

Profile of False Religion

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[0 : 00] All right, please bring me back in Luke chapter number 16. Thank you, Jonathan, David, and Charlotte. Luke chapter number 16, I've already read the scripture for you. And maybe when I read it, you thought, as I did when I first came upon the passage, that it seemed to be somewhat of a strange assortment of verses together.

You have an emotional response, and then Jesus giving his response to that, a rebuke by Jesus. And then this huge statement of contrast about the law never passing, and then a reference to divorce.

So it may seem like a strange assortment of verses, but we'll see that it's very cohesive, and you'll find this something similar in other parts of the gospel. Very set, fixed path intended to confront the Pharisees and instruct us about the destructive components of false religion.

Before we jump into it, I want to remind you that the Pharisees don't realize that they are the bad guys of the story. They are not going home and sitting down with their kids at family devotion and saying, Hey, I want to teach you a false understanding of the Messiah.

I want to tell you bad things. These are people that were loving their kids. These are people that are very zealous in what was going on, and that they would hold very close to it. They were religious people.

[1 : 14] They made good neighbors. They would care about you. They wanted to teach you. They wanted to instruct you, but Jesus lovingly confronts them because loving people is always to confront them with truth, especially in regards to things that affect eternity.

And so they'll see this as a loving Savior reaching out here to them. So the Pharisees are going to scoff at Jesus. At the beginning of chapter number 15, it said when Jesus was, the publicans and the sinners would draw near him, but the Pharisees, they would murmur.

They said, This man receives sinners and he eats with them. Now in the middle of chapter 16, that murmuring has got more bold. And it says in verse 14, And the Pharisees also who were covetous heard all these things, and they derided him.

They stuck their nose up at him. They looked down upon him. They went from murmuring to now just scoffing at Jesus. This word will show up again to Rideville in Luke 23.

We'll see it several months from now. It says, The people stood beholding, and the rulers also with them derided him, saying, He saved others. Let him save himself if he be Christ, the chosen of God.

[2 : 31] That word in that context helps you understand what's going on when they're deriding him. It's like, Really? If you're who you say you are, do something about it. You're not in the position to be telling us anything.

And that derision will continue all the way to the cross. Mark 15, 29, And they that passed by railed on him, wagging their heads and saying, O thou that destroyest the temple and buildest it in three days, mocking him.

People will mock and scoff and shake their head at him and rail him and ride him, all the way to the cross. But this isn't a new category of people.

Solomon tells us that a wise man hears his father's instructions, but a scorner heareth not a rebuke. Or a scorner will seek wisdom and findeth it not, but knowledge is easy of them understanding, is that a scorner doesn't listen to anybody.

A scorner loveth not one that reproveth him, neither will he go to the wise. This type of scorner, this kind of person, is all throughout history. It existed in the day of the Pharisees, and it exists in the day in which we live.

[3 : 39] And that our heart should break for those that are trapped in a false religion. In this passage, false religion will be defined, it will be studied, and it should be rejected.

But let us have the heart of Christ in the matter. Jesus came to seek and to save that which was lost. And these people in this story are very much lost, but they're not aware of it, which is the condition that most of the world lives in, which is to be lost and not be aware of it.

And one of the things that contributes to this lostness that they're not aware of is the covering of some type of false religion. This should remind us of those that we love, and ourselves should not find our safety in hiding in religious activity.

What's your relationship with the Lord? Well, I was baptized at this age, my dad was a deacon in a Baptist church, and I volunteer a lot of my time. That's a question. If you ask people many times about what the relationship is with the Creator or with our Lord, the answer is going to be religious activity that they're hiding in.

Of all kinds of shapes and form, this religious activity. And you wouldn't have to travel very far to find this. And we should understand that the world in which we live in is greatly influenced in culture by false religion.

[5 : 02] We are not a non-religious society. Some people would say that we are a post-Christian world. I would say that we maybe are a post-pseudo-Christian world.

That the people that are rejecting Christianity and the country that we're living in is not even rejecting a biblical understanding of Christianity. And so we had a time where people pretended that they were Christian, and now we have a time where people are admitting that they are not Christian.

But we're greatly influenced by false religion. So don't picture just the mosque in another part of the world or some type of temple. Picture any form of religion that does not have Jesus Christ as Lord.

And you'll find that in your family. You'll find that in your friends. You'll find that in your neighborhood. You don't have to go very far to find that. And maybe the day that the God of heaven would awaken you to the fact that it's found in your own life that you're hiding behind some false religion.

