

# LEADERS BEWARE

LUKE 11:37-54

**Those who find themselves leaders in the Christian community need to constantly examine our hearts.**

## I. WARNINGS TO LEADERS (VS 37-44)

**It's easy for leaders to focus on others' sins while neglecting our own inner lives.**

- A. TRUE PIETY VERSUS OUTWARD PIETY (37-41)
- B. THE LOSS OF PERSPECTIVE (42)
- C. SELF-ABSORBED (43)
- D. FALSE TEACHING (44)

## II. WARNINGS TO TEACHERS (VS 45-54)

**Those of us who teach, disciple, or advise others are always in danger of leading people astray through false teaching.**

- A. TEACHING LEGALISM (45-46)
- B. BLIND ARROGANCE (47-51)
- C. ARROGANT IGNORANCE (52)
- D. ENEMIES OF GOD (53-54)

# Leaders Beware

Luke 11:37-54

Last time we met, Jesus rebuked those who questioned His source of authority and were challenging Him for a sign from heaven to authenticate His ministry. Jesus referred to them as a wicked generation. He said they were blind to what He was doing and teaching because their souls were darkened by evil.

I don't know why, but it seems as if proud people cannot leave well enough alone. A Pharisee in the crowd used this as an occasion to invite Jesus to dinner. The Pharisees and religious teachers felt they too were above the regular people and thought of the crowds as wicked also. We'll see how that works out for them as we study through this morning's passage. The main players who interact with Jesus this morning are the Pharisees and religious experts in the law. In today's religious structure, these would be pastors and lawyers.

A couple in southern California was planning to get married. But on the way to the church, their limo was hit head on by a semi truck and killed instantly. The next thing you know, they were standing in heaven and being processed in by St. Peter. They asked St. Peter if they could be married in heaven. St. Peter hesitated for a moment and then said, "Let me think about it – I'll get back to you on this."

A week passed then a month, then six months but still no St. Peter. Then, after seven long months of waiting, St. Peter came back with a pastor following closely behind. "All right, you can get married now!"

The couple thanked Peter for granting their request. But during the seven months they started to think that a prenuptial agreement should be made. So they asked St. Peter if they could have this second request as well.

St. Peter, in frustration threw up his hands and said, "It took me seven months to find a pastor up here! How long do you think it's going to take me to find a lawyer?"

Jesus is going to turn up the heat on the religious leaders of the day. The conflict level is going to rise very quickly from this point on. As we have studied through the Gospel of Luke, the principles have generally applied to all of us. But this morning's passage and many to follow from this point on are directed at pastors, teachers, and leaders in the church. If we have been a Christian for a long time, we need to let these types of passages speak to us at a deep level. We would be comparable to the Pharisees and teachers of the law. They are the group that appears to be living the most holy lives. And yet they are the group that Jesus reserves His harshest criticisms for. They become His enemies and the ones who become directly responsible for His execution.

The main idea of this morning's text is this. **THOSE WHO FIND THEMSELVES LEADERS IN THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY NEED TO CONSTANTLY EXAMINE OUR HEARTS.** In other words, there is always the temptation to think because we have been Christians for a long time and that we hold leadership positions in the church that we are fine and are better than the culture we live in. It's strange to me that Jesus has the most trouble with the most religious people of the day.

### **WARNINGS TO LEADERS (VS 37-44)**

In verses 37-44 Jesus gives some stern warnings to leaders. The danger for those of us who are Christian leaders is this. **IT'S EASY FOR LEADERS TO FOCUS ON OTHERS' SINS WHILE NEGLECTING OUR OWN INNER LIVES.**

In verses 37 Jesus lays out the difference between true piety and simple outward piety. Luke neatly brackets this passage for us. In verse 37 Jesus went in. In verse 53 Jesus went away. The occasion is this. Jesus just rebuked the people of the day. After He finishes, a Pharisee invited Jesus home for lunch with him. Jesus accepted and went in to eat with him. Why would the Pharisee invite Jesus home with him after Jesus just gave this stinging rebuke? Pharisees also believed they lived in the midst of a wicked culture. In fact the very name Pharisee means one who has separated themselves. The Pharisees were a lot like us who take our Christianity seriously. They prayed regularly, made sure to give a tenth of all they made to the temple, they were careful to obey all the religious rules, they helped the poor, and they studied their Bibles meticulously every day. They focused their lives around worshiping God. So the first option is that they agreed with Jesus that this was a truly wicked culture. They agreed with Jesus that the common person was living in darkness. However, they were either blind to the fact that Jesus included them in His rebuke or they did understand and want to argue their piety with Jesus.

