

There are two things that I would like for you to put out of your mind... as we begin our study in Luke's Gospel today. The FIRST is a common depiction of Jesus... where He is painted with feminine features... and a wimpy look on His face. Growing up in the church... in the 1960's I saw a lot of pictures like this... on our Sunday School walls... and flannel graph illustrations. (For those who are wondering... "flannel graph" was our Power Point medium...) ... But I had the impression that Jesus was not at all tough – or manly.

The SECOND thing I would like you to put out of your thinking... is a saying (which I am sure most of you have heard.) – "*Gentle Jesus, meek and mild...*"

Of course Jesus was gentle, meek, and mild... when the situation called for Him to be. But this phrase does not serve Him well with today's passage. Neither does religious art (back in the 1960's.)

Pastor... Christian author... and Bible commentator – Kent Hughes - presents this section of Luke (that we are in) as if Jesus was pummeling the religious leaders of His day in a boxing ring. Round one is what we looked at last week... where Jesus landed three power-packed "woes" like punches to the Pharisees.

Last week... we saw Jesus come at them with the force of two left jabs and a thunderous right. ... A left — ***smack!*** ("*You are tightwad tithers... cheap hypocrites.*" ... Another left — ***smack!*** ("*You are puffed-up lovers of places and prominence—vain clerical frauds.*") And then the right — ***pow!*** ("*And to top it off, you are unmarked graves, spiritually diseased, spreading your defilement to all who come your way.*")

These well-aimed spiritual punches left the Pharisees reeling back... weak-kneed and leaning against the ropes. It also left (at least one) of their lawyer friends perplexed and off-balance. ... So today we will see round two – where “One of the experts in the law” steps into the ring against Jesus: ‘*Teacher, when you say these things, you insult us also*’”.

That lawyer stuck his chin way out... leaving it unprotected. He might as well have said, “Hit me!” ... The Lord then delivered three more powerful blows or woes. **Whack!** (“*Here’s one for overloading the people with unbiblical burdens.*”) ... **Whack!** (“*And here’s another for memorializing the dead prophets.*”) ... **Smash!** (“*And this is for depriving my people of the Word.*”)

All six woes were mighty punches... but round two (against the lawyer) was different from the first round (against the pharisees.) This was because though the Pharisees and lawyers were associates... they were different.

The Pharisees were *religionists*... members of a religious party that strictly applied all the interpretations of the Law that the scribes (the well-educated and upper-class experts of the Law) said people must do. You could be a common person without education or upper-class status... and be a pharisee. It simply meant that they believed a certain way... and tried to live in strict adherence to the Law.

But in order to be a scribe... you had to be well-educated and upper-class. The terms “*lawyers*”... “*scribes*”... or “*experts in the Law*” are all interchangeable. They are the same. They were a special combination of professional clergy / lawyer... who built hedges around what God gave to

Moses... by encrusting God's Law with myriads of extra regulations and traditions... which the religionistic pharisees stringently tried to follow.

Jesus' woes to the Pharisees were landed-punches on these hypocritical religious practices... But the woes that fell on the lawyers were even more forceful... because of the way they abused God's Word... and misled the pharisees and others.

James 3:1 (ESV)

¹ Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.

So... we find in round two (today) the divine assessment and judgment upon those who pervert the Word of God. This is a very solemn theme. But... even though Jesus' woes were fiercely aggressive... they were not ONLY damnations. They were also sorrowful groans over the destiny of those who will not heed God's Word. That is what a "woe" is.

Before I read last week's and this week's passages together... I want to tell you what my wife's response was... when I read to her the introduction of today's sermon. (I usually read the sermon to her on Friday night... after I finish writing it. We discuss it and then on Saturday... I go back to the office and make needed changes.) ... I did not get past the introduction before she pointed something out that I had not thought about – before she mentioned it. It wasn't where I was going... but I think it is very significant.

