

Clean On The Inside

The element of “trust” is one of the most important, and most needful attributes of any relationship that we find ourselves involved within. And that is especially so when it comes to matters of the “church”, this Christian religion that we hold so dear. And that “trust” must begin with the leadership, the church leaders.

And that is made so very clear to us all throughout these scriptures. In Titus chapter 1, we are told that a Church Leader must be,

above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, ⁸ but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. ⁹ He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it. (Titus 1:7-9)

In these next several verses of scripture in the Book of Luke chapter 11 that we'll study over the coming weeks, we find that the Lord Jesus is addressing this matter of trustworthiness at great length with some of the church leaders of His day. And as we'll see, His words were not words of praise, but were words of rebuke and reproof.

And this prompts a question for us about the church leaders of our own day. And may I ask . . . how trustworthy are the words, the teachings, and the behaviors of your and my favorite preachers, especially those that we frequently turn to on our radio or television set or our favorite internet websites. Do their words and their behaviors match up to their preaching. And especially, do their words and their behaviors match up to these instructions given here in the Book of Titus.

And very importantly, what about our own church? What about my words and my behaviors? As you listen to the words that I read from these scriptures and the things I say about them, and the behaviors that you see in me, are those things consistent with how you believe the Lord Jesus would have me to be. How truly trustworthy am I?

And again, that is the consideration that's being presented to us in these passages of scripture that we will study about over the coming weeks.

Here in these words, we'll see that the Lord Jesus never tried to avoid such matters and such questions as those. He actually welcomed them as He went about preaching and teaching in the towns and villages of Israel. It was in those circumstances that the Jewish leaders, the Scribes, and the Pharisees would try to engage Jesus in conversation, and that would be His special opportunities.

One thing seemed always to be clear, not many of those Jewish leaders that Jesus encountered believed Him to be the Person He was claiming to be, the Messiah, the Son of God. And that made most every encounter to be adversarial.

But Jesus had a very special Godly attribute that those Jewish leaders didn't know about. He was always aware of what they were thinking, every thought. And not only their thoughts, but also their motives.

And so, in this passage of scripture that we'll study today, as a Pharisee interrupted Jesus and asked Him to come and have dinner with him, Jesus was under no misconception as to the man's motives. Jesus knew that while the man might be simply curious about Him, at the heart of the man was deception. But Jesus accepted the man's invitation anyway.

I confess to you that I would have been very reluctant to go into that man's home. To me, it would have been like me going on to a television program like the "View", stepping into a den of lions that wanted to devour me.

But Jesus had no such hesitance. He was far more intelligent and far more in command of His emotions and of His Wisdom to be fearful of a meagerly Pharisee. And so, Jesus agreed to dine with this man.

And also at my reading of these words of our passage, I first wondered "why" Jesus would agree to visit with this man. But I was quickly reminded that this is the way of our Lord. He gives His truth to every person, whether they be good or evil, so that all men and women have a moment of choice and they will then be without excuse. If their hearts receive Him, then they will be saved. If their hearts have evil intents, then they will have at least been warned of the eternal dangers to their souls.

And so, the Lord Jesus agreed to dine with this man. Listen to these words of our passage in Luke chapter 11, beginning in verse 37.

³⁷And as He spoke, a certain Pharisee asked Him to dine with him. So He went in and sat down to eat. ³⁸When the Pharisee saw *it*, he marveled that He had not first washed before dinner. ³⁹Then the Lord said to him, "Now you Pharisees make the outside of the cup and dish clean, but your inward part is full of greed and wickedness. ⁴⁰Foolish ones! Did not He who made the outside make the inside also? ⁴¹But rather give alms of such things as you have; then indeed all things are clean to you.(Luke 11:37-41)

It's a curious thing, the manner in which Jesus engaged all the many different people that He encountered along His way. With some, He was gentle and encouraging, and especially so with those who seemed genuinely not to comprehend the wretchedness of their sinful state . . . the woman at the well, the prostitute who was being condemned by the church leaders, and also especially so, His disciples as He taught and rebuked them.

