

# JESUS ON OFFENSE

Luke 11:37-54  
Yeshua §110

For most of my life I've been taught that Jesus was critical of the Mosaic Law. That the message of the New Testament is Law versus Grace.

Through our Yeshua series I've come to realize I was mistaught and perhaps have not taught correctly the relationship between God's grace and God's law.

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Far from being critical of the Mosaic Law, Jesus honored the Law of Moses and taught it was the key to kingdom life. Jesus was not critical of the Mosaic Law, but the Oral Law. We see this in Luke 11:37-54.

## THE SETUP (LUKE 11:37-38)

**37 While Jesus was speaking, a Pharisee asked him to dine with him, so he went in and reclined at table. 38 The Pharisee was astonished to see that he did not first wash before dinner.**

This was a setup to catch Jesus violating the Oral Law<sup>1</sup>. This wasn't about hygiene. This wasn't about breaking the Mosaic Law. It was about the Oral Law. The Oral Law required a ceremonial washing of hands before eating bread. The Mosaic Law did not.

The Oral Law contains thousands of man-made laws. The development of the Oral Law corresponds to the development of Pharisaism. In 723BC the ten tribes of the Northern Kingdom of Israel were conquered and deported out of the Promised Land by the Assyrians. This was divine punishment for their idolatry and disregard for the Mosaic Covenant and Mosaic Law. In 586BC the same fate befell the southern kingdom of Judah for the same reasons. In 586BC the Babylonians conquered and deported the citizens of the Kingdom of Judah. The Exile lasted 70 years after which Jews began to return to the land. This is when the Oral Law began to develop as a deterrent against violating the Mosaic Law. It was a "fence" around the 613 divinely revealed commands of the Mosaic Law.

<sup>1</sup> Contained in the Mishnah. The Oral Law is also referred to as the "tradition of the elders" in the Gospels.

Over time, however, the Pharisees elevated the Oral Law to equal or greater divine authority than the Mosaic Law. Obedience to the thousands of additional laws was a practical impossibility. The Oral Law completely misrepresented God the Father and prevented His people from enjoying a personal relationship with Him. The Pharisees assumed that when the Messiah came, He would affirm the Oral Law and Pharisaism. But Jesus rejected the Oral Law and taught that only the 613 commandments of the Mosaic Law were binding. By repudiating the Oral Law, Jesus repudiated Pharisaism.

In spite of all the prophecies Jesus fulfilled, in spite of all the miracles Jesus performed, in spite of Jesus' authoritative teaching, in spite of Jesus' righteous character, the Pharisees rejected Jesus of Nazareth as the promised Messiah because Jesus rejected the Oral Law and Pharisaism.

In response to His host's disapproval, Jesus rebukes the Pharisees.

### **JESUS REBUKES THE PHARISEES (LUKE 11:39-44)**

39 And the Lord said to him, "Now you Pharisees cleanse the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness. 40 You fools! Did not he who made the outside make the inside also? 41 But give as alms those things that are within, and behold, everything is clean for you.

First, Jesus rebukes the Pharisees for their external righteousness. They appear to keep the Law, attending synagogue, giving alms to the poor, attending the Feasts in Jerusalem. But in their inner man, their character, they are full of greed and wickedness. If caught on a hot mic, they would be the ones heard swearing, telling a dirty story. They are fools living as if God cares more about their image than their integrity.

In verses 42-44 Jesus pronounces three woes on the Pharisees.

42 "But woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and every herb, and neglect justice and the love of God. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others. 43 Woe to you Pharisees! For you love the best seat in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces. 44 Woe to you! For you are like unmarked graves, and people walk over them without knowing it."

Jesus denounces the Pharisees:

Because they prioritize the least important part of the Law while ignoring the most important.

Because they seek their own glory.

Because they spiritually defile people who follow them.

Among the other guests at the dinner was at least one lawyer<sup>2</sup>. Lawyers were a subgroup of the Pharisees. Lawyers were the intellectual scholars of Pharisaism. This particular lawyer reacted defensively to Jesus' rebuke of the Pharisees.

### JESUS REBUKES THE LAWYERS (LUKE 11:45-52)

45 One of the lawyers answered him, "Teacher, in saying these things you insult us also." 46 And he said, "Woe to you lawyers also! For you load people with burdens hard to bear, and you yourselves do not touch the burdens with one of your fingers. 47 Woe to you! For you build the tombs of the prophets whom your fathers killed. 48 So you are witnesses and you consent to the deeds of your fathers, for they killed them, and you build their tombs. 49 Therefore also the Wisdom of God said, 'I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and persecute,' 50 so that the blood of all the prophets, shed from the foundation of the world, may be charged against this generation, 51 from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who perished between the altar and the sanctuary. Yes, I tell you, it will be required of this generation. 52 Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge. You did not enter yourselves, and you hindered those who were entering."

Jesus denounces lawyers with three woes:

First, they enslave the people with the impossible burden of keeping the Oral Law not required by God.