Now take a look at verse 38 because it seems as if Jesus does stuff to purposely get a rise from people. The Pharisees held cleanliness as of primary importance. Not only did they need to remain ceremonially clean but they connected that with physical cleanliness as well. They had very detailed protocols for washing their hands before meals. There is no Old Testament Law concerning these rules. Over time they became an accepted practice that Pharisees equated with God's commands.

Jesus walked in the house, went immediately to the table, sat down and readied Himself to eat. At this point, the Pharisee is surprised. Either he feels he has just caught Jesus sinning and thereby disqualifying Him from being the Promised Messiah, or he is genuinely surprised that Jesus didn't keep with the ceremonial hand washing because he believed Jesus to be an authentic Holy Man. Luke just mentions these things as a matter of fact, but we have already seen that people don't need to say things around Jesus. He knows their thoughts and often answers their questions without them even asking. Shouldn't that have been a clear sign to them Jesus was more than a mere man?

Jesus is a guest in this Pharisee's house. He is eating the guy's food. The Pharisee has not said anything out loud. Jesus now looks across the table and insults the host along with the other guests. Now as we study these couple of verses keep in mind that Jesus is mixing up the metaphor by moving back and forth between the metaphor and reality. For Jesus the outside of the cup and dish represents our outward behavior. The inside represents what's inside of us. Here is Jesus' criticism. Religious people look good on the outside. These Pharisees knew Scripture back and forth. They could quote the Bible and they could find Scriptures that applied to everyday life and situations. They sounded very authoritative. They could argue and defend a point using the Bible. They could pray fancy prayers. They made it a point to let people know they were different from the other people in their culture. They fed the poor, visited the sick, and their lives were driven to live according to the Bible. That sounds a lot like us doesn't it? If we have been Christians for a long time, we should look good on the outside. And those of us who are pastors and leaders ought to be a cut above the normal Christian.

So Jesus granted this to the Pharisees. He said that indeed their outward lives looked good. But then the conversation takes a bad turn. Jesus said that even though they looked good on the outside, their insides were filled with wickedness and greed. Their outsides looked good but their spirits were rotten and decayed. And the Bible is clear that man looks on the outside but God looks on the inside. In other words, to other people these religious leaders looked to be very pious but in reality they were wicked.

I think we understand this don't we? We church people read our Bibles regularly. We give a tenth of our money to church. We pray regularly and volunteer to do church ministry. We quote the Bible and we sound holy. But deep inside something is very wrong. We are proud, arrogant, jealous, filled with lust of all kinds, and really do think we are above the culture in which we live.

Here are a couple of tests for us to check our inner piety. First, if we are more focused on the sins and failures of others than we are on our own spiritual failings, the chances are that we are more outwardly pious than we are inwardly pious. Secondly it seems to me that if we are truly coming before God, we cannot leave that meeting without realizing how spiritually bankrupt we actually are. Thirdly, these realizations should lead us to be extremely gracious with one another's faults. Jesus is serious about our inward piety. That doesn't mean we ignore our outward piety. In other words, we should be reading the Bible, tithing, serving, and pursuing holiness. But these pious actions ought to be the result of our inward pursuit of holiness because of our love for God.

We have also seen an example of the loss of perspective rebuked in verse 42. In other words, people often make their own priorities and then think that Jesus values these priorities. Do you remember when Jesus went to Mary and Martha's house? Martha had her own set of priorities and these priorities were consistent with the culture and the religion of the day. She lost perspective by focusing so much on fulfilling her own priorities that she missed some real quality time with

Jesus. In fact the time she did spend with Jesus she used to accuse Him of not knowing what was right and wrong and further accusing Him of not caring about her. Can you imagine how much we would love to have Pharisees in our church? I'm sure the treasurer would love them. God's command is that we give a tenth of what we make to the church. These Pharisees were so careful that they even made tithed a tenth from their vegetable gardens. For those of you who garden at home, can you imagine setting aside a tenth of the parsley, onions, tomatoes, basil, mint and other things? I don't know how I would even go about figuring out what a tenth of a sprig of parsley would look like. Yet these Pharisees were so intent on doing everything perfectly, that they took time to do this. If all the people in church did this on a regular basis, churches would never be short of money.

Again, they missed what was really important. They were not focused on what should really be the priority in our lives. God ought to be the priority. God is love and God is the One Who judges. God is the One Who sets the priorities and we need to get our perspective in life from Him.

I think we may miss the meaning of a word in verse 42. The word for justice is the same word Jesus used for judgment earlier when He said that the Queen of Sheba and the people of Nineveh would arise at the judgment over the religious leaders of His day. Justice in this case refers to the fact we realize that we will need to stand before God at the judgment and only His love will carry us through. God's desire for us is to love Him and to do things out of love. In this same vein we must realize that we are not the judge.