Patti joyfully said – *"Wow! How much we need to see Jesus in this light because so often we pray to a wimpy Jesus - Who may (or may not) be able to answer our prayers... We need to see Him as strong as He really is... whenever we pray..."* Yes! He is very strong – and very compassionate. The woes mean that He felt sorry for their chosen destiny.

Luke 11:37-54

The boxing gloves came off as the religious leaders declared: “*Game on, Jesus! This ain’t over yet!...*”

Now... before we move forward... let me acknowledge an “elephant in the room”... which (perhaps) you’ve noticed. ... Jesus went on the attack. He “poked the bear”... and the bear came alive (which is what we see in the final two verses.) We can collectively point at Jesus and say: “**HE** started it!”

(In other words...) what happened to “*turn the other cheek?*” Shouldn’t Jesus have said: “*Excuse Me... I’m sorry*” ...and then gone over and washed His hands...? (Or simply comply with the tradition in the first place... when He entered the house?) Jesus seems to pick this fight by intentionally ignoring that house’s rules... and then He GOES AFTER THEM... when they (predictably) balk at Him. ... Sinless Jesus is somehow justified for this behavior. ... Are **we** ever to be aggressive (like we see Jesus here)...? How do we know when we are to follow Paul’s advice in Romans 12:18... or... follow this example of Jesus?

Romans 12:18 (ESV)

¹⁸ *If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.*

(You know) Christianity certainly **HAS** had it’s share of “picked fights”... contentions... disputes... and wars... down through the ages. Church splits are common today... as are expressions of aggression and hostility at regular church business meetings. Does the aggressive behavior of Jesus in our passage - justify any of it...?

In order to answer that... we need to take a brief survey of our passage... to see what the conditions were to which Jesus was responding. Do these same (or similar) circumstances exist... in a situation where we might feel incensed at a fellow church member...? If so... then maybe we should. (But I must say... most of the time - there is no resemblance.)

Often... an expressed aggression among believers is because someone's feelings got hurt. ... Somebody's ego was bruised. ... A sense of being valued was withheld from a person or a group.

Without careful examination... the issue might seem to be about serious matter (like an improper belief or a harmful practice) – but the driving factor (most often) primarily has a relational dimension at its core. (“*How dare they disrespect me, like this!*”) ... Jesus didn't have that. ... So what are the circumstances to suggest that we are following Christ's example with aggression? Here is why Jesus picked this fight.

Circumstance #1. The religionists were being OPPRESSIVE with their authority. ... They interpreted the law with thousands of regulations that others had to obey – but they included elaborate loopholes so that THEY did not have to comply. The religionists had especially turned the Sabbath day into something that was a burden and oppressive. God intended it to be a day of rest – not a day of misery and burden.

Circumstance #2. The religionists showed a ONENESS with treachery and injustice. Jesus charged these religionists with the death of God's prophets that were slain by their fathers. These religionists had memorialized by them by building monuments. But they would neither recognize the fact that the prophets were unjustly murdered – nor treat

God's Word through them as though it should be obeyed. Rather than obedience these religionists just built memorials (thinking that would suffice for honoring them.) Your forefathers silenced them by murder... you silence God's Word through them by simply building memorials as if that is very magnanimous – and better than obeying what they taught. You are squelching them every bit as much as your forefathers did. Jesus linked these religionists with the same treachery and injustice of their forefathers.

Circumstance #3. These religionists OPPOSED the spiritual growth of others. Jesus rebuked them for withholding the key of the knowledge of God from the people. They would not enter God's kingdom by faith (AND EVEN WORSE)... they also hindered others from doing the same - standing in their way.

Circumstance #4. (This one comes out more clearly in another incident where Jesus aggressively confronted His opponents.) It is here and in the scene where Jesus made whips... over-turned tables in the Temple... and threw the corrupt money-changers out... saying "You will not turn My Father's House of Prayer into a den of Thieves..." You see... Jesus was zealous for His Father's reputation... which was also the case here in Luke 11.

