

## **False Advertising**

### **Luke 11:37-54**

One of the things I find frustrating is false advertising. Several years ago we were looking for furniture for our basement family room and I was trying to find something lightly used on Craigslist at a decent price. One listing had a leather couch and loveseat with recliners on both ends and the pictures looked really good. The description said they were in “like new” condition and it was a decent price, so I thought this could be exactly what we were looking for. The only problem was that it was way up in Trego or Minong or something.

I decided it would be worth the trip at the price it was listed, so I contacted the seller, verified the information and condition of the items and Amy and I took half a day off to go up and look at it, expecting we would likely buy it. But after making the long drive and looking at the furniture, we were completely disappointed and very frustrated. When I sat down on both the couch and the loveseat I sank down way farther than I should have and I could tell that the springs were broken in over half of the seating areas and 3 out of the 4 armrests were broken and wobbling back and forth. The leather still looked good, but everything else was like people had been doing body slams on the furniture. I didn’t say anything, but I was very annoyed and would never believe another listing that came from them.

False advertising is very and turns people away. But false advertising is a big part of what people do every day, only it’s not with furniture and other items we list for sale, it’s for what we make people believe about ourselves. It’s almost comical sometimes the way people portray themselves on social media – the perfect picture that has everything the way we want it and want people to see: perfect hair, perfect lighting, and the perfect pose that makes us look thinner, or stronger, or prettier than we actually are. Every once in a while I come across the profile of someone I know and I can’t even recognize them – they don’t look like that!

It’s false advertising, and it doesn’t really matter that much on social media, but this morning I want to talk about when it does matter because of the way Satan uses it to be a barrier to the gospel in many people’s lives. The story we’re going to look at today contains one of the strongest rebukes Jesus gives throughout his entire ministry. And it’s a rebuke of some of the most influential spiritual leaders

of his day. There's something he exposes in them that we need to see and turn away from in our lives so that we are not doing what they did and setting up a major barrier for people to climb over to get to Christ.

Last week we saw a confrontation between Jesus and the scribes and Pharisees who were questioning where he got his power from. Some were accusing him of wielding the power of Satan, while others were unsure and wanted him to show some kind of sign from heaven to prove his power came from God. Jesus answered them both and today we'll see that his answer intrigued one of the Pharisees who then invited him to his home.

Read Luke 11:37-41.

*<sup>37</sup> While Jesus was speaking, a Pharisee asked him to dine with him, so he went in and reclined at table. <sup>38</sup> The Pharisee was astonished to see that he did not first wash before dinner. <sup>39</sup> 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. <sup>40</sup> You fools! Did not he who made the outside make the inside also? <sup>41</sup> But give as alms those things that are within, and behold, everything is clean for you.*

Luke says that it was while Jesus was still speaking the Pharisee asked him to dine with him, and Leon Morris points out: *"It is a fair inference that the Pharisee was interested in Jesus' teaching."* This makes me go back to what Jesus was teaching before this and I think the last paragraph we looked at last week ties in here. When Jesus was telling the people who wanted him to prove his power was from God that he wouldn't give them another sign, he said: *"<sup>34</sup> Your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eye is healthy, your whole body is full of light, but when it is bad, your body is full of darkness. <sup>35</sup> Therefore be careful lest the light in you be darkness. <sup>36</sup> If then your whole body is full of light, having no part dark, it will be wholly bright, as when a lamp with its rays gives you light."*

It seems the Pharisee may have been intrigued by this teaching. Perhaps he was one who wanted to see a sign and after hearing this he wanted to know more and invited Jesus into his home. Ironically, and possibly quite intentionally, that particular teaching addressed the core problem with the scribes and Pharisees. In that teaching, Jesus was talking about how vitally important your inner self is. He compares it to how important your eyes are to the rest of your body. If your eyes

are good, you can see the light and know where to go, but if your eyes are bad, you can't see and grope around in the darkness. In the same way, your inner self or your heart affects everything you do. So if there's the light of righteousness inside you, your whole life will be influenced by righteousness. But if the darkness of sin is in you, your life will be influenced by sin.