And it isn't one of the big five, and it doesn't have a name, but it's one that you have created. So first of all, in this profile of false religion, I want you to see that covetousness is at the heart of false religion.

[6 : 12] So it says the Pharisees, and it says that they were covetous, which means that they were lovers of money. And so this shouldn't surprise us. In Luke 14, the Pharisees only invited friends that would do a favor for them, right?

They would sit at the table because it was all about clout and influence. So they weren't eating with the people that couldn't pay them back. In Matthew chapter number 15, they had found the scheme where they didn't have to take care of their family.

They could take money, and they would say the word Corban. And they would say, now I don't have to use this money to provide. I will use it because I say it's dedicated to the Lord. In Luke chapter number 20, it's going to say, as it says in Matthew 23, that they devoured widows' houses, that they were in it for great gain, for earthly gain.

They were involved in it for earthly gain. So false teachers are in it for how it will change their life here on earth. How will it better their life here on earth?

Not just those that are teaching it, but those that are involved in it want to know, how do I make my life better? That's what I'm trying to do. And they were lovers of it. In 1 Peter 5, 2, it tells us that ministers, people that are serving God's people, should feed the flock of God, taking oversight, but they should not for filthy lucre, but be of a ready mind.

[7 : 27] We heard from Graham and Olivia this morning. They're in Nigeria, and they're in a small building without good air conditioning. And it will be probably not a very comfortable setting, but they are hearing the Bible taught.

Just down the road from them, they would go into a building that's nicer than anything that we have in this county. That money was given for this in Nigeria, just incredible buildings, because false religion is a profitable business because everyone is looking for peace.

If you're looking for a market to get into, look for the market of people looking in peace. I mean, there may be some people like this, or they may like this, and not everybody can do that. And you have little monies in the niches, as they would say, and finding things that nobody else is working in and selling it to them.

But if you want a big market, it is people looking for peace. And that's why there will always be false peddlers of peace. Jeremiah chapter number 6 says, For from the least of them, even unto the greatest of them, everyone is given the covetousness.

And from the prophet, even unto the priest, everyone dealeth falsely. They are healed also the herd of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace, when there is no peace.

[8 : 49] They are promoters of peace for profit. These large buildings in Nigeria are being built because people are looking for peace. They're looking for some kind of answers.

And somebody is standing up and saying, Peace, peace, but they're not offering peace. That's why it's great joy that we have a couple that's not only going to share the gospel, but they're going to live out the gospel.

They're not going to take, but they are going to give. False religion is not only marked by this covetousness, this love for money, but it's also marked by hostility towards the lordship of Christ.

As they say today, these people were triggered. When Jesus asked anything of them, when he gave a story and said, This is how a person ought to live their lives. They ought to live using their resources.

They ought to use this unrighteous man for eternal benefit. They were mad about it. The thoughts of using their money for eternity and for other people really upset them.

[9 : 47] I shared with you a few weeks ago a commentary from Exodus 18 where a rabbi would say, Let no man associate with the wicked, not even to bring him the law. We don't eat with sinners.

We don't use our money for their embetterment. We don't use our money to worry about their eternity. Our money is a result of God's love for us. Our money is a sign of our holiness.

We're not going to give that to somebody else. And their response understands that they did not understand the things of God. It was foolish to them. The Bible tells us that, right? 1 Corinthians 2.14, to the natural man.

He doesn't receive the things of the Spirit, but it's foolishness to him because they spiritually can't discern. The Pharisees here said, That's a foolish story, Jesus, that you just told. Me taking what I have to make friends for the kingdom?

That's crazy. Very religious. But when the light is turned on, it's obvious that their deeds were evil. John 3.19 says, For everyone that doeth evil, hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds shall be reproved.

[10 : 51] When Jesus spoke and they derided him, Jesus was turning the lights on to that false religion. And they were like covering their eyes. They were saying, Jesus, we do not like this.

They were deriding him. Because if you want to get along with believers of a false gospel, you have to dim the lights. You have to dim the gospel.

It's the only way that that's possible. We should, when it comes to brothers and sisters in Christ, be people that want to partner, to want to endeavor to have the spirit of unity, that want to work with another church across town for good things, that work with co-workers that are Christians.

But one of the commitments that we say is at no point are we going to put our hands on the dimmer of the gospel. We will never compromise gospel truth for the sake of association.

There's a parable Jesus tells, right? Two houses are built. Two religious houses are built. And they look similar, but they're different. Because one of them is built upon a rock. And one of them is not built upon the rock.

