**Hypocrisy Exposed; Love Extolled**

Based on [Luke 14:1-14](http://biblia.com/books/esv/Lk14.1-14)

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Jesus teaches two things in the gospel today. First he demonstrates how love is the fulfillment of the law, by exposing the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and in their Sabbath regulations. Second, he exposes their hypocrisy in their table etiquette. He teaches how in God’s kingdom their table etiquette will be condemned; and the table etiquette of His followers will be rewarded. We will consider these two teachings beginning with the first.

Today in laymen’s terms, a Pharisee is a hypocrite…someone who does not practice what they preach…who puts on a false front of fake righteousness. **Historically though, the Pharisees were a religious sect of Jews who strictly observed the Law of Moses and the Jewish religious traditions surrounding them.** It is important for you to understand something here: that “the law of Moses” and “the human traditions surrounding them” are not the same thing. One comes from God, the other from men. To show you how that is, I’m going to give you some historical background that is essential to understanding Jesus’ teaching. Please listen closely.

Observing Saturday as a day of rest, a Sabbath day wherein no work was to be done is a law of Moses. That means that it was a law given by God to his people through Moses who taught it to them. Moses’ Law is not just human tradition. ***Moses*** Law was ***God’s*** Law. The bible records how the Jews eventually turned away from God’s law given by Moses, and stopped observing the Sabbath and other commandments. They worshiped false gods and idols and so God, punished them by allowing the Babylonians to overtake Jerusalem and lead them away into captivity.

Years later, the Persians conquered the Babylonian Empire and took Jerusalem from them. **And under the rule of Cyrus the Great, the Jews were allowed to return home to Jerusalem and to the worship of God there.** First, they rebuilt the temple that had been destroyed by the Babylonians according to God’s Judgment. Later they rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem that had also been destroyed.

While in their captivity, the Jews learned their lesson. It happened just as the prophets had warned them beforehand. They knew that they were suffering so because God was judging their unfaithfulness to his law, the law of Moses. **So upon their return to Jerusalem, they were determined as God’s people not to fall into unfaithfulness again.** In the days of Ezra and Nehemiah, there was a strict and spiritual return to God’s law. It was their disregard of the law and their taking sin lightly that provoked God’s judgment, and they didn’t want to make that mistake again.

The restoration and reform of the Jews in those days met great success, as the observance of God’s law always does. God was pleased with his people. But the Jews are still sinful men. And what happens soon enough when a drunk man falls off of one side of the horse and tries to get back on, he’ll lose balance through his momentum and fall right off the other side. This is how generations later, in the days of Christ, people like the Pharisees showed up.

They not only wanted to follow the law of God given by Moses, but they began to expand upon it, and make new regulations that God had not given. So when God’s law said, “You must observe Saturday as a day of rest where no work is to be done.” People like the Pharisees and the scribes said, “**Alright, what does God mean by work**?” It’s a fair question, and in answering that and other questions about the mosaic law, they created a body of “traditions” not given by God in scripture, but supposedly based on it. And these traditions supposedly sourced in God’s word, but ultimately made by men became a code of righteous conduct by which you could recognize who was a sinner and who was righteous. The road to hell is paved with good intentions. These human traditions intended to aid in the observance of the law; but they ending up overshadowing God’s law in scripture, supplanting God’s law in scripture, and ultimately, opposing God’s law in scripture.

And so Jesus asks the Pharisees, who were experts in these man-made traditions, about the Sabbath. He says, “**Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?**” Clearly, the Pharisees thought so according to tradition. Elsewhere they accuse Jesus of breaking the Sabbath for doing that very thing. This time they are silent, because they know if they speak, he will use their words against them and expose their hypocrisy. Even without their words he exposes their hypocrisy anyway. The unrepentant heart is not safe when Jesus is around, he will flush out the falsehood. This is how he does it here:

First, Jesus heals a man with dropsy on the spot, opposing their tradition and so forcing their hand. They refuse to comment; which itself exposes their hypocrisy. Then he says “**Which of you Pharisees, having a son or an ox that has fallen into a well on a Sabbath day, will not immediately pull him out?**” They could not answer, because of course it was true. These Pharisees would pull *their own son* out of a well on the Sabbath and not think twice about it. Not only a son, but they would also save an ox, at least *their own* ox, even on the Sabbath and still regard themselves as righteous observers of the law.

Do you see why the word Pharisee has come to mean hypocrisy? It’s not that they were obsessed with the law. **On the contrary, these Pharisees, they were more than willing to break God’s law--or at least their traditions about it--if it was to save someone or something close to them, their own family, their own property.** But when it was a poor and sick stranger, whom they didn’t know or care about, that needed their help, that’s when they used God’s law—(or their loveless interpretation of it)—as a cover up, and an excuse ***not*** to love and ***not*** to help their neighbor. And worse yet, they would call their failure to love their neighbor “obedience to God” and regard it as proof of their own righteousness. They were Hypocrites, because in reality, their use of the law simply a cover of their own sin. Whitewashed tombs, blind guides, wolves in sheep’s clothing. Hypocrites.

