

THE KEY TO KNOWLEDGE

Luke 11:37-54

Key Verse 11:52

Woe to you experts in the law, because you have taken away the key to knowledge. You yourselves have not entered, and you have hindered those who were entering.

First, "Woe to you Pharisees" (37-44). A Pharisee invited Jesus to eat with him. Jesus graciously accepted his invitation, and went with him. But something unexpected happened. Verse 38 reads: "**But the Pharisee, noticing that Jesus did not wash before the meal, was surprised.**" Jesus did not wash his hands before eating the meal. The Jews always practiced this ritual – it was good for hygiene and it was their religious tradition. From their youth, Jewish children practiced this, washing their hands by pouring water on to their hands three times – its symbolic meaning was to wash away any sin they have collected as they stayed in the world. All the guests, of course, washed their hands before the meal, according to their custom, but Jesus did not at everyone's utter surprise. Usually, when we go to other's house for dinner, we are very careful not to offend anyone there, especially, the host family. So we try to accommodate their unique custom or style. If the family takes off their shoes outside, we too do so, even though we never do it home. Jesus did not need to cause any trouble with this kind of thing – he would simply have washed his hands taking 30 seconds, and everything would have been okay. Why then, did Jesus not wash his hands before the meal? Maybe, he was too hungry, or he forgot about it. But when we check out today's passage, the way Jesus deal with this matter was not a mistake, but he did it intentionally; maybe, he could not tolerate their hypocrisy any longer; or he was really bothered by their bad influence for others. Anyway, Jesus used it as a chance to challenge them. Today's passage is known as "Six Woes." The word, "Woe" means "Warning," indicating that something terrible can happen unless a proper action is taken in regard to the warning. Something terrible would happen unless the Pharisees took Jesus' warning seriously and responded properly. Let's see what kind of warning Jesus issued for them. Look at verses 39 and 40. Let's read these verses together:

³⁹Then the Lord said to him, "Now then, you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness.

⁴⁰You foolish people! Did not the one who made the outside make the inside also?

The Pharisees' problem was that they focused on keeping the rules and regulations; as a result, outwardly, they looked clean. They never messed up with drugs, alcohols or sexual immorality. They never cheated. They were moralistic. While others were living according to their sinful desires, they put

all their fleshly desires under their full control. They were well self-disciplined, very faithful to their duties and responsibilities. Outwardly, they were clean. But, they did not take care of their inner person. Simply, they were clean outwardly, but inwardly, they were unclean in God's eyes, with greed and wickedness. Jesus called them, "**foolish people**" who washed the outside of the cup only, and drank from it. Think about using such a cup for water – clean outside, but dirty inside. In God's eyes, they were simply foolish.

People do many Christian things. They say, "I do this, this and that for God." But if they do not take care of their inner person, they become foolish people, just like a cup or dish that is clean outside, but inside dirty. This was the trap, in which the Pharisees fell. This is the trap we must watch out for. Woe to you if you fall into this trap.

How can we avoid this trap? Look at verse 41. Let's read this verse together:

"But give what is inside the dish to the poor, and everything will be clean for you."

We must give our heart to the poor, meaning, instead of just talking about "I, my, me, and myself," we must be concerned about the poor, those who are in need; we must be concerned about their happiness and wellbeing. When you do this, Jesus says, "**Everything will be clean for you.**" Outwardly, the Pharisees do very well, living a moralistic life, doing their duties faithfully, living as God-worshipers; they are fully dedicated to God, well self-disciplined. Outwardly, nothing to be added. The only thing that is left for them to do is to give their hearts to the poor and live for them - this is how they can be truly clean inside and out before God.

Are you dedicated to God? Are you zealous for God? Then, how can you be really clean in every way possible? Give your heart to the poor and live as shepherds for them! Jesus says, "**Give what is inside the dish to the poor, and everything will be clean for you.**" No more selfish or self-centered life, but the shepherd's life for God's flock. This is what God wants us to do. This is the way we can remove greed and wickedness from us and become clean in everything we do.

Look at verse 42. Let's read this verse together:

⁴²"Woe to you Pharisees, because you give God a tenth of your mint, rue and all other kinds of garden herbs, but you neglect justice and the love of God. You should have practiced the latter without leaving the former undone.

