

Profile of a Pretender

Luke 11:37-54

Introduction

The Clean Cup Dilemma: As we've discussed, I have a bit of a coffee addiction. Coffee is enjoyable, useful, and at this point—let's be honest—habitual. Case in point: the other night I was working late in my office and, out of muscle memory, I grabbed a candle and almost took a sip. My hands just instinctively reach for a coffee cup every few minutes.

- On another occasion, I reached for what looked like my usual mug. It was sitting in its normal spot, looked perfectly fine from the outside—but the inside? It was from before the weekend. And at the bottom appeared a diorama of the *Creature from the Black Lagoon*. Thankfully, I noticed before I took a sip.
- Now here's the thing—we want our cups to look clean on the outside, but what matters most is whether they're clean on the inside. One is about appearance; the other is about reality—what's really going into your body!
- That's exactly the kind of moment Jesus walks into in our passage today. **The Pharisees are worried about unwashed hands, but Jesus sees unwashed hearts.** He didn't come to scrub the outside of the cup. He came to clean the inside. He didn't come just to tweak our behavior—he came to transform our hearts, which is the only way true change happens.
- And in today's passage, we're reminded of something tragic: the people who should've understood this best,¹ end up resisting him most.

Outward appearance can't hide a rebellious heart. Jesus exposes our hypocrisy to offer us real transformation.

- What gets us into this predicament is a failure to see our sin clearly, a desire to control our righteousness, and a trust in our own goodness. The only way out is honesty, surrender, and repentance.
- (1) The Problem, (2) The Profile, (3) The Pushback.

³⁷ While Jesus was speaking, a Pharisee asked him to dine with him, so he went in and reclined at table. ³⁸ The Pharisee was astonished to see that he did not first wash before dinner. ³⁹ And 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. ⁴⁰ You fools! Did not he who made the outside make the inside also? ⁴¹ But give as alms those things that are within, and behold, everything is clean for you. ⁴² "But woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and every herb, and neglect justice and the love of God. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others. ⁴³ Woe to you Pharisees! For you love the best seat in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces. ⁴⁴ Woe to you! For you are like unmarked graves, and people walk over them without knowing it." ⁴⁵ One of the lawyers answered him, "Teacher, in saying these things you insult us also." 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. ⁴⁷ Woe to you!

¹ Religious leaders

For you build the tombs of the prophets whom your fathers killed. ⁴⁸ So you are witnesses and you consent to the deeds of your fathers, for they killed them, and you build their tombs. ⁴⁹ Therefore also the Wisdom of God said, 'I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and persecute,' ⁵⁰ so that the blood of all the prophets, shed from the foundation of the world, may be charged against this generation, ⁵¹ from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who perished between the altar and the sanctuary. Yes, I tell you, it will be required of this generation. ⁵² Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge. You did not enter yourselves, and you hindered those who were entering." ⁵³ As he went away from there, the scribes and the Pharisees began to press him hard and to provoke him to speak about many things, ⁵⁴ lying in wait for him, to catch him in something he might say.²

1. The Problem (vv. 37-41)

Setting the Stage: ³⁷ While Jesus was speaking—warning the people about the danger of opposing him—he's invited to a fellowship meal by a Pharisee. And, perhaps to our surprise, he accepts!

- The Pharisees (along with their frequent companions, the scribes and lawyers)³ are a frequent and controversial cast of characters in the Gospels.⁴