Whose reputation are you most concerned about – your own(?) or your heavenly Father's(?). This will determine if your anger is a righteous anger or not. If you are (above all) most concerned for God the Father's honor – rather than your own... it is a righteous anger.

So... aggressive confrontation is probably necessary if these circumstances are CLEARLY present. 1) Authority is being abused in order

to oppress others... 2) Treachery and injustice is clearly present... 3) The spiritual growth of others is actively (indisputably - not possibly) being opposed... and 4) You are more concerned for God's reputation than your own. (It isn't a matter of your own ego getting bruised.)

If you have ever used aggressive confrontation without these conditions being present – you were not following the Lord's example.

Jesus' woes to the religionists of His day... echo tellingly down through the corridors of the last twenty centuries. Today we still have in our churches people who want to put man-made traditions on equal footing with Scripture. This is what Jesus was confronting.

BEWARE of any church... pastor... author... or Christian leader who insists that their preferred way of doing ministry... that their regulations... their traditions (which are NOT specifically written about in the Bible) are to be obeyed like Scripture. That is what Jesus lambasted the religionists in today's passage for....

FOLKS! Scripture is our standard. Nothing has equal authority. But this is often ignored. Churches often treat their preferred ways of doing ministry as though it is to be followed – just like it was Scripture. Church tradition and Scripture appear to have equal authority.

Here is something that I believe can be helpful to you. I understand there to be three kinds of churches in Christendom today. Allow me to explain what they are. Any church will fit into one of these three types. But there is only ONE (out of these three) that our passage of Scripture today will affirm.

I'll just describe how each of them treat CONVICTIONS and MINISTRY METHOD. I think every believer ought to use this in determining what church they should be part of.

The first category of churches has **FLEXIBLE** CONVICTIONS... and **FLEXIBLE** MINISTRY METHODS. They are willing to change their beliefs whichever way the winds of society is blowing. Logic tells us this is right... or science indicates that we need to accept such-n-such... Cultural pressure would have us believe this way... so we will declare it as true until the winds change and we see a need to change it again. Convictions that are based on what Scripture says... are useless in our modern day.

They are also flexible with their methods for doing ministry. Hey – whatever works... we will do. We will practically try anything to get people in and feel helped. **FLEXIBLE** CONVICTIONS... (Often man-made or conceived by humans... like what the religionists did and Jesus confronted) and **FLEXIBLE** MINISTRY METHODS. Many liberal churches or mainline denominations today fit under this category.

The second category has **INFLEXIBLE** CONVICTION... and **INFLEXIBLE** METHODS OF MINISTRY. They strive to have and maintain right doctrine. It will never change. (And if it is Biblical... this is good!) Their *convictions* are inflexible. And so are their *methods*. “*This is the way we have always done it... We will not change our ways...*” Tradition and preferred ministry methods are rarely (if ever) evaluated to see if a different way could be more effective. (No. Heaven forbid!) Methods of ministry are as unchangeable as doctrinal belief. Methods are treated as if they are on equal footing with the Bible itself.

These churches are often King James Bible ONLY churches. You had better not walk into one of these churches carrying any other version of the Bible. Another example of what you might find in one of these type of church is that Hymns are only sung in this church... (Well... maybe only a few Bill Gaither choruses are allowed – if they are on the church’s approved list of songs.) ... They might believe that Church services can only be on Sunday mornings at 11:00a.m. (Church at 2:00 in the afternoon – is not church.) There is no way we would ever consider a Saturday evening service – even if it would fit the lifestyle of the community better has great potential for outreach. ... “Conservative” and “Fundamentalist” are two labels that often are applied to these churches.

(You know what?) We have had people leave Living Water because we put tables out at the back of our auditorium to help young families with children... and to help older folks who can sit for an hour better when at a table. But none of that mattered. They told me: “*It is not church when it has tables...*”

We see in our passage today that Christ confronted this same attitude. Jesus accused the scribes — those who taught Jewish tradition beyond (or in place of) the authentic teaching of God’s Law – of wrongdoing!