Many Christians are careful to tithe to the penny but you never feel true grace from them. In fact you get the feeling they are judging you. Listen, again Jesus is not saying that tithing is not necessary. In fact He affirms that it is a command. However, what He is saying is that it ought to be done out of a grateful heart, out of genuine love and gratitude, and be accompanied by the grace and concern we show for others. It's not one or the other. It's both but love must be the foundation.

Next he accused the Pharisees of being self-absorbed in verse 43. They liked to sit in the front rows. They liked people to notice them and recognize them in public. They liked being leaders because they liked the attention they got. In other words, they liked human praise. I think that pastors and leaders have to constantly check ourselves before God. Many of us would have made good actors and enjoyed the spotlight and the applause we would get from the audience. It is a danger that we draw people to ourselves rather than to Jesus. We would quickly deny that there is any confusion in us, but it is something we all need to be diligent about. One day Spurgeon preached an extremely powerful sermon. At the door a lady shook his hand and told him that was perhaps the best sermon she had ever heard. Spurgeon responded, "The devil told me the same thing as I stepped down from the pulpit." It is easy for pastors and leaders to get caught up in our own importance. It is something we must be careful of. Once we start to believe what people are saying about us, the more we start to feel entitled and the easier it becomes to

think the rules don't apply to us. We think we can do anything we want. That's how pastors get caught in having affairs or stealing money. It is really dangerous to think more highly of ourselves than we ought to.

And the other danger we face as leaders is listed in verse 44 as false teaching. I probably need to explain this metaphor Jesus uses. For the Jews, to come in contact with dead bodies or graves made a person ceremonially unclean. If a person touched a dead body or came in contact with a grave, they could not participate in worship until they became ceremonially clean again. It was important for a Hebrew to avoid contact with these things. Therefore it was important that graves were clearly marked. Perhaps that's where we get our custom of marking graves today. Having a grave clearly marked would warn the Hebrew to stay away from the plot of ground because someone was buried there.

Now Jesus tells these religious people they are like unmarked graves. People are becoming contaminated by their association with them unknowingly. Because religious people look good on the outside and because they speak and act with authority, people come to them for advice and for teaching. People are easily led astray and don't even realize they are being led astray. These religious people are like unmarked graves. They are contaminating people without the people even realizing it. Jesus has just warned those of us who are pastors and leaders because **IT'S EASY FOR LEADERS TO FOCUS ON OTHERS' SINS WHILE NEGLECTING OUR OWN INNER LIVES.**

### **WARNINGS TO TEACHERS (VS 45-54)**

In verses 45-54 Jesus goes on to give some serious warnings to teachers. **THOSE OF US WHO TEACH, DISCIPLE, OR ADVISE OTHERS ARE ALWAYS IN DANGER OF LEADING PEOPLE ASTRAY THROUGH FALSE TEACHING.** Remember, Jesus is eating dinner with the religious leaders and teachers of the day. He just gave a good tongue lashing to the leaders but He's not done yet.

In verses 45-46 Jesus criticizes the teachers for teaching legalism. Did you ever people boldly and arrogantly say, "When I get to heaven, I'm going to ask God this or that."? It's the same attitude these religious people take with Jesus. I don't know what your attitude is, but when I get to heaven and even now when I sense God's presence, I will just shut up.

But look at verse 45. The experts in the law said, "Teacher, when you say these things, you insult us also." Duhh! It would have been better for them to just shut up and understand it applied to them as well. But as all religious people like to do, they want to justify themselves. Big mistake! Jesus has not shot all His bullets yet. He has a few more. Again this legalism and hypocrisy comes down to their setting standards and rules for others to live by while at the same time avoiding their own self-reflection on their own sins. And here is the thing about those who teach legalism. Legalists take parts of the Bible that they are in agreement with and then force others to live up to their standards. They make others conform to

their rules while at the same time they avoid looking at the wickedness, pride, and filth within their own souls.

There is also another form of legalism. People who appear to be holy and righteous on the outside may have a war raging on within themselves. And so they project these inner struggles they are having within themselves onto all others around them. They may be setting all sorts of standards on others that they themselves cannot live up to themselves. Look what Jesus has to say to these people, "Woe to you, because you load people down with burdens they can hardly carry, and you yourselves will not lift one finger to help them. It's pretty easy to assume a position of spiritual superiority and then try and control the lives of others. These people's energy would be better spent getting their own lives in order.

This type of spiritual pride leads to blind arrogance in verses 47-51. Like us, the religious leaders and teachers would have liked to compare themselves with the heroes of the Bible. They would want to think of themselves as being of the same character as Moses, Elijah, King David, or one of the other greats. We would like to think of ourselves as a Peter, John, Paul, Barnabas, or some other New Testament hero.

