody about the defilement that's brought by its contagious nature in verse 44. The Pharisees here apparently, they are silenced because Jesus has just described them to a T. He has pronounced woes upon all the, the entire way that they live, the way that they think. He's pronounced woes and judgment up on the way they actually conduct themselves in their life. This is, this is the whole manner of their existence. He just swept it all away with condemnation.

So where did they get this form of religion? What made them so certain that this is the path to righteousness? Why were they so sure that the tra, traditions they kept and the rituals that they practiced, why were they so certain that this kind of living was the way to righteousness, the way to please God?

And to the lawyers in verse 45. They're the brains behind the operation. "One of the lawyers answered Jesus and he said, 'Teacher, in saying these things you insult us also.'"

Interesting, right? Jesus said, verse 42, "Woe to you Pharisees!" Verse 43, "Woe to you Pharisees!" "Woe to you!" verse 44. He's talking to the Pharisees. Pharisees say nothing.

It's one of the lawyers who takes the initiative to give an answer. Three things to notice about that. Just observations to make in the fact that this lawyer responded and the way he responded. First, notice how the lawyer is attempting to shift the attention from what Jesus has said to the offense that Jesus has caused.

It's really a strong verb there, ah, that's used about insult. It's the verb *hybrizo*, from which we get the word, you can hear the word hubris. That's where the word comes from. It refers to, hubris refers to an exaggerated pride that thinks nothing about giving an offense far and wide, it doesn't matter. That's how, that's how arrogant the person is. They don't care about giving an offense because they think so highly of themselves that everything, they do is pure, everything they do is right, and they don't care about offending anybody else. That's hubris.

Well, that is kind of what's going on in the verb *hybrizo*. The, the basic meaning of *hybrizo*, the original sense of that verb is to conduct an invasion. And in an invasion, as you may or may not be aware, soldiers don't care too much about hurting people's feelings. Might even use some harsh language every now and again as they shoot bullets and throw grenades and mortars and all the rest.

That's the basic meaning of this verb, is to conduct an invasion, to, and, and when it comes down to an interpersonal level, it's to violate somebody. To insult a person, to

spitefully mock and revile them. It's often translated in the Bible to, to treat shamefully. Again, the lawyer, he doesn't seem interested here in talking about a single thing Jesus actually said. He's not concerned about the what of Jesus' words, about, he's concerned about how Jesus said it.

This is the very origin of the tone police, right? They're all concerned about tone and the insinuation here from this lawyer is that, the offense that Jesus has caused, he's gone over the top. He's gone overboard. This is unwarranted. Jesus causing this offense, it's completely unjustified. Or maybe, maybe overstated. Therefore Jesus owes them an apology. At least his behavior, his words require some kind of an explanation.

So subtly, this is what lawyers do, subtly, he is trying to turn the tables on Jesus. He's trying to shift the focus from the substance of Jesus' indictment to the tone, to how he made everybody feel. Lawyers understand this so well, that he who frames the debate wins the debate. Though, the person who frames the argument and gets the first word in and frames everything,

it's the one who wins the argument. That's how a courtroom's conducted.

So he's trying to divert the attention here from the facts of Jesus' indictment to his bad manners. The way he's coming across. He's trying to put Jesus on the defensive. He's hoping to make Jesus uncomfortable enough to explain himself. He's trying to guilt him. Mark it down, folks, that is a tactic of a proud heart.

Second thing we need to notice in the lawyer's response is well, that he responded, that he answered. Listen, he felt stung here, by Jesus' indictment of the Pharisees' practice of religion. Why is that? Why would he feel stung? Because the lawyers, the widely, they're widely upheld as the experts in the law. So the Pharisees are really putting into practice what the lawyers have taught them.

Fascinating, isn't it? That Jesus Christ, the living, and the incarnate word of God, when he speaks, it's as if God's Word is unleashed because it is. As Hebrews 4:12 say, "The word of God is

living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, it pierces to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. No creature," especially one of these scribes, "no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him with whom we have to do."

It's not just the Pharisees here who are under the microscope. The scribes, these legal experts, these professional exegetes, and theologians, they make their living teaching what the Pharisees were practicing as a lifestyle. They are feeling exposed here. They're feeling flayed open, naked, and laid bare. So they are really eager to hide, find some cover, try to cover themselves up.

And that's why the lawyer tries this tactic of shifting the focus. It's called blame shifting. Take the attention off of himself and talk instead about Jesus' tone, talk about how offensive he's been. Which brings us to a third observation here. And this is an observation that'll take us kind of into our outline for this morning. Each woe that Jesus pronounces

upon the lawyers in verses 46 to 51, each of these, or 52, I should say.

Each of these woes that he pronounces upon the lawyers, each point of condemnation corresponds to and looks back to and explains the charges that Jesus brought against the Pharisees in their hypocritical religion. So every woe that Jesus pronounces against the lawyer, it points back to and explains, expounds, the reason for the hypocrisy in the Pharisees. I'm going to try to show that as we walk through each point.

But what I want you to see here just in kind of giving this general observation, what we need to recognize here is that what stands behind the hypocrisy of the Pharisees is the unbelief of the lawyers. What stands betwixt, behind the the hypocritical practice, the pharisaical religion of the Pharisees is the teaching of these scribes, of these lawyers, the teachers of the law. Unbelief is the root cause of all false religion. And hypocrisy is the rotten fruit that is produced by all false religion.