But Jesus did not often extend that same gentleness to the religious leaders, those scribes and Pharisees whose life-pursuit it was supposed to be to study, to learn and to teach the sacred Laws of God to their congregations, men who seemed willing to engage their minds in the deeper things of God, but not so their hearts.

With those men, it seemed that Jesus addressed their behaviors more directly and with stronger rebukes than He did with most of the other people.

Here, even as a guest in the house of one of those religious leaders, Jesus cut straight to the point and said to the Pharisee, (verse 39)

³⁹ . . . "Now you Pharisees make the outside of the cup and dish clean, but your inward part is full of greed and wickedness. ⁴⁰Foolish ones! Did not He who made the outside make the inside also? (Luke 11:39-40)

I wonder if those Pharisees were able to comprehend this simple analogy that Jesus was using, that He was speaking about their soul and their spirit.

Also on a similar occasion given to us in Matthew chapter 23, Jesus was even stronger in His rebukes calling the Scribes and Pharisees "whitewashed tombs", clean on the outside, but dead on the inside.

Also, in the Book of Matthew, chapter 23, when Jesus was speaking to a crowd of people about those Jewish leaders, He warned the people to use great care as they listened to and followed the instructions that their Jewish leaders would give. There, Jesus said,

¹ . . . to the multitudes and to His disciples, ² . . . “The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat. ³Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do. (Matthew 23:1-3)

This instruction from the Lord Jesus reminds me of an old adage about “saying and not doing”. And that is what Jesus was instructing His disciples regarding the Scribes and the Pharisees. Jesus was saying that yes, “Listen to and obey the words of the Scribes and the Pharisees when they give you the scriptures, but by no means do as the Scribes and Pharisees themselves do”.

Why would Jesus give that instruction? It's because, while the Scribes and the Pharisees continued to sit in the seat of Moses, teaching the eternal truths of God from the Book of the Law, their words would be trustworthy. But by no means were the people to trust and follow the personal behaviors of those same teachers of the law.

Folks, thanks be to God, His word is true and will always remain true and trustworthy regardless of whether or not the ones presenting that word are Godly people.

And that is a lesson for you and me in our own day and time. Some, perhaps even many of our church leaders of today, will fall short of the character and responsibility and integrity that they should exercise, and some of those, unfortunately, very publicly so.

Think back with me for a moment! With some church leaders that we have witnessed in the past, they taught and we listened and learned many, many good and Godly lessons from the scriptures. But later on, we learned that behind the scenes, they had for many years been living a life of deception and sinful behavior.

My thoughts go to evangelists like Ravi Zacharias. Over the lifetime of his ministry, he gave many good and Godly instructions from the scriptures. But

later, after he had died, we learned that his personal life was, at times, very sinful.

Why and how can that be so? It is as simple as this truth that Jesus is conveying here. God's word is pure, and it remains pure no matter who is giving it, even if it be through the most corrupt of preachers and teachers.

And think with me just one step further. Is that not also true with you and me? Is not also your heart and my heart in much the same wretched condition. Is not our heart just as Jeremiah the Prophet declared, "Desperately wicked and deceitful above all things"? But yet, even from within that condition, we can still give forth pure and wholesome truths, to our families, to our children and even from this pulpit.

Our first safeguard as we listen to the words being preached to us is that God carefully guards His word, so much so that His word remains pure and uncorrupted in spite of the wretched condition of the heart of the one who presents it.

Does this mean that everything that a teacher or preacher is saying as they hold this word in their hand is absolutely true? No! Just as the Scribes and the Pharisees proved, these words of God can be twisted to sound as if they mean something that they were never intended to mean.

What then is our "ultimate safeguard", our protection against the mishandling of God's word? Our "ultimate safeguard" is the "Holy Spirit".

It was Him, the Holy Spirit, who first conceived these words and then committed them to writing through the minds and the hands of the writers of the scriptures. And it is Him, the Holy Spirit, who literally and actually continues to reside within these words as they are read and preached and sang. And it is Him, the Holy Spirit, who also resides within the heart of every person who believes, and who then takes these words and conveys their truth to our senses.