But in this section, Jesus is going to compare them to the wicked kings of the Old Testament and the false prophets who actually tortured and killed God's true Old Testament prophets. As I said at the outset, we leaders, teachers, and long time Christians would do better to identify ourselves with the Pharisees than the Apostles. In the Hebrew Scriptures, we see oftentimes that when Israel went astray, God would raise up a prophet to rebuke them and get them on track. Evil kings would not want God's authentic prophets around because they did not have anything good to say to them. So the evil kings would surround themselves with false prophets who would prophesy good things for them.

True prophets were often rejected by the people, the kings, and oftentimes the priests. If you go back and read the call of Old Testament prophets, you will rarely find them excited to receive God's call. They get the clear idea that when God calls them as prophets, their life is going to go down the toilette quickly. People do not want to hear God's message.

These false prophets start to enjoy their status because people look up to them. People start to believe them and follow them. They become proud and arrogant but in reality they are ignorant. They end up working directly against God. In verses 50-51 I think Jesus is prophesying to them that like the false prophets of the Old Testament, they will turn against God and actually be responsible for the death of Jesus. This group sitting around the table will instigate the people and the Roman government to humiliate, torture, and execute Jesus. Listen to how Jesus put it 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, from 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" (Luke 11:50-51 / NIV).

We may think we are spiritually mature and gifted. We may be able to gather a following around us because we look outwardly pious. We may actually have started to believe we are something. But in the end, we may be living in blind arrogance.

This leads to Jesus' next criticism. These types of people are not only fooling others, they are actually fooling themselves. In verse 52 Jesus describes their state as arrogant ignorance. Not only are they arrogant they are ignorant. With all their religious rules and pious sounding talk, they merely prevent people from coming to Jesus. The reason is that they have not themselves experienced a loving relationship with God. The interesting thing I have noticed over the years is that these people are extremely busy giving advice to people about how to live their lives while at the same time their own lives are a mess. If someone does not have the peace of God in them, how can they teach others about the peace of God? If they have not experienced the grace of God in their lives, how can they demonstrate God's grace to others? Again I think it's worth just listening to how Jesus has phrased this:

"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" (Luke 11:52 / NIV).

False leaders and false teachers are dangerous to the Christian community because as Luke makes clear in verses 53-54, they are enemies of God. Remember what I said about the way Luke arranged his Gospel. As Jesus gets closer and closer geographically to Jerusalem, tensions will rise. He will experience more conflicts and each conflict will be more intense. We can feel the tension building. After lunch, Jesus left. After He left, the Pharisees and the teachers realized they had been slapped. Instead of taking Jesus' words to heart and examining their own souls to see if Jesus was correct, they were filled with anger and hatred. They purposed to use every ounce of energy to prove Jesus wrong and to discredit Him. They would decline every noun and parse every verb that came from Jesus' mouth to see if they could catch Him saying something incorrect. As this conflict increases we will see them move from being angry and trying to test Him, to looking for a way to discredit Him, ultimately to planning to put Him to death.

I would say there is a reason that James the brother of our Lord said this to teachers:

"1Dear brothers and sisters, not many of you should become teachers in the church, for we who teach will be judged by God with greater strictness"  
(James 3:1 / NLT).

Perhaps we leaders and teachers should think about this every time we want to preach, teach, advise, counsel, or lead. It may stroke our egos to be held in high

esteem or have people look up to us, depend on us, or think we are good. But God will hold us accountable for every word we preach, teach, and advise. That ought to be a very sobering thought. Why does James warn us so strongly? **THOSE OF US WHO TEACH, DISCIPLE, OR ADVISE OTHERS ARE ALWAYS IN DANGER OF LEADING PEOPLE ASTRAY THROUGH FALSE TEACHING.**

As I study through these passages and preach them, they force me to look inward constantly to make sure that I have not fooled myself like the religious leaders and teachers of Jesus' day. I'm not that smart and it's not that hard for Satan to fool us and blind us. That's why **THOSE WHO FIND THEMSELVES LEADERS IN THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY NEED TO CONSTANTLY EXAMINE OUR HEARTS.**

Listen to how Samuel Brengle describes authentic godly leadership:

“[Leadership] is not won by promotion but by many prayers and tears. It is attained by confessions of sin, and much heart searching and humbling before God; by self-surrender, a courageous sacrifice of every idol, a bold, deathless, uncompromising and uncomplaining embracing of the cross, and by an eternal, unfaltering looking unto Jesus crucified.”

That is the attitude those who find themselves church leaders and teachers must adopt if we want to stay on track.