And so, it's an evil heart of unbelief that will always give rise to and produce religious hypocrisy. Sure as an apple tree produces apples, so unbelief will produce hypocrisy. So before we even get into our outline, I want to ask this question, how are we going to think through the application to our own lives? I mean, are we here in our church, are we like these Jewish scribes, teachers of the law, these professional exegetes and theologians who err from the start because we don't fear God or believe his word?

I hope not because if that's true, we really need to tighten up our membership process because we're getting some things wrong if we're, if we're a church filled with people like this. Hearts of unbelief. That said, though, we believers can go off track, can't we? We believers can go off track whenever we pay heed and listen to unbelieving voices. When we allow the voices, the opinions, the views of unbelief and especially the prescriptions of unbelief and the expectations of unbelief to direct the way we live and practice our Christianity, we can feel kowtowed into bowing to unbelieving voices. Pressured into doing what they expect.

So in that sense, I guess you could say that many of us are in the position of the Pharisees. Not that we are pharisees and hypocrites, but just that we're in their position. We can kind of sympathize with them because we're practitioners of religion, most of us here. We're not experts. I mean we don't, we don't get paid to do this. We don't get paid to study Scripture. We have to really trust what the experts tell us. We have to read their commentaries, read their systematic theologies. We're at the mercy of their fidelity to Scripture, aren't we?

We have to listen to them and learn from them to inform the way we understand and practice our faith. So listen, if the people were reading and studying and everything, if they're rotten at the core. Guess what's gonna happen to us? Most people in our churches are busy making a living, aren't we? We have to rely on the integrity, faithfulness of scholars, exegetes, theologians, who teach in our seminaries and our institutions. Those who write books that influence everyone on a popular level.

Those who train the pastors that fill the pulpits of our churches. I don't have time, really, to go into it in any great

detail this morning, but I think we have some good reason to check that. To be cautious about the voices that we're listening to. There's a lot of bad stuff out there, a lot of bad stuff. And there's a lot more we can say, but we need to move on from these introductory matters and get to what Jesus actually says to these lawyers.

Last week, Jesus diagnosed hypocrisy in the Pharisees' religious practice. This week, Jesus is deconstructing unbelief. He's deconstructing the unbelief that is informing their religion. He's, he's pulling back the curtain and he's going back there and he's saying, this is what explains your hypocrisy. It's unbelief. So he's going to deconstruct the unbelieving scholarship, you might say, of the law experts and the lawyers and the scribes.

First point for your outline this morning, number one, unbelief obscures the law. Simply put, unbelief obscures, or you might say, hides the law. Unbelief obscures the law. Why did the Pharisees tithe their salt and pepper? Because the law experts have taught them to. This is the first woe that Jesus pronounces

upon them in verses 46. "One of the lawyers answered him, 'Teacher, in saying these things you insult us also.'"

Then this in verse 46. "And 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.'" The lawyers, they're the teachers of the law, also known in Scripture as the scribes. They are the law experts, the law teachers. The majority of the Pharisees were laymen. The lawyers are professionals. They're the educated ones. They're the, they're the ones who studied under the rabbinical schools.

They're the ones who studied all the tradition of the, the oral tradition and the written tradition. They're the trained theologians. So these guys are the seminary professors. And it's through their close association with these Pharisees and the influence of Pharisee money, the scribes were able to broaden their popular appeal. They were able to come out from behind the ivory tower and come into the mainstream.

It'd be one thing if their teaching remained tucked away safely hidden in some ivory tower, hidden in obscurity, some scholarly theological journal that no one but other academics are ever gonna read. But no, they got out there and mixed in public. They liked the attention. They liked the feeling of being the one with the answers. So they came out from behind, from outside of their ivory tower, and they accompanied the Pharisees. They're often paired together, scribes and Pharisees.

Their teaching infected everyone and as their teaching infected everyone, it burdened them significantly with heavy, heavy burdens. The verb there "to load people with," or "to burden people," it's directly related to the noun that's in the same sentence, the noun burden and that noun for burden refers to like a ship's cargo, which is, which is rather apropos of a word picture because it conveys the weight of a burden.

Think about how much cargo goes into sh, into a ship and think about you offloading that ship one box at a time, to go to some freighter, some cargo carrier that goes across one of our major oceans and think about you being burdened with offloading that

ship by yourself. Think about the many varieties of cargo that's contained in a ship. And all of that is being freighted into popular religion.

It's like a ship's cargo; it's too much for a person to carry. It's impossible. It requires a ship's hold to carry all these burdens. So the number of burdens, the weight, the variety of burdens, impossible for anyone to carry by himself. It's like a ship's cargo and there's nothing but an ocean-going freighter that can carry all this weight.

Now, we already talked about the pharisees' practice of tithing the mint, the rue, every garden herb. That obs, obscured, as we learned last week, that obscured the true intention of God in the law of tithing by covering over with this burden of minutia. But let me give you just a few examples pertaining to the Sabbath in particular.

The Mishna sab, Shabbat goes into great detail on what may and may not be carried as a burden on the Sabbath day. And that, that concern about what can be carried and how far and how much

and all the rest, carried on a Sabbath day, that concern is related to commentary that comes from Jeremiah chapter 17 where God tells Jeremiah. Tells him, "Jeremiah, you go stand at the gates of Jerusalem and you confront the people who are going in and out of the gates carrying burdens. They are working on the Sabbath day."