² ³⁷ Ἐν δὲ τῷ λαλῆσαι ἐρωτᾷ αὐτὸν Φαρισαῖος ὅπως ἀριστήσῃ παρ' αὐτῷ· εἰσελθὼν δὲ ἀνέπεσεν. ³⁸ ὁ δὲ Φαρισαῖος ἰδὼν ἐθαύμασεν ὅτι οὐ πρῶτον ἐβαπτίσθη πρὸ τοῦ ἀρίστου. ³⁹ εἶπεν δὲ ὁ κύριος πρὸς αὐτόν, Νῦν ὑμεῖς οἱ Φαρισαῖοι τὸ ἔξωθεν τοῦ ποτηρίου καὶ τοῦ πίνακος καθαρίζετε, τὸ δὲ ἔσωθεν ὑμῶν γέμει ἀρπαγῆς καὶ πονηρίας. ⁴⁰ ἄφρονες, οὐχ ὁ ποιήσας τὸ ἔξωθεν καὶ τὸ ἔσωθεν ἐποίησεν; ⁴¹ πλὴν τὰ ἐνόντα ὁδοῦ ἐλεημοσύνην, καὶ ἰδοὺ πάντα καθαρά ὑμῖν ἐστίν. ⁴² ἀλλὰ οὐαὶ ὑμῖν τοῖς Φαρισαίοις, ὅτι ἀποδεκατοῦτε τὸ ἡδύοσμον καὶ τὸ πῆγανον καὶ πᾶν λάχανον καὶ παρέρχεσθε τὴν κρίσιν καὶ τὴν ἀγάπην τοῦ θεοῦ· ταῦτα δὲ ἔδει ποιῆσαι κάκεῖνα μὴ παρεῖναι. ⁴³ οὐαὶ ὑμῖν τοῖς Φαρισαίοις, ὅτι ἀγαπᾶτε τὴν πρωτοκαθεδρίαν ἐν ταῖς συναγωγαῖς καὶ τοὺς ἀσπασμούς ἐν ταῖς ἀγοραῖς. ⁴⁴ οὐαὶ ὑμῖν, ὅτι ἐστὲ ὡς τὰ μνημεῖα τὰ ἀδολῆ, καὶ οἱ ἄνθρωποι [οἱ] περιπατοῦντες ἐπάνω οὐκ οἶδασιν. ⁴⁵ Ἀποκριθεὶς δὲ τις τῶν νομικῶν λέγει αὐτῷ, Διδάσκαλε, ταῦτα λέγων καὶ ἡμᾶς ὑβρίζεις. ⁴⁶ ὁ δὲ εἶπεν, Καὶ ὑμῖν τοῖς νομικοῖς οὐαὶ, ὅτι φορτίζετε τοὺς ἀνθρώπους φορτία δυσβάστακτα, καὶ αὐτοὶ ἐνὶ τῶν δακτύλων ὑμῶν οὐ προσπαύετε τοῖς φορτίοις. ⁴⁷ οὐαὶ ὑμῖν, ὅτι οἰκοδομεῖτε τὰ μνημεῖα τῶν προφητῶν, οἱ δὲ πατέρες ὑμῶν ἀπέκτειναν αὐτούς. ⁴⁸ ἄρα μάρτυρές ἐστε καὶ συνευδοκεῖτε τοῖς ἔργοις τῶν πατέρων ὑμῶν, ὅτι αὐτοὶ μὲν ἀπέκτειναν αὐτούς, ὑμεῖς δὲ οἰκοδομεῖτε. ⁴⁹ διὰ τοῦτο καὶ ἡ σοφία τοῦ θεοῦ εἶπεν, Ἀποστελῶ εἰς αὐτοὺς προφήτας καὶ ἀποστόλους, καὶ ἐξ αὐτῶν ἀποκτενοῦσιν καὶ διώξουσιν, ⁵⁰ ἵνα ἐκζητηθῇ τὸ αἷμα πάντων τῶν προφητῶν τὸ ἐκκεχυμένον ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου ἀπὸ τῆς γενεᾶς ταύτης, ⁵¹ ἀπὸ αἵματος Ἀβελ ἕως αἵματος Ζαχαρίου τοῦ ἀπολομένου μεταξὺ τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου καὶ τοῦ οἴκου· ναὶ λέγω ὑμῖν, ἐκζητηθήσεται ἀπὸ τῆς γενεᾶς ταύτης. ⁵² οὐαὶ ὑμῖν τοῖς νομικοῖς, ὅτι ἤρατε τὴν κλεῖδα τῆς γνώσεως· αὐτοὶ οὐκ εἰσῆλθατε καὶ τοὺς εἰσερχομένους ἐκωλύσατε. ⁵³ Κάκεῖθεν ἐξεληθόντος αὐτοῦ ἤρξαντο οἱ γραμματεῖς καὶ οἱ Φαρισαῖοι δεινῶς ἐνέχρην καὶ ἀποστοματίζεν αὐτὸν περὶ πλειόνων, ⁵⁴ ἐνεδρεῦοντες αὐτὸν θηρεῦσαι τι ἐκ τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ.