Category #1. Is **FLEXIBLE** CONVICTIONS... and **FLEXIBLE** MINISTRY METHODS.

Category #2. Is **INFLEXIBLE** CONVICTION... and **INFLEXIBLE** METHODS OF MINISTRY.

Category #3. Is the only one that I think our passage today will support... and it is **INFLEXIBLE** CONVICTION... and **FLEXIBLE** MINISTRY

METHODS. This seeks to keep and maintain Biblical beliefs. (Just like category two... that I just mentioned) this third and final category (also) will not change with the whims or pressures of society. Only a clearer understanding of Biblical truth would change this church's convictions. Convictions are inflexible. BUT... (here) ministry is *flexible*. Traditions and methods (that are not specifically dealt with in Scripture) can change. They are not seen as being on the same level as Scripture. In fact it is a good idea to evaluate methods to see if they are as *effective* as they otherwise might be.

The elders and deacons of Living Water are all on the same page... that our church will be this third category type of church. We have **INFLEXIBLE** CONVICTIONS and **FLEXIBLE** METHODS. ... [P A U S E] ...

Now... I simply cannot leave today's passage without commenting on a very important concept that is brought out in verses 49-51. So let's read those again...

Luke 11:49-51

God will finally express His wrath... after putting up with the murder of many prophets and servants of His... down through the centuries. Jesus prophesies that the generation of religionists to whom He was (at that time) speaking to... would kill God's messengers just as their forefathers had done. Jesus predicted the events that we read in the Book of Acts. Think of what happened to James (the brother of John) and to Peter and how Paul persecuted Christians (before he became one) and then tremendously suffered himself. But Jesus (the greatest Prophet to ever come) was

crucified. And the blood of all God's messengers down through the centuries would be extracted from **this** current generation.

The question is asked, "But was it fair to punish the Jews of Christ's time for the blood that had been unrighteously shed 'since the founding of the world'?"

The biblical answer is that #1. they murdered the ultimate prophet (Jesus) and #2. responsibility increases with the years. ... Every new generation that fails to take to heart the lessons of the preceding generation... is adding to its own guilt and therefore also to the severity of its punishment.

The generation of Jesus saw His amazing miracles... heard His teaching so full of grace and truth... and witnessed how it was backed by the authority of His Father in heaven. They marveled at His wisdom. They followed His sinless life. — **And then they crucified Him!** ... Truly it **was** an evil... adulterous... perverse... and crooked generation.... (like no other)! ... But they were not content to ONLY reject the Son of God... they kept it up and continued it with His followers... persuing them in Israel and throughout the Diaspora. ... No wonder Jesus said that all of the shed blood of the martyrs from Abel to Zacharias ... would be heaped on **that** generation.

So... if it is true that every new generation that fails to take to heart the lessons of the preceding generation... is adding to its own guilt and therefore also to the severity of its punishment... can you even begin to imagine just how much we who live in this generation will be accountable for...?

As we close our passage in Luke today... I ask this: “How can YOU AND I avoid the mistakes of the Pharisees?”

First... *never try to cover wrong **within** by merely cleaning up the **externals** of your life.* Religionists and church attenders down through the centuries have been trying to cover sin... by looking good EXTERNALLY.

Second... *always pay more attention to the inside of your life.* Regularly discern what is going on inside of you – get to the heart. Ask some hard questions about your motives: “Why do I want to do this?”... “How much of what I do is truly for the benefit of others?” ... “Why did I feel the need to stretch the truth just now?”... “Why do I care so much about THAT person’s opinion of me?” “What image am I trying to project? Is it the REAL me?” “Will I be angry if they don’t accept the image I am trying to portray?”

Before we shake an accusatory finger at the religionists of Christ’s day – remember that Phariseism is every bit as strong today – and closer to home than we think!