Tithing, one tenth offering is a righteous act. After bringing them into the promised land, God commanded the Israelites to bring one tenth offering to the

temple. With this one tenth offering, the Levites who served God in the temple were provided, and could continue to serve God's work. With this offering, God's church is being supported, and God's kingdom work can continue. With this offering, we really participate in God's kingdom work here on earth. But even this important religious act of tithing does not mean anything if your inner heart is not right. The Pharisees did this tithing meticulously, by bringing one tenth of everything they earned. One tenth of mint, they measured it, and brought it to the temple; one tenth of rue, they measured it, and brought it to the temple. One tenth of salary, they brought it; in doing so, they did not forget about their extra income such as tips. They took great pride in this. It is not easy to do tithing this way. In America, church going people do not do tithing, and only 0.3% of their income they bring as offering, so usually a lot of coins, which they do not value that much. They say, "It is the Old Testament law, and we are free from the law in Jesus." They say so not because they hold onto the grace of Jesus, but because they hold onto the love of money. As a result, many churches are dead, many Christian families are broken, and their children suffer from drugs, violence and diseases. They pay really high price, far more than one tenth.

Compared to modern day church going people, the Pharisees were great in tithing. But Jesus says that still, their meticulous tithing did not mean anything because they neglected to clean their inner heart – justice and the love of God. Jesus says, **"You should have practiced the latter without leaving the former undone."** To Jesus, both tithing, and justice and the love of God are important, and we must do both of them – outwardly, doing our duty toward God in tithing, and inwardly, instead of being proud, pursuing justice and the love of God.

When you do these religious duties such as tithing, or keeping the Sunday worship service, or praying, you are identified as Christians. It is like wearing a uniform. When you see a man with a policeman uniform, you recognize him as a policeman. But there are two kinds of policemen - good policemen and bad policemen. By doing all these duties, you are like a priest, wearing the priestly garments, and thereby, you are identified as priests. But what kind of priests are you? Jesus does not want you to be priests just outwardly alone, but also inwardly, in your real person - holy and righteous, respectable and honorable - simply, Jesus wants us to be real children of God, not just in title alone. This is the reason why we must practice both of them - outwardly, we must do all the righteous acts such as tithing, praying, keeping the Sunday worship service absolutely, thus revealing ourselves as Christians, and we must practice justice and the love of God in our day to day real life, thus revealing ourselves as real children of God at home, at work, at school, and in the church. Jesus gives us a clear direction of how we must live as Christians and what we must do, saying, **"You should have practiced the latter without leaving the former undone."**

Look at verse 43 and 44. Let's read these verses together:

⁴³"Woe to you Pharisees, because you love the most important seats in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces. ⁴⁴"Woe to you, because you are like unmarked graves, which men walk over without knowing it."

The Pharisees loved the most important seats in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces. It meant that they wanted to be recognized and honored as devout people. When we think about this, we can see that fundamentally, they were pursuing their own desire, struggling hard to build their own image in the name of serving God; they were seeking their own dreams and desires in religion; at that time, they could not live for God. Outwardly, they looked righteous, but inwardly, they were full of uncleanness like the graves. Jesus describes them that they were like unmarked graves.

Grave is the symbol of death, and whatever is dead is unclean, and whoever touches what is unclean becomes unclean; so, people avoided graves. The Gentile people were like marked graves - they were known unclean due to their unclean lifestyles, unclean value system and unclean desires and hopes; whoever came to them and had conversation or fellowship with them would become unclean too, being influenced by their perspectives, value system and lifestyle; so, Israel people simply avoided them and had no contact with them. But the Pharisees were like unmarked graves; outwardly, they looked clean and righteous due to their religious and clean life; but inwardly, they were unclean just like the Gentile people; their perspective was unclean; their value system was unclean; their desires and hopes were unclean. But because of their righteous looking life due to keeping the laws and doing many requirements, they looked clean. So, without knowing their true condition, people came to them and had conversation with them, or spent time with them; then, they were all influenced by their views and perspectives and became unclean too. These religiously zealous people were more dangerous than the Gentile people.

This is the trap the Pharisees fell in. When they did not take care of their inner person, but just focused on polishing their outward appearance as devout people, they became like unmarked graves, so poisonous and lethal, making many people unclean due to their words and actions. We must not fall victim to this trap. We must not love the most important seats in the church - we must not pursue positions and titles in serving God; instead, we must pursue God's kingdom and God's name. We must take care of our inner person, repenting our greed and wickedness.

Second, "Woe to you experts in the law" (45-54). One of the experts in the law was there, and said to Jesus, "Teacher, when you say these things, you insult us also." Then, Jesus said to him, **"And you expert in the law, woe to you, because you load people with burdens they can hardly carry, and you**

yourselves will not lift one finger to help them." Jesus was like fire; whoever touched him got burned. It was a meal time; things could have been peaceful. But when Jesus saw how corrupt these seemingly religious leaders were, the dining place became a fierce battle ground, and fire came out of his mouth and burned them. Jesus was untouchable. The experts in the law were scribes in those days; they were given the authority to copy the Bible; they were honored. They were teachers of the law. But now here Jesus pointed out their problem that they were just like policemen imposing the heavy burden of keeping the laws to people, but not practically helping them to keep the laws. They were just enjoying their privilege as the teachers of the law, but not fulfilling their duty. Under their care, people came to know what they should do, but they could not do it due to their weaknesses in sin. Their hearts were turned to things of this world that they could not simply turn to God, and these experts in the law just left them alone. They were Bible teachers, but not shepherds for God's flock.