³ Φαρισαῖοι, γραμματεῖς, νομικοί: Lk 5:17, 21; Mk 7:1, 5; Matt 23:2; Ezra 7:6; Lk 11:45-52; Lk 7:30; Matt 22:35

⁴ The Pharisees have **traditionally** been viewed as legalists and hypocrites—emphasizing external conformity to the law while neglecting inner transformation (cf. Matt 23). Patristic and Reformation writers often cast them as archetypes of pride, self-righteousness, and opposition to grace. Some **recent scholarship**, however, has emphasized their concern for ethical living, communal piety, and Torah fidelity within a framework of “covenantal nomism,” wherein one enters the covenant by grace and maintains it through obedience (see E. P. Sanders, Jacob Neusner, Amy-Jill Levine, Paul Sloan, etc.). Jesus’ critiques, in this view, reflect sharp intra-Jewish polemic, not wholesale rejection. **Historically**, the Pharisees emerged in the second century BCE (likely from Hasidean roots), emphasized oral tradition, resisted Hellenization, and eventually became the foundation for Rabbinic Judaism, which codified Jewish law in the Mishnah (c. 200 CE) and later the Talmud.

- They become Jesus' primary **opponents** throughout his earthly ministry⁵—accusing him of breaking biblical commands, undermining religious traditions, and poisoning public opinion out of jealousy for his growing popularity and undeniable authority.
 - That's why this moment is so unexpected. Jesus is enjoying a meal with those who will ultimately scheme to destroy him.
- But we forget—Jesus actually has more in common with the Pharisees than we might think: he cares about holiness, loves Scripture, teaches obedience to God. **They are so close—yet so far.**
- We're surprised when Jesus responds with gentle compassion to tax collectors, prostitutes, and obvious sinners but saves his sharpest critiques for the devoutly religious.
 - In many ways, religious hypocrisy is more dangerous than outright rebellion. **Why?** Because religious hypocrisy fools you into thinking you're right with God when you're not. You're close enough to the truth to be confident but not close enough to be saved. Near misses are the most spiritually dangerous of all.

Occasion for Outrage: ³⁸ The Pharisee was astonished to see that he did not first wash before dinner. The whole confrontation is triggered by what seems like a small thing: **Jesus doesn't wash his hands before dinner.** Now, before the germaphobes panic, this isn't about **hygiene**, it's about **ritual purity**. This is not permission to skip washing your hands after you use the restroom. Jesus wasn't defying the "employees must wash hands before returning to work" sign. You know those signs are for you, not the employees. They are to make you *think* the employees are washing their hands 😊.

- The Pharisee is astonished! He's shocked, even offended! **Why?** Because no self-respecting Jewish religious leader would forego this practice, or so they think.
- **Ritual handwashing** had become a deeply ingrained tradition among the Pharisees.
- There are times in the Hebrew Bible where ceremonial washing happens, but never for daily meals (only for priests when approaching the alter during their tabernacle service).⁶ But by the time of Jesus and clearly in the Rabbinic codes in the years to follow, the practice took on outsized proportions.⁷
 - The Pharisees took limited ceremonial prescriptions for priests and expanded them for all people at every meal. **The thought?** If some washing was good for priests at the temple, then more washing is better for all people at all meals.
 - Every culture tends to create their own little Shibboleths.⁸ I've been in many churches and cultures that have spoken or unspoken tests. **E.g., how you pray, how you dress, musical style, political affiliation, etc.**