God knows the weakness within the hearts and minds of men and women, and He graciously provides us with these layers upon layers of protection. His word is ever and always true, and His Holy Spirit is faithful to administer it with purity to every willing heart. And it is therein, that we can have confidence as we receive His words of truth.

But with that being said, does this mean that we will never be led astray by the deception of others, and even and especially by our church leaders? The answer is, "unfortunately no!" There still remains a stumbling block that can allow us to be led astray by false teaching.

And that stumbling block takes place when we find ourselves putting more faith in the person of the church leader, the preacher, than we put in the words he is preaching. It's then that we stumble.

Folks, I do want you to love me and to trust me. But unfortunately, within that trust can come a failure for us all. Yes, I want to be faithful and true to God and to His words of truth. But regrettably, I am fallible and my ways are fallible. And you really must be careful to listen to and to follow God's word and God's word alone, and certainly not me personally.

At my core, I have many of the same possibilities of failure as did those Scribes and Pharisees. So these words of Jesus do apply to me. And they apply also to Billy Graham, and to every other favorite church leader or bible teacher or television evangelist.

So then, do these words that I have just said to you seem at least a little bit contradictory, especially to the words I said earlier, that God's Holy Spirit will safeguard His precious word from corruption? It could seem contradictory, but it truly is not.

That's because, this walk that we walk with Christ truly is intended to be a very, very "narrow pathway". And inside that narrow way is a life that is filled with endless choices, choices that God has deliberately placed in our path, choices that demand a "free will" decision from us to shun evil and to choose righteousness. And that testing of our faith is absolutely necessary in order to raise up and train up children of a Holy God in real and true faith.

It is only as our faith is tested that we are drawn nearer to Him. It is only then that we begin to really know Him and know His Character and His Truth. And it is then that we develop that special "spiritual awareness" spoken about in these scriptures, the awareness that enables us to recognize and to turn away from the deceptive teachings of the false teachers.

In the Book of Matthew chapter 23, Jesus gives us a few of the recognizable signs of those false teachers. There He tells us,

²"The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. ³So you must obey them and do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. ⁴They tie up heavy loads and put them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them. ⁵"Everything they do is done for men to see. . . . ⁶they love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues; ⁷they love to be greeted in the marketplaces and to have men call them 'Rabbi. (Matthew 23:2-7)

So much of what we read here is clearly seen taking place within many of our modern church settings, especially within those churches that focus their ministry on Health and Wealth and Prosperity, putting heavy burdens on the church members while the church leaders enjoy personal wealth.

Also, another of the obvious ways for us to recognize the kind of church leaders that the Lord Jesus is warning about here can be seen as we watch some of those men and women being interviewed in the national media.

So often, we find that those church leaders love the accolades and praises being showered upon them as they are being interviewed. And they allow their conversations to be directed away from the person and work of Christ, and onto themselves and onto their personal work and accomplishments.

And that can so easily and subtly take place because the two can very often look the same. And I must tell you that this sort of thing takes place very, very often and it is done in the guise of ministry. And Jesus clearly warns us to "Beware of those false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves."

And what was Jesus' advice to those corrupt religious leaders? In verse 41, He said,

⁴¹But rather give alms of such things as you have; then indeed all things are clean to you. (Luke 11:41)

What did Jesus mean by these words? He was telling those church leaders that rather than seeking benefit and acclaim and wealth for themselves, they should instead turn from their corrupt ways and begin to give, give of their wealth, give

of their time, give of their efforts, give of anything and everything they have, so that others might gain eternal life.

One last thought before we close. The truth that Jesus wanted those men then, and you and I now to realize is that it does us no eternal good to be clean on the outside of our soul, but corrupt on the inside, to “look” like a “good Christian”, clean on the outside, but not clean on the inside.

Dear friends, you and I must do as Jesus is instructing us. We must receive God's word as it is given to us in these scriptures and then let it do its divine work of making us clean on the inside, as well as clean on the outside.

One last reminder as we close. The truth that the Lord Jesus would have you and me to follow each day is the truth that is given within the words of this scripture. That is why it is so very important that we dedicate ourselves to the reading and to the knowing of these precious truths. It is then and only then that we'll be able to recognize a false teacher and to turn away from them and their teaching.

Let's pray.