For the scribes and Pharisees, this teaching exposed exactly what was going on in them, though I don't think they knew it until Jesus went to this guy's house and leveled with them. We need to understand who these guys were in order to understand what Jesus says to them. (Picture) When you think of scribes, think of an occupation – they were basically lawyers. They were experts in the law and could draft legal documents. Every village had at least one scribe. So it's a type of job.

The Pharisees were a particular religious sect, made up of laymen who were tradesmen, landowners, and had money. They were religious, but they were different than priests who served in the temple. They either had non-religious jobs, or they were completely devoted to being a Pharisee. In these ways you can kind of compare them to the Gideons today who aren't pastors, but business owners who formed a unique religious group.

The defining characteristic of Pharisees was that they were zealous for the law. Like the scribes, they were experts in the law, which led to a lot of overlap in the two groups – a lot of scribes became Pharisees, which is why you see them often mentioned together in Scripture. But beyond their zeal for the law, they were known to be zealous for the traditions of their fathers. In their zeal to keep the laws of Scripture, the Pharisees had come up with hundreds of additional laws that acted as a fence to keep them from violating the commands of Scripture. And these laws became even more important than the commands in Scripture, which ironically led them to disobey Scripture in order to obey their own laws. They had added laws for ceremonial washing, for Sabbath, and for many other things and they adhered to these traditions with great zeal. This was what defined them.

But even though they were law keepers on the outside, their hearts were spiritually dead, and they were just as corrupt and sinful as anyone else. They were full of pride, greed, and immorality. They loved to be seen and admired in public for their devotion to God but were worldly and wicked on the inside. They

were poster-children for hypocrisy, but hugely influential on the culture and religion of that day. Many people looked to the Pharisees for spiritual guidance and they were leading them astray. And Jesus HATED it. So when he came and taught the people, much of his teaching was confronting and undoing the destructive influence of the Pharisees.

So this Pharisee invited Jesus into his home and the first thing Luke records is that he was shocked when Jesus didn't wash his hands before lunch – that was one of their traditions and this guy couldn't believe that Jesus didn't follow it. I think Jesus may have done it intentionally so they would all take notice, which they did, and that opened the door for him to confront their hypocrisy. This is the strongest rebuke from Jesus that you'll find in Scripture. He was gracious and merciful to prostitutes and tax collectors, but when it came to the scribes and Pharisees, he was highly confrontational because of what they were doing and hopefully you can see why.

Jesus said: *“Now you Pharisees cleanse the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness. <sup>40</sup> You fools! Did not he who made the outside make the inside also? <sup>41</sup> But give as alms those things that are within, and behold, everything is clean for you.”*

They followed hundreds of rules on the outside, but on the inside they were full of sin. So Jesus reminded them, “God made both the outside and the inside” – in other words, “God doesn't just look at your external adherence to rules; he knows exactly what what's going on inside you and he knows your hypocrisy.” So he tells them they should first offer their hearts to him as an offering and then they would be truly clean.

He continues his rebuke in verse 42...

Read Luke 11:42-44.

*<sup>42</sup> “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. <sup>43</sup> Woe to you Pharisees! For you love the best seat in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces. <sup>44</sup> Woe to you! For you are like unmarked graves, and people walk over them without knowing it.”*

According to Strong's Concordance, "Woe" is an expression of grief or denunciation. Jesus says it repeatedly with every rebuke. Leon Morris points out it's an attitude of regret, not vindictiveness: "Shame on you!" They were going through the meticulous efforts of tithing exactly 10%, even dividing up and tithing their herbs, but they weren't practicing justice and love, which are far more important. They were also soaking in the attention of the people by sitting up front in the synagogue and making public appearances in the marketplace. They loved the attention and praise they received.

Jesus tells them they are like unmarked graves, which were common in Israel, and people would walk over them without even knowing it, which would make them ceremonially unclean – something the Pharisees detested. But what Jesus was saying is that when people came into contact with them, they were making the people unclean.

After this strong rebuke to the Pharisees, one of the scribes, or lawyers who apparently wasn't a Pharisee spoke up, offended that some of the things Jesus said also insulted them – as if he assumed Jesus didn't mean to rebuke them. But Jesus makes it clear they too were guilty of even more...