⁵ "In the Synoptic Gospels, the Pharisees are the main group of Jews who oppose Jesus throughout his ministry" (E. P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief*, 63). "The Pharisees are Jesus' principal opponents in the Synoptic tradition, especially in Matthew and Luke, where they consistently resist his authority, teachings, and practices" (Evans, *WBC*, 653). "Luke portrays the Pharisees as recurring figures of opposition, more concerned with tradition and status than with responding to Jesus' message" (Bock, *BECNT*, 1126).

⁶ Ex 30:17-21

⁷ *M. Yad.* 1, Josephus, *Jewish War* 2.8.5 §129

⁸ When the Gileadites were fighting the Ephraimites, they used the word shibboleth as a linguistic test to identify fleeing enemies. The Ephraimites couldn't pronounce the "sh" sound and said sibboleth instead (Judg 12:6). We use "Shibboleth" to mean a cultural marker, password, catch phrase, pet doctrine, or practice to separate our tribe from theirs.

- You see, they weren't simply trying to obey the law of God; they went beyond the law of God. In their attempt to increase separation from the world, they created more problems.
 - There's a dangerous desire to *add* rules, as if God's Word isn't enough, that God forgot something, if he knew what we knew he would have been more specific (e.g., drunkenness vs drinking).
- So Jesus fails to participate in their man-made tradition and it sets the table—pun intended—for one of the boldest rebukes of religious hypocrisy in Scripture. Jesus exposes what happens when tradition replaces truth and performance replaces purity.

Rebuke: ³⁹ And 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. ⁴⁰ You fools! Did not he who made the outside make the inside also? His emphatic response⁹ clarifies the issue. They've spent all this time curating external behavior to prove their goodness, but they neglected to deal with the wickedness inside them.

- He uses the illustration I opened with, which would have been familiar from the Torah.¹⁰ What good is a cup that is clean on the outside but filthy on the inside? The same is true of a person. **If the Pharisees took half as much care to purify their hearts as they did their hands, they might actually be clean before God rather than just look clean before men.**

Who Are You Fooling?: You can't divorce your outer behavior from your inner reality. All of you belongs to God (body, mind, and heart). Do you really think you can fool God with some religious performance? That clean hands make up for a rotten heart. Clean hands mean very little if your heart is dirty.

- This is exactly the issue behind the challenge of baptism. We're Baptists—we believe in regenerate church membership, which means we only want to baptize people who have genuinely trusted in Christ.
 - Water baptism is a public proclamation of faith, a step of obedience, and a joyful identification with Christ and his Church. But it's also something more—an outward sign of an inward reality.
 - Only God knows the heart, but we believe it's our responsibility—as pastors and fellow believers—to do everything we can to discern genuine transformation: to look for understanding, repentance, and fruit. Because if you get baptized for religious or superstitious reasons—to impress others, to check a box, to earn a blessing, to feel more spiritual, without a regenerate heart made new by God—you didn't get baptized, you just got wet. A washing on the outside, if God hasn't changed your heart, is just a bath.

The point of all the Old Testament ceremonial laws was to visualize the need and provision of inner holiness—a clean heart made possible by the mercy of God.

- From beginning to end, the Hebrew Bible teaches that God cares more about your heart than your hands, more about the condition of your soul than the appearance of your religion.

⁹ *vŭn űmeĩs*, emphatic, *a la* "as a matter of fact"

¹⁰ Lev 11:33, 15:12

- “These people draw near with their mouth and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me” (Isa 29:13).¹¹
- “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise” (Ps 51:17).¹²
- “I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh” (Ezek 36:25–26).¹³

Warning: The great danger isn’t just wickedness—it’s righteous-looking lostness. It’s being close to the truth without being transformed by it. It’s what one writer has called “Christian atheism”—professing to believe in Christ but living as if he doesn’t exist.¹⁴ What does it look like when you turn external behavior into an end in itself, when you mimic the form of worship without the heart of worship? It looks like the Pharisees and Jewish Lawyers of Luke 11. Jesus condemns them with **six** specific indictments (woes) that end up serving as a **profile of a pretender**.