Second, they rejected God's prophets. The prophecies of the prophets were for the purpose of identifying Messiah when He comes.<sup>3</sup> By rejecting the prophets, the lawyers prevented that generation from seeing clearly Jesus fulfilled the

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<sup>2</sup> 3544. νομικός *nomikós*; fem. *nomikḗ*, neut. *nomikón*, adj. from *nómos* (3551), law. Pertaining to the law, a matter of law; subst. one skilled in the law, a lawyer. Lawyers appear together with the Pharisees in Luke 7:30 and 14:3. Apparently, they were from among the Pharisees (Matt. 22:35) and with the scribes (Mark 12:28; Luke 10:25; 11:45, 46, 52) and were experts in the Mosaic law.

Zodhiates, Spiros. *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*. Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000.

<sup>3</sup> Messiah will be born of a virgin, in the town of Bethlehem, descended from the line of King David etc.

prophecies of the prophets. For this reason, their generation will be charged with the blood of all the prophets. The mention of Abel (Gen. 4:8; Heb. 11:4) to Zechariah (2 Chron. 24:20-22) may be a Jewish saying referring to the history of martyrs recorded in the Old Testament. Abel was the first recorded martyr and Zechariah the last.

Finally, Jesus denounces lawyers for taking away the key of knowledge. The lawyers did this by the labyrinth of laws contained in the Oral Law based on convoluted systems of logic<sup>4</sup>. They prevented people from simply reading and applying the Mosaic Law according to a normal reading of the text.

By the time Jesus finished, the Pharisees and scribes were livid.

### SCRIBES AND PHARISEES LOSE IT (LUKE 11:53-54)

53 As he went away from there, the scribes and the Pharisees began to press him hard and to provoke him to speak about many things, 54 lying in wait for him, to catch him in something he might say.

The conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees was over the Oral Law and their hypocritical, external righteousness. Jesus honored the Mosaic Law and called the Jews to reject the Oral Law and once again walk with God according to the Mosaic Law.

Consider Matthew 5:17-20:

#### **MATTHEW 5:17-20 (ESV)**

17 “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. 18 For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. 19 Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called

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<sup>4</sup> This example is one paragraph of many dealing with hand washing:

*Hands become unclean and are made clean as far as the joint. How so? If he poured the first water over the hands as far as the joint and poured the second water over the hands beyond the joint and the latter flowed back to the hands, the hands are clean. If he poured the first and the second water over the hands beyond the joint and they flowed back to the hands, the hands remain unclean. If he poured the first water over one of his hands and then changed his mind and poured the second water over both his hands, they are unclean. If he poured the first water over both his hands and then changed his mind and poured the second water over one of his hands, his one hand becomes clean. If he poured water over one of his hands and rubbed it on the other hand it remains unclean. If he rubbed it on his head or on the wall it is clean. Water may be poured over the hands of four or five persons, each hand being by the side of the other, or being one above the other, provided that the hands are held loosely so that the water flows between them.*

Mishnah, Yadayim, 2.3

great in the kingdom of heaven. 20 For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

This teaching is directed to the disciples (Matt. 5:1-2) who are born-again believers. Far from attacking the Law of Moses, Jesus affirms both the Law of Moses and the writings of the Prophets.

What is Jesus teaching the disciples in verse 20? The degree to which a person obeys the Law of Moses is the measure of one's righteousness. In our passage today, Jesus rebuked the scribes and Pharisees for practicing external righteousness which is no righteousness at all. If the disciples want to enter the kingdom of heaven, their righteousness must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees. The righteousness of the disciples must be an ethical righteousness that is internal and sincere if they are to enter the kingdom of heaven. What follows in the Sermon on the Mount is "the righteousness that exceeds"; it is the ethical righteousness that is internal and sincere. For instance:

***MATTHEW 5:21-22 (ESV)***

21 "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' 22 But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire.

And again:

***MATTHEW 7:1-5 (ESV)***

1 "Judge not, that you be not judged. 2 For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. 3 Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? 4 Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye? 5 You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.

Far from criticizing the Law of Moses, Jesus is teaching His disciples that obedience to the Law of Moses is the means of experiencing kingdom life now. "Enter the kingdom of heaven" does not mean "go to heaven when you die". The disciples are already saved by faith in Jesus (John 3:16). To "enter the kingdom of

heaven” means to experience God’s kingdom here and now by living according to its standards and principles.

This principle applies to us. We are not under the Law of Moses (Heb. 7:12). We are under the Law of Christ (1 Cor. 9:21; Gal. 6:2). By obedience to the Law of Christ we experience God’s kingdom here and now and we secure our inheritance to reign with Christ in the Messianic Kingdom. Failure to obey the Law of Christ results in a wasted, fruitless life and loss of our inheritance to reign with Christ.

Think about Jesus’ appeal to His men found in Matthew 7:13-14:

***MATTHEW 7:13-14 (ESV)***

13 “Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many.

14 For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.

One path is named “life” and it is entered by a “narrow gate”. What is the “narrow gate”? Obedience to the Law of Moses. What is the path of “life”? Kingdom life now and our inheritance to reign with Christ in the Messianic Kingdom.

The right understanding of Law and Grace is this:

- We are justified by grace through faith in the blood sacrifice, death and resurrection of Jesus.
- We are sanctified and made fit to reign with Jesus in the Kingdom by obedience to His Law contained in the commands of the New Testament.

Have you put your faith in Jesus to be reconciled to God?

Are you obeying the Law of Christ contained in the commands of the New Testament?