You remember the law, it said back in the Ten Commandments, exodus chapter 20:8 through 11. God says, "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy." Holiness is not meant to be a burden of minutia. Holiness, drawing near to holiness is meant to be a joyful occasion of worship. God says, "Six days you shall labor, do all your work." So do all your work on the other six days of the week. I made six other days for you to do all the work that your heart desires. "But when you get to the seventh, the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it, you shall do no work. You or your son or your daughter or your male servant or your female servant."

So not your, not you and not your slaves. Not you and not someone you own. Not you or someone you employ. I'm concerned

about everybody in this economy. Nobody, not even, get this, not even your livestock. Don't even burden your animals that have no soul. Your livestock, get this and also not just for you Israelites, not just for you Jews, "but for the sojourner who's within your gates." The foreigner, the alien the stranger. Protect them from work on the Sabbath day as well.

"For," here's the pattern, "in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, all that's within them." Okay, so he could've done that on a single day in a single moment. He didn't have to go days. He could've done it with a breath. He could've done it with a thought. But he's not, he said, No, I'm giving them a pattern. Six days work, one day rest.

"He rested on the seventh day." The lord ceased from his labor. "Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day, made it holy." He wants us to rest. He wants us to find rest in him on the Sabbath day. The Sabbath day, the Sabbath principle that we still try to practice here on our Sundays, the Lord's day. The Sabbath principle is that we may find refreshment in the Lord our God. It's not to burden ourselves with all kinds of other junk and

distraction and entertainment and everything else that, that all the pagans do. It's not for that.

It is for us to enjoy rest in the Lord our God. Rest with his people. Rest and encouragement and understanding of the truth, right from the very beginning. Right from the very beginning when God gave the law about the Sabbath, which is a law of blessing, not of burden, but of blessing. There's a man, remember caught gathering sticks on the Sabbath day in Numbers. I mean, he didn't get ten steps from Sinai. He's already breaking the Sabbath.

All the way through Israel's history, it continued. The Jews continued to violate the Sabbath. The surrounding nations had no problem buying, selling, trading on the Sabbath day and they enticed the Jews into it. You want to make a little money on the side? You want to make a... They're all in, they're all in there learning the law, let's, let's do a little business. You make a little extra money get something nice for your wife. There's no harm in making a little money.

Just before Jew, Jerusalem is sacked by the Babylonians, God sent Jeremiah into the city gates to confront the people's, the people as they transacted business on the Sabbath. It says in Jeremiah 17:21, "Thus says the Lord: Take care for the sake of your lives, and do not bear a burden on the Sabbath day or bring it in by the gates of Jerusalem. Don't carry a burden out of your houses on the Sabbath or do any work. But keep the Sabbath day holy, as I commanded your fathers."

Now just stop there for a second and think. If you, if you're listening to Jeremiah and you're carrying your wares that you're re, getting ready to sell to the surrounding nations and you're coming through the gates of Jerusalem. You're like, yeah, I'm gonna go make a little money. And Jeremiah's there crying out to you, confronting you for carrying that burden, you know exactly what he's talking about, don't you?

You go back to Exodus chapter 20 and you, remem, "remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy." I'm not keeping it holy. I'm not setting it apart. I'm not making it the most important day of spiritual rest of the week. I'm treatin' it like any other day.



Stop what I'm doing. Take the burden back, drop it off and spend time worshipping the Lord.

So the lawyers read Jeremiah 17:21, 22, and just like that lawyer in Luke 10:29 who desires to justify himself saying, "And who is my neighbor?" I mean let's define terms, Jesus. In the same way, the lawyers here, the scribes, they ask the question, that question about everything and here it is again. "And what is a burden?" What is a burden? Let's get our definition, definition right.

Here are a few. And I'm just, I'm telling you, this is a few out of a, an elaborate amount of detail that it would take a long, long time just to read: Mishna Shabbat. A tailor, someone who sews clothes, men's, men's clothes. A tailor should not go out with his needle close to nightfall on the Sabbath eve lest he forget and carry. Even though his needle may be stuck into his garment, just where tailors keep their needles, that's a burden.

Nor the scribe with his quill, his pen, which is stuck behind his ear in the manner of scribes. Can't carry the quill pen in

your ear or the needle in your belt, is what a burden is, the scribes are saying. Nor, I, I love this part. I just had to include this. Nor may he reluc, remove lice from his garments, that is with the needle or the quill. Can't pick out lice. That's work on the Sabbath. Leave it alone.

If one takes out straw that is to feed an animal. He may take out no more than a cow's mouthful. I've never done that experiment, but I imagine it's only a little bit. I don't know. Might be a lot, I don't' know. But he can't take out much more than a cow's mouthful. The idea is that any more is a burden and burdens can't be carried on a Sabbath.

So you can shove some straw into your cow's mouth and then you're absolved of liability. If it's pea stalks, a camel's mouthful. Evidently this is a larger than a cow's mouthful. I don't know. If one is not liable with a cow's mouthful of pea stalks, well, then they're not fit for a cow. Grain ears, ears of grain, a lamb's mouthful. Grasses, a kid, a goat, a young goat's mouthful. And the list goes on and on and on like this. It's grueling. So I'm gonna spare you.