2. The Profile (vv. 42-52)

(1) Precise in Ritual, Lacking in Love (v. 42) ⁴² “But woe¹⁵ to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and every herb,¹⁶ and neglect justice and the love of God. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others.”¹⁷

- The short summary of this section is that they focus on the minutia of the law but ignore the important things. They are experts on the trivial but ignorant of the essential.
- This picture of tithing is very instructive: they are measuring out the correct percentage of spices to give to God, but are neglecting justice and the love of God.
- **Careful obedience in the small things isn’t bad, it’s just not enough, and it’s backwards.**
- Why is this insufficient? It’s trying to figure out the limits of obedience. How little must I give God vs. how much can I give God.
- What good is it if you recite a prayer to God every day, put money in the offering plate every week, read through the entire Bible every year, if none of it is done out of love?
 - God calls **love** him with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength.¹⁸ If the obedience we show is divorced from love then it is not worship, it’s performance.
- I think it often comes from our need for **control** and **self-justification**. We like to prove our righteousness by showing the receipts.

¹¹ “Wash your heart from evil, O Jerusalem, that you may be saved” (Jer 4:14).

¹² “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me” (Ps 51:10).

¹³ “But give as alms those things that are within, and behold, everything is clean for you” (v. 41)

¹⁴ HT Craig Groeschel, *The Christian Atheist: Believing in God but Living as If He Doesn’t Exist*

¹⁵ ἀλλὰ οὐαὶ introduces series of woes

¹⁶ Cf Matt 23:24

¹⁷ Both John Piper and Tim Keller use these passage to discuss giving and money.

¹⁸ Mk 12:30

- “Presents are the best way to show someone how much you care. It's like this tangible thing that you can point to and say, ‘Hey, man, I love you this many dollars worth’” (Michael Scott).¹⁹
- “You cannot put a price on your child's life. Unless you're my accountant who says the IRS currently values them at \$2,000 a pop.”
- None of us ever masters love (we can only hope to be mastered by God's love). Jesus is warning them of thinking they have ever loved God enough.
- This is no excuse to engage in whatever behavior you want under the guise of “a loving heart.” Love isn't lawless. A loving heart submits *more* completely to the commands of God. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others.
 - God wants our hearts to be so in love with him that they produce behavior that glorifies him.
 - How can you tell if your good behavior comes from a loving heart? Take money, for example:
 - When your heart is right, giving doesn't feel like a burden—it feels like a joy.
 - You don't give out of guilt or obligation. You're not trying to pay God off to leave you alone.
 - You give because you love what God is doing and you want in.
 - You don't miss the money—you're glad to see it go.
 - Your heart is engaged with the causes you give to: you care more, pray more, and get involved.
 - You don't resent the sacrifice—you dream about having more so you can give more.²⁰

First, they measured their mint; second, they're chasing their mentions.

(2) Craving Public Approval, Not God's Applause (v. 43) ⁴³ Woe to you Pharisees! For you love the best seat in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces.²¹

- When love isn't the goal, applause usually is.
- A heart that isn't aimed at God, will aim at the crowd.
- If love for God isn't driving your devotion, approval from others will.
- Self-Assessment: Does your heart delight in receiving honor from others or from God? Do you feel better when you have more power or a higher position? Do you compare yourself against others more than God?
- Humility is a prerequisite for kingdom living and can only be produced by the gospel, which reminds us that our salvation is a gift from God that we did not earn.²²

¹⁹ The Office, Season 2: Christmas Party

²⁰ “Jesus is not saying: Big issues like justice are important and little issues like money are less important. [In fact, Justice] is a money issue... Get your heart right about loving God and caring about how people are treated, and then the details of how you handle your money... will be praiseworthy and not a religious camouflage for selfishness” (Piper).