[11 : 52] And so those that are built upon the rock, that is the gospel. So who has the true claim upon the relationship to Jesus or to God? The Pharisees are saying, we are the ones that worship God.

And we know who is right. And now Jesus is here saying that this is right. How would we know? And Jesus tells in Luke chapter number 8, when they said, hey, your mom, your mother, and your brethren are out here.

And Jesus said, my mother and my brethren are those which hear the word of God and do it. Those are the people that Jesus has true claim upon the Father.

So here they were. They didn't want to lose their life. They didn't want to lose their independence. They didn't want to lose their freedom, their source of income, their prestige, or their power, or their position. They were not humbled.

They were not coming broken in spirit. They came to Jesus in pride, and they derided him. Michael Muhammad Knight, not a believer, not a Christian, wrote in his book, Journey to the End of Islam.

[12 : 51] He said this, People say that America has no religion, but it's the opposite. America has every religion, all the old ones, and produces more new ones than anywhere else on earth.

America's religious life is like the photo mosaic in which a thousand little images add up to one big picture, except there's no big picture, just a blob of unrelated and unrelatable images.

Text imposes, The freedom to take what you want from a religion and reject the rest and be lonely, standing outside the warm shelters of temples with your own goon God that no one else can understand.

That statement, the freedom to take what you want from a religion and reject the rest, is a defining characteristic of religion in America today.

Everybody gets to put it together. A false religion will always want an all-loving, providing God, but they don't want Jesus to be Lord. There's a story about a guy named Micah in Judges 17 and 18.

[13 : 57] Micah's mom is praying this curse, and she says, Somebody has stolen my money, and I'm praying a curse on them. And Micah comes over and says, Hey mom, I heard you prayed a curse on the person that stole your money.

Well, that was me. And then what she said, Oh, my little darling, let's just do something good with that. Let's buy some idols. And so that's what happened. They made idols, and then they talked the family member into being a priest for them.

So now they have a priest, and they have their idols. And the believer, and then it says in Judges 17 and 13, Then said Micah, Now know that I, the Lord, will do me good, seeing that I have a Levite to my priest.

He might as well said, I now know that the Lord will do me good, because I have a lucky rabbit's foot. All right? Or I have a four-leaf clover. Or I have created something that God's blessings.

And this false teacher has a false message. So this prophet for hire, the one that they made a priest that was there, So people came by, the people of Dan, they inquired, and they asked a question.

[15 : 00] And he's like, Okay, I got an answer for them. Judges 18, 6. And the priest said unto them, Go in peace before the Lord is your way wherein you go. It sounded biblical, right?

He's like, Go in peace before the Lord is in your way. He was making it up. He was like, Yeah, there's peace, but there was no peace. It was very violent. It was a bad day in that peaceful town.

But he spoke as if he was offering peace, but he didn't. And you'll see that this homemade false religion continues for generations. Judges 18, 30.

And the children of Dan set up the graven image, And Jonathan, the son of Gershom, the son of Manasseh, He and his sons were priests to the tribe of Dan Until the day of the captivity of the Lamb.

And they set up Micah's graven image, which he made. That image is still continuing through the generations. And then the sadness of it is, And all the time that the house of God was in Shiloh.

[15 : 58] A homemade religion that was going to be passed from generation to generation. And that's the day in which we live in. As that man said in his book, It's the idea that you can accept something for religion, But you can reject what you don't want.

Is that many, and maybe some in here today, Have created their own version of religion. They've made a homemade religion. People tell you this.

Sometimes with great pride. Hey, would you like to study the Bible? Could I tell you what the Bible says about the creator of the universe? You know what? I just kind of, I got my own thing going on here.

You know, I'm like, I'm spiritual, but I'm not religious. And I study after this group. And I've also studied after this group. And I just kind of got my own thing.

And I'm like, okay, you have your own homemade religion. Why don't you trademark it? Why don't you get some followers, man? If you're going to do this thing, why don't you do it right? All right? If you're going to start a cult, might as well get some followers with you.

[16 : 59] But people say it's so cavalier that they are creating a religion that has never been here before. And that they are the ones that are creating it. Do you see the nonsense?

Judges says every man did right in his own eyes. That's what's happening in the story of Micah. Where they're like, I like this idea of a priest. I also kind of like this idea of having a graven image. Let me just kind of pick from it.

So many people today. So many people that I love. So many people that you love have created false religions where they've borrowed from your background and your tradition and your Bible.

And they've made their own. And Jesus says that this is a detestable deception of self-righteousness. A false religion is an attempt to justify yourselves before men.