If one, here's another one, if one carries something out of his house on the Sabbath, whether in his right hand or his left hand, in his bosom or on his shoulder, he is liable. Liable means guilty. Guilty means you need to pay the penalty of a sinner guilt offering. He is liable because, after all, the right hand or the left hand or the bosom or the shoulder are the customary ways of carrying things.

But if he makes this burden carrying completely inconvenient for himself and he carries something out on top of his hands, like not in the palm, but you try to carry this microphone on top of your hand balancing it or on his foot, or in his mouth, or on his elbow, or in his ear or on his, in his hair, or in the bottom edge of his garment, or in his shoe or in his sandal, he's not liable for that is not the customary way of carrying.

I'm mean, I'm actually reading that. "That is not the customary way of carrying." Therefore, it's okay. Carry something in the normal way, make this easy for yourself, and you're guilty of violating the Sabbath burden bearing rules. But carry it in an

uncomfortable, awkward, abnormal, inconvenient way, I mean, literally, make your burden even more burdensome. Hey, no problem! Carry whatever you want so long as you suffer for it. Suffering absolves you from all Sabbath liability.

This is just, listen, this is just one of the sins that the lawyers are guilty of. Adding burdens like this, by proliferating oral tradition upon oral tradition, expansion after expansion upon the law itself. That's what A.T. Robertson calls, they're pettifogging interpretations. Pettifogging. P-e-t-t-i-f-o-g-g-i-n-g. I had to look it up, too. Pettifogging refers to placing undue emphasis on petty details. Any of you got a pettifogging friend. Yeah, I do, too.

This is exactly the right word for what these trifling lawyers are doing. They are pettifogging. In addition to proliferating burdens, pumping out stupid regulations like tenured bureaucrats, the lawyers had no compassion for what they're doing to common people. I mean, life is burdensome enough, isn't it? We all eat our bread by the sweat of our brow and every

single one of us, in the conduct of our life, in everything that we do, we commit sins every single day.

And we feel the shame and the weight of guilt in our sin. I mean, shouldn't spiritual leaders use their intellectual gifts and all their training and all their experience and position to give counsel that lifts people's burdens, whenever possible? I mean, shouldn't they help people with the truth and not hurt them with their pettifoggery?

Instead, Jesus said, "You lawyers, you yourselves don't even touch one of those burdens with one of your fingers." What does it mean, touch one of those burdens with your fingers? It can mean that they don't try to help people lift the burdens that they place upon them. It could be a little more complex here, that they don't personally experience the burdens that they place upon other people because they, the same interpretive imagination that they use to create and proliferate burdens, they use that same imagination to, as an ingenuity to get themselves out of carrying burdens.

So they avoid all the implications of their own teaching. Kind of like folks on capitol hill who make all kinds of law that they actually don't have to live by. So they wiggle out of it. They use that same cleverness that created the burden in the first place to escape the implications of it. I think the lawyers here are guilty of both sins. I think there's due evidence; there are plenty of evidence for both viewpoints.

But I think that the verb here, which can be translated, the verb to touch, it, it can be translated to touch lightly, to apply a light touch to something. Metaphorically, it means to touch in a concerned way, to touch in a helpful way. The verb is actually used of a physician who gently feels around a sore spot on a person's, you know, a person's injury. Or touches someone lightly in the, on the neck or the, or the wrist to check the pulse.

And I think that's what Jesus is using. He's using the verb in its sense here. I think he's using it to refer to their lack of compassion in, in, in applying a gentle touch to help people with burdens. They don't do that. They don't do anything to

alleviate the pain of carrying what they create. They are so enamored with their own cleverness, in novel interpretation, they're so intoxicated the, with the power that they seem to wield of creating all these new traditions for people to follow. They think nothing of the implications that their own teaching has on just regular folks.

This is not true with our Lord; not true it all. May it never be said of us, that we're like this. But listen, let's just keep our eyes on him. If we keep our eyes on Christ, we'll never be like this. Let's just keep our eyes on him. Jesus carried the greatest burden that anyone could carry. He carried the spiritual burden of our guilt and our shame. All of our sin, all of our iniquity, all of our transgression, all of the accompanying impurity and defilement, all that sorrow and brokenness, he carried to Calvary. And by his grace he canceled the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.

He carried burdens to the hill, and he died to alleviate us of our burden. This is our example, this is our pattern. This is

why Jesus could say, such a wonderful text of Scripture, "Come to me all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you," what? "rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you'll find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, my burden is light." There is yoke, there is a burden, but it's easy yoke and a light burden.

Look, these lawyers created the burdens. The Pharisees tried to carry them. And so, they both taught and influenced the common people to do the same thing. And, and that really is Je, who Jesus is speaking to here. He's saying this is what you are doing. You're laboring and you're heavy laden so if you feel this, come to me. These guys multiplied burdens that didn't help people at all. But Christ, in his meekness, Christ in his compassion, he comes to remove the yoke of slavery. He comes to save people from these onerous burdens and to bring them under his easy yoke to carry, very light burdens.