²¹ Cf Matt 23:6

²² Eph 2:8-9

- “Humility is the beginning of worship” because it takes our eyes off of ourselves and allows us to see Christ (Calvin).
 - Some think you have to have prestige, acclaim, power, and authority to win (i.e., modern politics). That is not the way of Jesus, it’s the way of the world, and it won’t lead to Christ, it will lead to destruction.

When you crave attention more than holiness, you won’t just fool others—you’ll infect them.

(3) Appears Safe, But Spreads Corruption (v. 44) ⁴⁴ Woe to you! For you are like unmarked graves, and people walk over them without knowing it.”²³

- They look harmless, busy being all religious. Quoting Scripture, wearing the right clothes, participating in the right rituals. But that’s exactly what makes them dangerous.
- In Old Testament, touching a grave made you ceremonially unclean²⁴—which is why graves were marked clearly. Jesus says the Pharisees are unmarked graves: their spiritual toxicity is invisible to those around them.
 - They’re like spiritual carbon monoxide—odorless, invisible, deadly. You don’t know it’s there. You just slowly stop breathing. That’s the danger of spiritual leadership without integrity: it doesn’t just fail—it poisons.
- People walk near them, learn from them, follow them—and are corrupted without even realizing it. They don’t just ruin themselves—they quietly drag others down with them. It’s not just hypocrisy, it’s **contagious hypocrisy**.
- They’re not just faking righteousness; they’re multiplying it—making others just as blind, proud, and deceived as they are.
 - “Woe to you... for you travel across sea and land to make a single proselyte, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves” (Matt 23:15).
- We make people what we are! If we are loveless hypocrites, pretending but not believing, we will teach people to be the same.
 - We will even justify our own behavior by getting other people to join in (e.g., prove our music taste is good because others like it, or movies, or politics, or hobbies, etc.).
- How do we avoid this danger? Is my example drawing people closer to Jesus—or just making them more like me?

Pretenders don’t just mislead others by their example—they crush others with expectations they refuse to carry themselves.

(4) Demands Much, Does Little (vv. 45-46) ⁴⁵ One of the lawyers answered him, “Teacher, in saying these things you insult us also.” ⁴⁶ And he said, “Woe to you lawyers also! For you load

²³ Different from Matt 23:27 where the Pharisees are graves that are clean on the outside but foul on the inside. The point being made is different in Luke. Matthew focuses on the internal contradiction: you look clean outside but are filthy inside. Luke focuses on the external consequence: you look safe but you’re spiritually toxic to others.

²⁴ Num 19:6

people with burdens hard to bear, and you yourselves do not touch the burdens with one of your fingers.²⁵

- A new crew enters the conversation: **lawyers**—think biblical scholars and legal interpreters, not courtroom litigators²⁶ (e.g., Torah = law, hence “lawyer”). And one of them takes offense: “Hey, Jesus... I think you’re talking about us too.”²⁷ He’s not wrong. But instead of backing off, Jesus doubles down.²⁸
- They study the Scriptures but **miss the point**.
 - They dissect every piece of the Bible to the point that they can’t see the picture of the Messiah it paints. They read all of the laws as an end in themselves rather than a guide leading us to Christ.
 - The same thing can still happen today—we see it all the time in certain corners of academia, where the Bible is treated like an artifact to be analyzed, not a word to be believed.
- They not only miss the point of the Hebrew Bible (the law), but they weaponize it against others.
- The way they interpret it doesn’t lead to freedom but bondage, it weighs others down. We know their teaching is a **burden** and not a blessing because they themselves are not willing to follow their own advice. Do as I say, not as I do. “For they preach, but do not practice” (Matt 23:3). What a powerfully succinct definition of hypocrisy.
 - Beware of any leader who expects more of you than they’re willing to give themselves. They expect others to rise to a standard they won’t even *try* to meet.
 - There’s a reason why the Bible warns that “not many should become teachers” (Jas 3:1) that those who teach the Bible are under a stricter judgment: “It is the great liability of a teaching ministry: knowing you will likely out-teach your own ability to obey, knowing there will be days when you will not practice what you have preached” (Wilkin). **But there is an eternal difference between fallibility²⁹ and hypocrisy.**
- It’s like a skinny chef, a fat trainer, or a doctor smoking cigarettes. If what you preach is such good news, why is it good news for me and not for you?
 - The problem isn’t the law, it’s the lawyers. “The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul” (Ps 19:7). God gave his Word to lead people to life, not weigh them down.³⁰
 - This does not mean that you can do whatever you want, or that if something is hard or requires discipline or boundaries it is bad, but that the law leads us to Jesus. The law points to Jesus. The law isn’t the end of the story but the trailhead to grace.