Jesus said earlier in Luke’s gospel, “**Beware the leaven of the Pharisees which is hypocrisy. Nothing is covered up that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known**” (Luke 12:1b-2). Jesus already reveals what was hidden in their hearts. *The Pharisees knew* that love is the fulfillment of the law…that’s why they would rescue their own son from a well in a heartbeat. *They knew* that the Sabbath was made to benefit man, not man to benefit the Sabbath…that’s why in an emergency they would work to save their ox or other property from danger. *They knew* these things when it pertained to their own friend, or brother or possessions. **But when it came to others, especially the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind…they pretended that God commanded them to neglect their neighbor.** Snakes and vipers. Hypocrites.

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The Pharisees may have been a historical religious sect now defunct. But they are still around today. **Their leaven is not their own, it is the leaven of sin that continues to corrupt the world. It is the way of life of those who walk in the darkness and it is the struggle that the children of light are continually called to battle in their own hearts.** And here is that leaven in you: ***that you condemn others for the selfishness and pride that you excuse in yourself***. // “**You who abhor idols, do you rob temples**” (Romans 2:22). Yes you do. And even though you who boast in the law dishonor God by breaking the law…forgiveness is yours in Jesus Christ who carried all the blame you heap on others. The leaven of the Pharisees is hypocrisy: the hatred of others for the very same sin that is in ourselves. You did not overcome that sin any more than your neighbor. The only reason it cannot claim you is because Jesus crucified it--feathers and all--so that your record of debt is cancelled before God and you stand before Him justified.

You, who have been given such undeserved forgiveness; do not hesitate to forgive others who have sinned against you. If they have sinned against you, don’t “tear a strip out of them”, neither should you hold your tongue before them and complain about them behind their back. Go to them and rebuke them to their face in all humility and meekness. **If they repent forgive them, readily willingly and without remainder. If they do not repent, be patient with them. You cannot forgive them without repentance, but you do not have to bite back either.** Suffer with them. Love them. They will likely call you names, accuse you of things. The natural sinful immediate reaction to being accused is to accuse back and accuse bigger. Take their abuse while praying earnestly for their restoration. **Don’t let them change the subject to your sin until they have dealt with their own that is before them.** Patiently remind them that their sin remains; but that there is a way of escape…repentance and faith in Jesus Christ…without which you too are condemned. But with which you are justified before God in heaven.

So you see, it ***isn’t*** that the Pharisees were legalists…that “they were just all law, law, law,” until then Jesus comes with the gospel to overrule it. **The point is that they were hypocrites, applying the letter of the law to strangers and enemies, while applying the spirit of the law, which is love to their friends, family and possessions.** It’s not that they did not know forgiveness, it’s that their forgiveness was based on some human tradition, some good-ole boys club, in short…something other than repentance, by which all stand as poor miserable sinners before an all righteous God.

The Pharisees kill others with the law, but apply the gospel to themselves. But God has made us, who are in Christ, sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the spirit gives life. **The letter--that is “the law”--is for sin and sin still needs to be rebuked; but the Spirit—that is “the gospel”---is for righteousness, because repentance needs forgiveness.** The Pharisees are those who divide law and gospel by their heart. Christians divide law and gospel by repentance and faith in the Word of God.

The Spirit of the law is love. Be on your guard because people will use the law of love in this way. They will say that love is what you feel in your heart. So if there are some external rules that go against what you feel in your heart, God wants you to follow your heart. For instance: So there is an external rule that faithful people don’t get divorced, but your heart no longer feels attraction to your spouse, but to someone else. This *counterfeit* of the law of love would teach that you should follow your heart and get a divorce, even if it is against “the written code.” This is the new hypocrisy, which is really more of the old. Because remember, it was the ***Pharisees*** who Jesus condemned for following their heart. Their heart told them to that they could rescue their son from a well on the Sabbath, but that they could not rescue a sick stranger. Following your heart is not love, its lawlessness.

But Jesus said, “I **have not come to abolish the Law, but to fulfill it.**” And he did that by coming down from heaven to our table. He did not sit down in a place of honor, he was not born of a queen, he was not raised in a holy city. **He lived the life of a man because he was a man, a man of sorrows, bearing burdens, his whole life a sacrifice poured out for the sake of his neighbor’s justification before God; poured out into the cup of salvation for the feast he has prepared in his own body and blood.**

And when he comes to our table, we find it is really His table. For all things are his. And to His table, He does not invite the rich; he does not invite worldly dignitaries; he does not invite the proud; in a word..he does not invite the unrepentant who believe they are equal with God. **Instead he invites the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind; in a word he invites you to cast all your anxieties your fears your sins upon him, and in repentance own up to the fact that apart from him you are poor, crippled, lame, blind.**  But through faith, he pours upon you grace upon grace giving you spiritual treasures, spiritual works, and spiritual sight that today, even in this veil of tears under the shadow of death, you follow his example. **You take the lowest table; and you invite the lowly to the feast.** This is because by faith, you have, and you do, and you see all that is Christ’s. For now this is by faith. **And it will remain yours by faith until the last day where you will be repaid in the sight of all creation at the resurrection of the just.**