Their failure as teachers of the law shows us how we must live as shepherds and shepherdesses. We must teach our students the word of God and show them what they should do - they must turn to God and live for God; they must deny their own desires and hopes in this life and live as Jesus' disciples taking up his cross. But showing them this truth is often not enough; many people see it, but are not willing to turn to God in repentance because they love their own life and want to fulfill it. We, as shepherds and shepherdesses, must help them, wrestling with them, challenging them to repent, and praying for them with long patience and teaching them the word of God diligently, so that, eventually, thanks to our service and patience, thanks to our faithful Bible studies and prayer, they may be able to accept God's will upon their lives and turn to God and live for God - thus, we complete our duty as shepherds and shepherdesses for God's flock. Actually, that's how we are here today as God's servants - thanks to our shepherds struggling with us even for years. That's how we must live as shepherds and Bible teachers.

Look at verse 47. **47"Woe to you, because you build tombs for the prophets, and it was your forefathers who killed them."** They thought that, by building the tombs for the prophets, they were showing honor to them. Their idea was, "Had I been in those days, surely I would have accepted the prophets and even become their disciple. I don't understand why our forefathers killed them." "I don't understand why our forefathers rebelled against God and Moses even after experiencing the exodus through the Red Sea." But Jesus said to them, **"Your forefathers killed the prophets and you build their tombs."** He showed them that they were cooperating with their forefathers in rejecting God's prophets - their forefathers killed them, and they built tombs for them - they were acting in collusion to kill them. What a shocking interpretation it was! Why did Jesus have this interpretation? It was because, in their practical life, they were rejecting God's prophet, Jesus Christ. While rejecting the prophet of their own time, Jesus Christ the Son of God, who struggled hard to teach them

the way of God, they tried to show honor to the prophets of the past. It was nonsense. They were following their forefathers' footsteps - rejecting God's prophets sent to them. So he said to them, **"Therefore this generation will be held responsible for the blood of all the prophets that has been shed since the beginning of the world."** Let's read verses 50 and 51 together:

⁵⁰Therefore this generation will be held responsible for the blood of all the prophets that has been shed since the beginning of the world, ⁵¹from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who was killed between the altar and the sanctuary. Yes, I tell you, this generation will be held responsible for it all.

Many people think that the story of Cain and Abel was just a story and that they have no part of it. But Jesus sees differently - many people today, are responsible for the blood of Abel. People casually say that if had they lived in the time of Isaiah, surely, they would have honored him greatly as a servant of God and followed him, but Jesus does not accept that kind of assumption at all; instead, he sees that many of them are actually responsible for his blood. People say that if they were in the time of Jesus, surely, they would follow him as his loyal disciples. But again, Jesus does not accept that kind of assumption at all; he does not accept them as his faithful disciples only because of such words of mouth or such desire; instead, he shows here that actually, many of them are responsible for his blood shed on the cross. Jesus says, **"Yes, I tell you, this generation will be held responsible for it all."** Why? It is because, all these people, while saying such words, practically reject God's prophets of their own time. God sends his servants to tell them what to do and how to live practically; but these people reject all of them and don't live according to God's will and purpose, but keep saying, "If I lived in the past,..." They are just following the footsteps of the Israel people in rejecting God's prophets. They are responsible for the blood of all the prophets. What is important is that today, we accept God's servants sent to us as God's prophets and accept their messages and obey God's will and purpose. People have developed many convenient ways to reject God's prophets as the teachers of the law did. The most popular way is to hide themselves in the crowd at churches - instead of accepting God's prophets sent to them personally and obeying God's will, they simply say that they will go to other church where no one will bother them. One student was touched by God's word, and he could not sleep for three days; but instead of accepting God's will, he said that he had talked with Chuck Smith. So, did he obey God's will? No. All these people are responsible for the blood of Abel, for the blood of Isaiah, for the blood of Jeremiah,... They are the very ones who reject the prophets sent to them. In Jesus' eyes, they are in the same category of people who killed God's prophets.

Look at verse 52. Let's read this verse together:

Woe to you experts in the law, because you have taken away the key to knowledge. You yourselves have not entered, and you have hindered those who were entering.