²⁵ Cf Matt 23:4

²⁶ What’s the difference between a lawyer and a herd of buffalo? The lawyer charges more.

²⁷ Insult ὑβρίσεις. English word “hubris”?

²⁸ The terms “scribes” and “lawyers” refer to experts in the Mosaic Law—often aligned with the Pharisees, but not synonymous with them. Most lawyers were Pharisees, but not all Pharisees were lawyers. “Lawyer” (νομικός) describes a role, not a party—more akin to a theological scholar or legal academic than a political figure.

²⁹ Alternate wording: being imperfect

³⁰ E.g., legal knots about how far you can walk on the Sabbath or how tight you can tie a rope, etc.

- For me, the question becomes this: In the example I set and the guidance I give, am I pointing people to Jesus—or just piling on more rules? Do my admonitions lead people to life in Christ, or do they crush them under the weight of disqualification?

When you refuse to obey the truth, the next move is to rewrite the story—to excuse your sin by justifying the past.

(5) Rewrite the Past, Repeat Its Sin (vv. 47-51) ⁴⁷ Woe to you! For you build the tombs of the prophets whom your fathers killed. ^{31 48} So you are witnesses and you consent to the deeds of your fathers, for they killed them, and you build their tombs. ⁴⁹ Therefore also the Wisdom of God said, 'I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and persecute,' ⁵⁰ so that the blood of all the prophets, shed from the foundation of the world, may be charged against this generation, ⁵¹ from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who perished between the altar and the sanctuary. Yes, I tell you, it will be required of this generation.

- Jesus now turns the spotlight on their selective memory and spiritual self-deception.
- They build and maintain tombs for the Old Testament prophets. On the surface, this seems like reverence, but Jesus exposes the superficial hypocrisy of it.
- They're saying, "We're different, we would've listened. We wouldn't have done that," all while rejecting the very truth the prophets pointed to.
- Not only would they have rejected the prophets, they're about to complete the rebellion of their ancestors by rejecting the One the prophets pointed to! They decorate the graves of the righteous while plotting the death of the Righteous One himself.
 - Their treatment of Jesus and his messengers will confirm their participation in the rebellion they claim to renounce.
 - Jesus is exposing their self-righteous delusion: they think they're more enlightened than their ancestors, but they're just as guilty—because they're about to kill the greatest prophet of all.
 - **They're not memorializing the prophets, they're putting the final nail in the coffin.**
- They don't see that the same spirit of rebellion lives in them. And instead of repenting, they rewrite the story so they come out looking faithful. **It's easier to claim you would've done better than to do better now.**
 - It's easy to think, knowing what I know now, I would have been on the right side of history (e.g., slavery, racism, holocaust), when the same attitudes underlying some of these ideas not only refuse to go away but are making a comeback!³²
- Delusional hypocrisy like the Pharisees grows in the soil of denial. When you think you're the **exception**—that you could never fall into that kind of sin, that you're different and wouldn't do what they did—you're already halfway there. Start with being honest with

³¹ Cf Matt 23:29-35

³² E.g., Darryl Cooper expressed Holocaust revisionist views on The Joe Rogan Experience (March 2025), downplaying Nazi intent and suggesting Hitler opposed Kristallnacht. Likewise, Corey Mahler and James White publicly debated whether Black Christians are equally capable of sanctification as white Christians (May 2025)—a debate that should never have occurred, as the very premise is inherently racist and unworthy of serious theological discourse.

yourself. Can you admit your own capacity for self-deception and the dangerous temptations that lurk within?