What are we to do with this, folks? Don't obscure the truth of God's Word from people. Don't obscure the truth of God's word from people and let me just say this, we are New Testament

people, we love to live in the red letters of Scripture, don't we? But you cannot understand Jesus' words in the Gospels, you can't understand the, the way they're expounded in the, in the, in the all the writings of the New Testament. You can't understand that without going back to understanding the law and the prophets.

So don't obscure God's Word and especially, don't obscure the law of God. Paul said, Romans 7:12, "The law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good." We read earlier Psalm 19 for our Scripture reading. "The law of the Lord is perfect it revives, it converts the soul." That is it gives life. "The testimony of the Lord is sure," it's certain, it makes a simple, naïve, ignorant person wise, filled with understanding. Gives him discernment. "The precepts of the Lord are right." Righteousness rejoices the heart. "The commandment of the Lord is pure, it enlightens the eyes." You can see clearly for miles and miles. Most importantly, you can see clearly for the next step.

Beloved, do not obscure the law of God. Don't obscure it by ignoring it. Don't obscure it by opining about it, about what you don't understand. Go back, read it, teach it to people. Study it for yourself. Learn the law. Love it, meditate upon it. Learn to share David's heart about it. "O, how I love your law," he said. Wrote a psalm, Psalm 119. Many people think David is the author of that psalm. It could be Daniel. There may be some others. Love the law like the psalmist of Psalm 119 loves the law. Teach others to follow your example.

We'll just keep moving. Not only does a heart of unbelief obscure the law of God, there's a second way to identify unbelief. It's, it's manifest in these lawyers. Number two, point number two, unbelief hates the prophets. Unbelief hates the prophets. Not only does unbelief obscure the law, but it hates the prophets. Why, why, going back to verse 43, why do the Pharisees love themselves? What promotes and encourages and never checks or confronts self-worship that Jesus condemned in them back in verse 43?

Well, it's because of the scribes, who study God's Word with a heart of unbelief. And absent of the fear of the Lord, human pride is left unchecked. And all that's left when you boil everything away, all that's left is the idolatry of self-love. They've obscured the law of Moses behind man-made traditions. And they ignore the message of the prophets, whose whole purpose of the prophets is to confront and expose that unbelief and point them back to the law.

It's so ironic, isn't it? Because it would seem on the surface, that the lawyers, the theologians, they are all about God's Word. They love the Word of God. Their daily occupation is to study Scripture, teach Scripture, regulate and assign assignments from Scripture. They are deep into the exegetical details of the text. And the prophets, well can they, can anybody show any more respect that they do?

I mean, look at verse 47, "Woe to you," Jesus says, "For you build the tombs of the prophets whom your fathers killed. And so you are witnesses and you consent to," or you agree with "the deeds of your fathers, for they killed them, and you build their

tombs.” Okay, so on the one hand, Jesus is saying the only prophet you honor is a dead prophet. You don’t like the living ones so much. Kill them, and then honor them.

Living ones, verse 49, you kill, you persecute; the dead ones, you enshrine. Their fathers, fathers of these scribes and Pharisees, the fathers of the Jewish nation, they hated the message of the prophets, so they killed them. But listen, the children hated the message of the prophets, too. And so they made their message, and they made the prophets remote and out of touch beyond reach by enshrining them in elaborate tombs. They made them an ornament, rather than something to actually listen to.

It’s like all the, you know, so they call them Christian bookstores. You know, you go in these Christian bookstores, and you see all this Jesus junk, all these trinkets, all this gobbledygook. Ornaments of religion. It has nothing to do with truth. Can’t find one good book in there, not one. You might be thinking, though, what’s wrong with building tombs and memorials for prophets? I mean wouldn’t it be good to have a pro, a mem, a

memorial here in Greeley? Jeremiah: oomph! We'd all drive by Jeremiah. Look at Jeremiah! He's condemning us, our false religion.

I mean isn't it showing honor, right, to call attention to the martyrs? I mean we've got a hall over here with a bunch of reformers, puritans, they weren't treated so well in their day. Some of them killed, John Huss, out there, killed, dead. I mean, isn't it good to build monuments, pictures, and everything else for martyrs, prophets? Does building a tomb for a prophet endorse the unjust execution by a past generation, because that's Jesus' argument here.

The answer to that question becomes abundantly clear in the next few verses. And just to summarize, just listen to, I'll summarize, really, what Jesus is basically telling everybody. He says, listen, if you really want to honor the prophets, you're not going to keep yourself busy with memorializing them. You're not going to be spending a bunch of money to build and beautify their tombs. Preoccupation with honoring the dead body is proof positive you've failed to grasp the prophet's living message,

which is God's living Word. You want to honor them? You do what they said.

That's the problem. Look at the next few verses. Start in verse 49. Jesus says, "Therefore the wisdom, therefore also the Wisdom of God said, 'I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and persecute,' so that the blood of all the prophets, shed from the foundation of the world, may be charged against this generation," just to expand on that, "from the blood of Abel," verse 51, "from the blood of," Abel, "Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who perished between the altar and the sanctuary." Jesus says, "Yes, I tell you, it will be required of this generation."

Frightening, frightening words. If you're living in that generation and you hear that heaviness come upon you, I mean, none of the scribes pettifogging bus, rules and regulation and burdens that they provided you can amount to what Jesus just laid on them. The blood of all the martyrs. The blood of all the prophets from the foundation of the world until Zechariah. Incredible burden. Incredible weight.