They were experts in the law, specialists in the Bible. But Jesus said to them, **"You have not entered knowledge."** In our terms, they are Bible scholars, theologians and seminary professors who have written many books about the Bible with Phds in theology; yet, Jesus said to them, **"You have not entered knowledge."** Modern day, theologians and seminary professors actually rarely study the Bible, but they study about the Bible, heavily relying on history and many commentaries. So, they do not know the Bible that much. But unlike modern day Bible scholars, the teachers of the law had no commentary available, except the oral tradition - even Talmud would be made about 200 years later. They really studied the Old Testament; as a result, they came to have keen understanding of the Bible. When someone asks them, **"What is written in the law?"** They would answer, **"Love the Lord your God and love your neighbors."** When they are asked, "Where would the Christ be born?" they would say, **"In Bethlehem in Judea,"** reciting Micah 5:2. They were indeed experts in the law. Yet, Jesus said to them, **"You have not entered knowledge."** So, here, "knowledge" Jesus talks about is not head knowledge of the Bible, not even keen understanding of the Bible, but real knowledge that becomes your own, that shapes up your view, perspectives, your value system and lifestyle, that makes what you are and who you are, that determines what you do and how you live your life; you see it with your own eyes, so you live in that way. Even if the experts in the law had keen understanding of what God was talking about in the Bible, their life remained the same; thus, it was not life-giving. And about this, Jesus said, **"You have not entered knowledge."**

How come they have not entered knowledge, despite their great understanding of the Bible? Jesus said to them, **"Woe to you, because you have taken away the key to knowledge."** They took away the key that would unlock the door to real knowledge, so they failed to enter knowledge, despite their great understanding of the Bible. What is the key that unlocks the door to real knowledge? Isaiah 33:6 reads: **"The LORD will be the sure foundation for your times, a rich store of salvation and wisdom and knowledge; the fear of the LORD is the key to this treasure."** God is a rich store of salvation, wisdom and knowledge. In this store you can find salvation and thereby, you can have a new life, beautiful and meaningful; in this store, you can find wisdom, and you come to know the way of life, how you should live your life and thereby, you will live your life without any regret. In this store, you can have knowledge, true knowledge, and thereby, you will come to know who you are, who God is, and what life is about, and with this knowledge, you will not live in darkness or confusion any longer. God is a rich store for salvation, wisdom and knowledge - all the treasures are there. But when you come to this store, you see that the door is locked. And you need the key. What is the key to

this store, the key that will escort you to the inside of the store and let you enjoy all the treasures - salvation, wisdom and knowledge? God says in Isaiah, **"The fear of the Lord is the key to this treasure."** The fear of God is the key to salvation, wisdom and knowledge in God. Because the teachers of the law approached the Bible without the fear of the Lord, they failed to find this treasure in God; instead, they only build head knowledge of the Bible, and become proud and self-righteous.

Modern day, many people struggle hard to remove this key from Christian life; no matter how evil people are, preachers proclaim God's forgiveness, blessings and peace; people say, "If you say, "I believe in Jesus," you are saved." They have developed the theory, "Once you are saved, you are saved forever." Preachers are so quick to pronounce people's salvation through altar calls, but the statistics shows that within 2 years, 95% of them do not come to church any longer. This altar call was introduced to the Christian community through Charles G. Finney (1792-1875) during the Second Great Awakening movement in America. When he preached, the fear of God seized people that many of them were so troubled that they wept and wept until they were brought to Charles and confessed their sins in repentance and made a decision to turn to God; some of them were literally frozen that others had to carry them home. Most of these people remained true to their faith in Jesus all the days of their life. The same gospel, but when people come to the gospel with the fear of God, they find salvation and their life changes completely - they tap into the treasure store; but those who do not have the fear of God just develop head knowledge and a lot of information about the Bible and God, but not real knowledge, and thereby, despite their knowledge of the Bible, there is no change in their real life. The key to salvation, the key to wisdom and the key to knowledge in Jesus Christ is the fear of God. Those who fear God obey God's command no matter what; those who do not fear God just make excuses conveniently. As Bible teachers, we must avoid the trap of the teachers of the law. Fear God, this is the key to knowledge.

Many people think that they are okay because they have zeal for God or because they work hard for God. But the failures of the Pharisees and the experts in the law show that living for God is more than that. We see why God encouraged Joshua to be careful to obey everything God had commanded him through his servant Moses (Josh 1:7,8). We need to be careful to do everything God has commanded us. Surely, those who fear God will be careful to obey everything God has commanded them, and they are the ones who enjoy all the treasures in Jesus Christ. May God help us that we may take Jesus' warning sincerely and seriously and that none of may fall victim to the trap of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law.

One Word: The Fear Of God Is The Key To Knowledge