

Study Guide



Woe to Religion

Luke 11:37-54

Main Idea

Religion is opposed to and opposite from the gospel.

Overview

I. Woe to Religion for It Causes You to be Zealous about the Wrong Things (v. 42)

- Being zealous in of itself is not bad, but you can be zealous about the things of God and not God himself
- The Pharisees were so focused on following a religious system, they neglected fulfilling the greatest command
- There was duty, but no devotion
- The gospel causes you to be zealous about the right thing, God, because when the truth of the gospel grips your heart you'll find yourself joyfully serving God and others because God has loved you

II. Woe to Religion for it Causes You to Seek Positions of Glory (v. 43)

- The Pharisees liked to be found in those places that made them look important, and hear others tell them how important and good they were
- This is what religion does because your position before God in heaven is based on your performance on earth, so you have strive to make yourself look good
- The gospel frees you to rest in God, the Person of Glory – if you have His approval in Christ, then your identity is not based on the approval of others

III. Woe to Religion for it Leaves You Spiritually Dead (v. 44)

- To the Pharisees there was probably nothing more unclean than a grave
- Yet Jesus looks at them and says, “You are just like a grave...unclean and dead”
- Religion does nothing to solve our greatest need; apart from Christ, we are like the Pharisees, like a grave; we are spiritually dead
- The gospel brings spiritual life, true, eternal life (Col. 2:11-15; Ephesians 2:1-4)
- Only life from death could meet our need – not religion, not tradition, not moral exertion – God offers us life, new life, eternal life in Christ Jesus!

IV. Woe to Religion for it Causes You to Burden Others (v. 46)

- The religious leaders interpreted the law to break down others, but used their expertise to bend it for themselves - it was a classic case of “Do what I say, not what I do because I’m better than you.”
- Why would they do this? Because they have to look good! That’s what sits at the heart of religion – you look good if others look bad
- The gospel offers rest for all who seek freedom from the crushing legalistic burden and guilt of trying to earn salvation by good works (Mt. 11:29-30)

V. Woe to Religion for it Causes You to Compare Self-Righteously (v. 47-48)

- The religious leaders thought themselves morally better and spiritually above their ancestors, and because they were so much better they would not have joined the forefathers in murdering the prophets (cf. Mt. 23:30)
- But Jesus is saying, “Your building of these tombs does not show your superiority, it’s a symbol of your self-righteousness.”
- The gospel calls you not to look back and around in self-righteousness but up to Christ in repentance

VI. Woe to Religion for it Causes You to Reject Jesus (v. 52)

- The very ones who should have taught God’s word and the knowledge of the Old Testament with their “key” have rejected the door that key opens
- The Old Testament, just like the New, swings wide open and points to Jesus and the salvation to be found in him
- Not only do the religious leaders refuse to accept Scripture’s teaching and be saved, but their distorted interpretations keep others from truly knowing God
- Jesus and religion are not compatible; they’re opposed to and opposites from one another; religion causes you to reject Jesus.
- Religion puts self at the center gets in the way of salvation, but the gospel puts Christ at the center and opens up the way to salvation.

Good News: Jesus does not just offer “Woes” to condemn us but offers up his righteous life to save us!

Questions

Discussion Starter: *Why is do we so often read Scripture and want to put ourselves into the story as the hero?*

1. Read Luke 11:37-54.
2. What do verses 39-41 tell us about the problem with religion? What’s the remedy?
3. In verse 42, we see the Pharisees are very zealous, but about the wrong thing. How does religion make you zealous about the wrong things? How does this contrast with the gospel?
4. In verse 43, we see that the Pharisees loved to positions that made them look good. Why does religion make you act this way? How does this contrast with the gospel?
5. In verse 44, we see that Jesus calls the Pharisees unmarked graves. What does he mean by this? What does this tell us about the danger of religion? How does this contrast with the gospel?
6. In verse 46, we see that the Pharisees burden others. How are they doing this and why are they doing it? How does this contrast with the gospel?
7. In verses 47-48, the Scribes say they would have not killed the prophets like their forefathers (cf. Mt. 23:30). Yet what does Jesus say about them? Why does religion have the Scribes act this way? How does this contrast with the gospel?
8. In verse 52, what does Jesus condemn the Scribes for? What does this tell you about the danger of religion? How does this contrast with the gospel?

Accountability Question: *Where are you acting like a Pharisee?*