"The Wisdom of God said." If you're wondering about that expression, just hold that thought. We'll come back to it. "The Wisdom of God said, 'I will send them prophets and apostles.'" The idea here is that wave after wave of messengers came from God over time. They spoke revelation from God. They came. As they came, they came with increasing clarity and ever sharpening focus generation after generations.

And the, the revelation they brought is always progressing generation after generation. And it comes all the way to its crescendo and its culmination and fulfillment in Jesus Christ at this moment in the text. And Jesus is laying the guilt of the sin for the slaying of all of God's messengers. His prophets, those who spoke with authority the Word of God, all the apostles, literally the sent out ones. All the, their blood is charged to the generations standing right in front of him.

Why? Because they have had the privilege of biblical, historical perspective and they have refused to heed the message. They've refused to repent and believe, to turn from their sins and

embrace salvation in Jesus Christ. Instead of obeying the instructions of grace and truth and law of Moses. Instead of learning from the prophetic commentary on the law, instead of heeding the repeated warnings of the prophets who pleaded with the people, pointed to the coming Messiah, this generation, led by the Pharisees, led by the scribes, they're following in the bloody footsteps of their fathers. And they're about to kill yet another of God's messengers. This one, "the only Son from the Father full of grace and truth."

Jesus started with Abel, going back to the foundation of the world, goes to Abel, he ends with Zechariah. And he's not doing that because he's talking about the first and last martyrs of history chronol, chronologically, but because they're the first and last canonically. The Hebrew Bible, the canon of the Old Testament, canon of the Hebrew Bible, it begins, as our does, with the book of Genesis. So that makes Abel understandable as the first martyr who spoke with a prophetic voice.

But unlike our Bibles, our, the Hebrew Bible ends with the, with the Chronicles. Chronicles and that makes Zechariah, 2

Chronicles chapter 24, Zechariah is the last martyr. So again, this is bitterly ironic because what did the scribes do if not paying attention every single day to everything between Genesis and Chronicles? They prided themselves in their biblical knowledge. Their doctrinal purity. Their theological precision. Their view of honoring murdered prophets, build tombs for them.

Jesus' view of honoring murdering prophets, read what's written about them, listen, obey their voice. Repent of your sin; turn back to the law. Turn back to the grace that's found in God and God alone. The account of Abel's righteousness we read in Genesis. We can see it pictured before us in the narrative text. He offered a pleasing sacrifice, a blood atonement. He recognized the need for that animal to die as a vicarious substitute for himself.

We can only presume that that clarity came by revelation from the Spirit of God. And in fact, the writer to the Hebrews helps us to see that more clearly. In Hebrews 11:4 it says, "By faith Able offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain through which he was commended as righteous. God commending him

by accepting his gifts and though his faith, though he died, he still speaks.”

According to Genesis 4:10, the voice of Abel’s blood cried out to God from the ground. It’s not merely Abel’s offering that Cain hated. He hated Abel’s prophetic voice. He didn’t like the message from his own brother. He killed him for it. That’s a first prophetic martyr of human history. And really sets the pattern, sets the, the mold for what’s going to follow as God sends prophet and apostle, prophet and apostle all through the generations.

In 2 Chronicles, 24:20, we read about the last one in the Hebrew canon, which would penetrate the hearts of the scribes. It had to. It says there, “Spirit of God clothed Zechariah the son of Jehoiada the priest, and he stood above the people, and said to them, ‘Thus says God, “Why, why do you break the commandments of the Lord, so that you cannot prosper? Because you’ve forsaken the Lord, he has forsaken you.”’” Next verse says they conspired against him. “By the command of the king they stoned him with stones in the court of the house of the Lord.”

That murder happened in the temple court. He was perched up above on a platform above, according to Josephus. They pushed him off, which caused him to land in the court temple courtyard. Surely breaking a myriad of bones. But he wasn't dead yet, so they surround him and stoned him with stones. Happened between the altar and the sanctuary.

No place is safe. No place is protected from murderous conspiracy from those who hate the prophetic voice, which is why, sadly, Jesus said he had, he had to get to Jerusalem. Luke 13:33, "For it cannot be that a prophet should perish away from Jerusalem." Because in less than six months' time, these same Pharisees, these same lawyers, they're having lunch with him right now, but eventually, they're gonna lead a murderous course of "Crucify, crucify, crucify! Let his blood be on our heads and the heads of our children!"

Thousands of years of prophetic witness has landed at the doorstep and at the feet of these Pharisees and scribes. All those words coming to their fulfillment in this one person,

Jesus Christ. And this generation is about to join the generations of their fathers, but putting their own Messiah to death. That's why building and beautifying tombs, while ignoring divine words of confrontation, that is so offensive to God. It is so hypocritical. This generation is bathed in blood, and they are going to answer for it. Tragic, dreadful word of indictment.

Beloved, how do we apply this? Learn to love people who confront you for your sin. Learn to love people who speak with prophetic voice, who lean into your life with serious conversation and truth. Like the prophets did to the people of their own time, learn to love biblical confrontation. Learn to love having your sin exposed. Not because we glory in our shame. No.