And here's the sobering truth: All this pretending doesn't just hurt you—it hurts others. When your faith is fake, it doesn't just collapse inward—it spreads outward.

(6) Refuses to Enter and Closes the Door (v. 52) ⁵² Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge. You did not enter yourselves, and you hindered those who were entering.”³³

- It's one thing to reject the truth yourself, it's another to keep others from finding it.
- Because these “Bible Scholars” miss Jesus, they hide him from others. They have the Scriptures, the authority, the key of knowledge, but refused to go where it led because they didn't want to admit their own sin, surrender their authority, or submit their lives.
- If they can't do it, no one can (e.g., take my ball home).
 - Jesus is the key to God. Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (Jn 14:6).
 - Jesus is the key to Scripture. He told the Pharisees, “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life” (Jn 5:39-40).
 - The key to Scripture is not geopolitical circumstances or prophetic sudoku. If someone gives you a book that says you can decode prophecy by Russian oil prices, it's better used for lighting a BBQ than biblical interpretation.³⁴
- Bad teachers lead you away from Jesus. Bad teachers make you dependent on them, not God. Bad teachers confuse you rather than enlighten you.
- Is my life teaching the truth of Jesus or blurring it?

The sad ending, when the truth finally confronts them, they don't repent. They dig in, push back, and go on the attack. That's the final reveal of a pretender.

3. The Pushback (vv. 53-54)

⁵³ As he went away from there, the scribes and the Pharisees began to press him hard and to provoke him to speak about many things, ⁵⁴ lying in wait for him, to catch him in something he might say.

- Instead of being pierced by Jesus' words, they were provoked by them. Instead of humbled, they hardened. They didn't repent, they retaliated.
 - press = hostility, antagonism, ill will (ἐνέχρειν)
 - hard = vehemently, fiercely (δυνῶς)
 - provoke = cross-examine, question (ἀποστοματίζειν)
- “The temperature in the room rose as a result of Jesus' accusations” (Bock). They were not interested in learning from Jesus, they wanted to catch him. “The picture is of a trap

³³ Cf Matt 23:13-15

³⁴ E.g., *What in the World is Going On?* (David Jeremiah) 🔥

ready to spring” (Bock). If they can prove Jesus wrong or discredit him, they can justify their own wickedness (at least in their minds).

- That’s what unrepentant hypocrisy does: it closes your ears, hardens your heart, and loads your weapons.
- How you respond to Jesus’ critique reveals your heart. Remember what they heard his harsh words earlier? They were insulted.³⁵ **They weren’t convicted, they were offended.** Their pride was louder than their conscience.

Conclusion

What About Us?: It is good and helpful to see in this passage a profile of a pretender, so you can identify and avoid leaders who would burden you and take you away from Jesus. **But** if all you ever do is notice the hypocrisy of others and never the hypocrisy of your own heart, then you’ll end up just like them.

- Jesus didn’t call out hypocrites because he hated them, but because he wanted them to repent. He **loved** them enough to confront their self deception. The question isn’t just “Are we like them?” The better question is: “Will we listen to Jesus when he points it out?”

Diagnostic Questions:

- In what areas of my life am I focused on spiritual appearance over reality?
- Where am I more interested in proving my righteousness than humbly admitting my need?
- Am I guiding others to Jesus or just to my preferences, opinions, and agenda?
- When God’s Word convicts me, do I respond with repentance and obedience or resistance?

³⁵ Lk 11:45