Read Luke 11:45-52.

*<sup>45</sup> One of the lawyers answered him, "Teacher, in saying these things you insult us also." <sup>46</sup> 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. <sup>47</sup> Woe to you! For you build the tombs of the prophets whom your fathers killed. <sup>48</sup> So you are witnesses and you consent to the deeds of your fathers, for they killed them, and you build their tombs. <sup>49</sup> Therefore also the Wisdom of God said, 'I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and persecute,' <sup>50</sup> so that the blood of all the prophets, shed from the foundation of the world, may be charged against this generation, <sup>51</sup> 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. <sup>52</sup> 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."*

So he follows up three woes to the Pharisees with three more woes to the scribes, or lawyers. The first one is about all the extra laws they came up with and

demanded of the people. There were so many laws it was very burdensome for the people to try to follow them. But Leon Morris points out that there were also many loopholes that lawyers could go through that enabled them to pretty much do whatever they wanted. So Jesus exposed this area of their hypocrisy.

The second woe has to do with their hypocrisy concerning the Old Testament prophets. They were building tombs to honor them and make themselves look good, but they were also, by following in the footsteps and traditions of their fathers, giving consent to the deeds of their fathers who murdered them. It was the same spirit of wickedness inside them that would murder those whom you would then give honor to for your own glory.

Jesus then points out that the guilt for the murder of all the prophets would fall on the lawyers of that generation and I think that's because all the prophets were ultimately revealing God's plan of sending the Messiah, and when they rejected Jesus and murdered him, they would be in effect rejecting all the prophets who were pointing to him and be guilty of all their blood. By killing Jesus they were also guilty of killing all the prophets who tried to tell them who he was.

The final woe is because they were taking away the key of the true knowledge of God from the people because of how they were leading them astray. By claiming to have knowledge and convincing people to believe them, they were actually preventing people from gaining true knowledge.

As you can imagine, the scribes and Pharisees didn't take to kindly to Jesus' harsh rebuke and Luke finishes with a few words about that.

Read Luke 11:53-54.

*<sup>53</sup> 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, <sup>54</sup> lying in wait for him, to catch him in something he might say.*

The scribes and Pharisees were experts in false advertising, making themselves look good on the outside even though they were full of sin and corruption within. And one of the biggest problems with that was that they were leading people away from God. Their influence was creating a major barrier that Jesus was intent on dismantling.

The question we need to ask ourselves is: Am I doing the same thing? One of the biggest barriers I've found for why people aren't interested in Christianity is actually Christians. And it's not those who are truly living out the life of Christ that are the problem, it's those that bear the name of Jesus but live like everyone else. It's false advertising. They grumble and complain, they gossip and slander, they look down on people and condemn others, they fight and argue, they're selfish and mean. They may pride themselves for going to church and believing in God, and obeying the Ten Commandments, and opposing abortion, and standing for traditional marriage, but inside they're full of pride, greed, hatred, sin and darkness and it's easy for people to see. Unbelievers pick up on it all the time and use it to justify their assumption that "Christians are all hypocrites." We build a wall between them and God.

We need to stop pretending. Rather than putting on a spiritual front that doesn't match up with what's going on inside. Jesus calls us to be honest about who we really are – to be sober minded and humble. None of us is going to be perfect on this side of heaven, so let's not pretend we are. Let us seek to grow in godliness, but let's be honest and transparent about where we're at. It's ok to admit our weaknesses and failures and confess our sins to God and others. It's ok to ask for forgiveness and not try to cover it up. God wants us to be real. He wants us to be humble. That opens the door to further growth in our spiritual lives and makes a big difference to those who are watching: "Yeah, they aren't perfect, but they don't pretend to be. They have problems like I do, but they're looking to Jesus to help them."

Let's take some time as we turn to worship to ask God to examine our hearts and show us if there's hypocrisy lurking there. Let's confess that to him and ask him to transform our lives. As much as Jesus hates this sin, there is immediate and full forgiveness at the foot of the cross. Jesus died for hypocrites and he wants us to experience his grace and mercy deep in our hearts so that his love will overflow in us and we will let his light shine through us.