Love actually covers over iniquity and sin. But we want our sins to be identified so that we can repent. So love those who help you to see what remains in your life in sanctification. Learn to love those who love the truth, who want to bring it to bare in your life. They're doing that because they love you. Those who fear the Lord, hating sin, learning to, they're, they're loving



to learn how to walk in the light, walk in the truth, practice love for God, love for neighbor.

These are the ones who oppose this lawyer-like pride, resist it, this pretention of showing honor for God's Word while actually walking in utter disregard to it. Those who fear the Lord, hating sin, loving truth, loving righteousness, they grow, they mature in discernment, they learn to spot this kind of scholarly unbelief. Oh sure, we may lack the sophistication to argue the finer points with any of these highfalutin exegetes and theologians. We can't, we can't stand toe-to-toe with them.

Oh, but we possess a sensitivity granted by the fear of the Lord and the Holy Spirit. We can spot phony pretention whenever it shows up. This unbelief is manifest to us, isn't it? It's like we got a, got a spidey sense that goes off every time we see it. So an evil heart of unbelief obscures and mif, misrepresents the law. It, it, it obscures the law by piling opinion and regulation and rule on top of the pure, holy, good law.

Unbelief hates, persecutes, murders the prophets. Without understanding the law, without a sense of heart that fears the Lord, hears the prophets, this leads inevitably to a third point in our text. Third, quite simply, unbelief rejects the Gospel. Unbelief rejects the Gospel. It obscures the law. It hates the prophetic voice and it a, rejects the Gospel.

Back to the Pharisees, they're uncleanness and impurity in verse 44. Why do they keep spreading this contagion? Why do they keep infecting others with their own defilements? Because their teachers, the lawyers, rejected God's saving Gospel. They've barred the door to salvation, which means they remain impure and unclean and trapped in iniquity. So defilement is all they have to share with other people.

Look at verse 52, "Woe to Lawyers! For you've taken away the key of knowledge. You did not enter yourselves and you hindered those who are entering," or trying to enter, is how you could better inter, better translate that. Instead of the using, using the key that they have, instead of using that key of the knowledge of salvation, instead of using that key to open the

door to salvation, they stick it in the lock, and they break the key off in the lock.

They bar themselves and anyone else from entering into God's kingdom by means of saving truth. And now we come to the cruelty found in unbelief. It is so cruel. The pride of unbelief is not just a matter of distasteful arrogance and hubris that we all can't stand. This is deadly. It is eternally consequential.

Imagine for a moment in your mind's eye there's a fire burning in a high-rise building. Flames roaring. Smoke ascending. People are exiting their offices. They're taking the stairs down to the main floor so they can escape the building. The security guards are down there on the first floor, and they're belts. You know how security guards are, they're belts are filled with keys. Keys all over the place. They hold the key to the front door, which is a very, very important key right now.

Imagine now, the unimaginable. Security guard, he has the key of escape from a burning building, choking smoke. The key to rescue and the fresh air outside. Imagine the guard uses his key to

lock himself in, break the key off in the lock, locking everyone else in, as well. Now they're all there locked together inside of a burning building. No escape. They all die together.

Building comes down on top of them. What derangement, right? What, what a sociopath, what a psychopath! Who would do that? Evidently the scribes would. This is the unprovi, unforgiveable sin of unregenerate biblical scholarship. Unbelieving academics who get paid to interpret Scripture, paid to write articles, paid to publish in journals and write books and be the scholarly opinion at every conference and show and everything else.

They teach in the seminaries. They speak at the conference and seminars. They churn out unbelieving pastors into unsuspecting churches. May God spare us. The lawyers, the scribes, they piled on tradition on top of tradition. They created rules and regulations. They added prescriptions. They built barriers layer after layer after layer of man-made opinion and preference that obscures the plain truth of God's Word from common people.

So enamored were they with their own scholarship. So intoxicated with how complex they could make everything. They failed to understand the point of everything. God has spoken that we may be saved. Have we missed that? The writer to the Hebrews gets the point. Hebrews 1:1 to 3. "Long ago, at many times in many ways, God spoke to us to our fathers by the prophets, but in the last days he has spoken to us by his son, whom he has appointed heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, he upholds the universes by the word of his power. And after," get this, "after making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high." He sat down because he could proclaim, "It is finished."

You do not need a seminary degree to understand the impact of that, to see the joy in that message. That God has spoken that we might know him. That through his son, he came to save us from our sins, which are many. Folks, that's the point. That is the message. That is what the historical record is all about. The law, the prophets, the Gospel. "In this, the love of God was made manifest among us that God sent his only son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that

we've loved God," we haven't. "But that he loved us, sent his son to be the propitiation for our sins."

Propitiation, real big word. It just means satisfaction of wrath. So much wrath piled up for our so many sins. All satisfied. All taken away in Christ. That's about lifting burdens, beloved. That is about lifting burdens, not adding them. That is about understanding the law of God. And understanding how guilty we are. It's about understanding and honoring the prophets, heeding their words, saying, boy, I am guilty. You're right. I'm guilty. That points us to salvation. The only hope of salvation which is in the Gospel of God by faith in the Son of God. That's what it means to use the key of knowledge to open the door of salvation, to open the way of eternal life of God, eternal God with God.

Just a brief postscript on this scene. Look at verses 53 to 54. Jesus went away from there. The scribes and the Pharisees evidently did not repent, but instead they began to "press him hard and provoke him to speak about many things, and they're lying in wait," they're settin' up an ambush, "to catch him in

something he might say." A few minutes ago, it said, looking at verse 49, that expression, the Wisdom of God, I said hold that thought.

Well, now's the time to unpack it just briefly. When Jesus said, "Therefore also the Wisdom of God said," he's not, he's not pointing back to some specific text in the Old Testament. There isn't one that actually makes this exact statement. He's not referring to some unknown ancient book he once read called The Wisdom of God. He didn't read that. This isn't Luke's insertion into Jesus' conversation or even worse, it's not the Christian community, at some time later in the future inserting the wisdom of God back into this speech of Jesus, reading something back into his words.

All those, by the way, are various commentators and their views on this text. I didn't make them up. I mean, talk about pettifoggery. When Jesus personifies the wisdom of God here, he does so, in the spirit of, like Proverbs 8, personifying wisdom speaking, and it speaks prophetically. He speaks as someone who is intimately familiar with the ways of God because he is.

"For," Luke 10:22, "all things have been handed over to me, by my Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father," who the So, "who the Father is except the Son." The omniscience of the father is known by the omniscient son. The omniscient son is known by the omniscient father. He knows his father. He knows his father's ways. He knows his father's wisdom. So when Jesus gives a voice to the wisdom of God, he's talking about the wisdom of God, and the delight God has in his wisdom of subverting the expectations of men.

He's referring to God's pleasure in thwarting human wisdom, in stymieing human power, in accomplishing his eternal decree in a way that is completely contrary to human expectation. So verses 53 and 54, that postscript on this scene, what's that gonna end up with? The death of Jesus Christ. What did God accomplish with the death of Jesus Christ? In spite of all their anger, in spite of their hatred, in spite of their unbelief, he used the wisdom of men, thwarted it, subverted it, and he used it to his ends to accomplish the wisdom of God providing us with salvation.

That's exactly the message of Paul in 1 Corinthians chapter 1. Go ahead and turn there as we close to 1 Corinthians chapter 1. While you're turning there, I'll just mention this growing animosity scribes, Pharisees, all of this accelerated after this encounter. Jesus doesn't sit down with them again in the rest of Luke's Gospel. It's gonna culminate in the crucifixion of Christ. And as I've said, that's the very means used of God in his wisdom to provide the once for all sacrifice for sins. Save his people, Jew and Gentile alike.

Look at chapter 1, 1 Corinthians, verse 18. "For the word," of cross, "of the cross, it is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.' Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom," scribal wisdom, Pharisaic wisdom, any other kind of wisdom, "it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs, Greeks seek wisdom, we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews,

folly to Gentiles, but to show who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men."

Beloved, it is so, so important that we avoid listening to the wisdom of the world and avoid any influence from unbelieving scribes and lawyers and experts who try to obscure and ignore the law of God. Try to reinterpret it. Try to shave off the hard edges for a, for a weak, sensitive, paper-thin skin culture. We've got to reject that. We've got to reject those who reject the prophetic voice. We've got to reject those who turn us away from the only salvation that's found in the Gospel.

If we're to follow Paul's example, resolved, as he says in the next chapter, 1 Corinthians 2:2. "Resolve to know nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified." Listen, we are going to preach law and Gospel. And we're gonna do that with a prophetic intensity and voice. Because people do not understand the solution without understanding the problem. That means we got to



Speak prophetically. We got to speak in penetrating words. We got to confront the actual sins people are actually committing.

Not the sins of somebody else some time ago. Not isms and schisms, we gotta speak about what people are doing right now in their life. Point to their accountability before a holy God. Beloved, we may never, never, never obscure the law. Let us never do that. Let us never be ashamed of it. Let us never hide the law from view with our own opinions. May we always cultivate a heart of reverence and fear of the Lord. May we love biblical pro, prophetic confrontation in our own lives.

May we listen to, heed God's voice. May we take comfort in the Gospel and the Gospel alone. And let us, then, having learned that for ourselves, make use of God's Word to point many lost and dying people to what truly matters. Use the key of knowledge to open the door of salvation to many other people. Salvation in Christ alone, to which all the law and the prophets point.

Bow with me in a word of prayer. Our Father, we thank you so much for a, just the penetrating wisdom of Jesus Christ. What a teacher. What a redeemer. What a Savior we have. We thank you that we're not on the other side of that table sitting from him like a scribe, hardened in our unbelief. We thank you that we are those whom you've made soft. You've made a, you've given us, taken out the heart of stone and given us a heart of flesh, one that's responsive to you. You've given us eyes to see and ears to hear. You've caused us to be born again that we might put our faith in Jesus Christ and trust him and him alone. We listen to the law. We've heard the prophetic voice speaking to us. And drawing the, drawing the bead and putting the crosshairs on our own hearts.

And if we're, were we left there, we'd be crushed in despair. But then you were so gracious to point us to salvation in Christ that we might see him, high and lifted on up on that cross and see that he's dying for me. Dying for those who believe. Thank you so much for the Gospel that saves us. We thank you, for a redeemer who's powerful to save, one whom you accepted by raising him from the dead. We thank you that he lives even now. He sits at your right hand having accomplished our redemption.



Having purchased our reconciliation. May we proclaim his praises even more so now that we've understood these things from Jesus.

In his name we pray, amen.