Verse 15. And he said unto them, Ye are they which justify yourselves before men. But God knoweth your hearts. For that which is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God.

[17 : 58] And so they were sneering at Jesus because they saw him as a poor man being followed by other poor men. Yet having the nerve that teach them about money. Jesus responded that God knows the hearts of people.

And that he is not impressed with their outward appearance and their wealth. And so what is this self-justifying that's going on? They destroy the righteous standard of God. They omit his laws and they disregard his ordinances.

And so this deception makes themselves right before God. And that's what Paul says. He says these people have a zeal for God but not according to knowledge. And what was the knowledge? The knowledge was the righteousness of God that they were rejecting here.

So here's the problem real quickly. They did all their work on the outside. The Pharisees did. They satisfied a faulty standard like playing a board game with a kid.

Right? The kid always wins. Don't they? No matter what the game is, they win. Why? Because you're making the rules. This isn't fair. You know? So I don't like board games with little kids. You can never win. And so they're doing this work on the outside.

[19 : 01] They satisfy a false standard. They impress a jury who doesn't even get to decide anything. And all the while they ignore the true righteous standard of the one who will ultimately be their judge.

And all of mankind is prone to do this. You think that's what Jesus said. That God knows your heart. And you seek to justify yourselves before other people.

And they would do that. They would say prayers so that they would be heard. They would fast so other people would see it. It said that they would even disfigure. They would mess up their hair. They would mess up their face.

They wanted to look hungry before they went to other people. So that people would know that they had been fasting. Because they were trying to justify themselves before other people.

False religions offers the hope of justification in front of other people. But the people are not the jury. You will never stand before your peers. You will stand before a righteous God.

[19 : 59] So you can fool me. You can fool anybody that you ever want in this world. But that is not the jury. Another thing the false religion offers is approval by man. People want approval.

When it's that they do their alms before man. It says that they may have the glory of men and be seen. They wanted to be highly esteemed of other people. And it said in verse number 15 that it says that what is highly esteemed among men.

It's an abomination in the sight of God. You love your sin. You love this world. And all these things that you're doing. It is an abomination before me. And Jesus here is confronting the evil of their heart.

But God knoweth their heart. God sees their heart. All throughout the Bible. Psalm 44 21. Shall not God search thee out? For he knoweth the secrets of their hearts.

So many people that I've met have been so willing to debate for so long. Because they believe that if they can convince me that they are right. Then they will be right. You know you can convince me of an idea.

[21 : 00] And you can still be wrong. I am not the judge here. That God knoweth the heart. So don't ever look for me or anybody else for approval. I'm very glad that you are here.

Matt if you want me to sign that thing for your probation officer to say you are here. I'll do it alright. I will let people know you are here. But I can only tell your attendance. But I can't know your heart.

But only the God of heaven can. And so this false religion is giving this promise. That you can justify yourself before men. Which will give you a false assurance. And you'll nullify the laws of God.

And you replace it with your own standards. And then you will defend those standards. And you'll feel good about yourself. And so good that you will now mock and score God's truth. When it's presented to you.

But here's the foolishness of that. Someday you will stand before a real judge. Only to find that not one dot of the law was nullified. And you'll be judged according to not only what you did.

[21 : 54] But according to also what was in your heart. False religion plays games with God's law. You see they are telling Jesus that he doesn't believe in the law.

They are the only ones on the high horse. We know the law. What you're saying is something new. But Jesus came and he fulfilled the law for them. And so they're not looking. When he speaks to them.

They're accusing him of not respecting the law. And this is what Jesus says. It would be easier for the whole universe to disappear. Than the smallest jot.

Or the smallest tittle of law. The fail. It will last forever. And he's saying you're accusing me of abolishing the law. That's not the case. I came and fulfilled the law. But then he goes on and he talks to them.

He's like let's talk about what it is that you are doing to the law. And that's when he gives this verse about divorce. And putting away of a wife. He begins to speak to them. Just like the apostle Paul said.

[22 : 52] I wouldn't have known my covetousness. I would not have known who I was if it was not for the law. Jesus says let's bring the law into the story. What is it you guys are doing? You're putting your wives away because they don't cook the way you want them to.

For whatever reason you write a bill of divorcement. And you just send them away. And now what you have done is you say that I don't follow the law. Let's take one example of the law here. Of the eternal things that God has said about marriage.

What are you doing? And it's in that moment that I would imagine that a lot of those Pharisees that were writing. Began to scoot to the back of the crowd there. Because they knew that Jesus was placing his finger right on their heart.

And right into their misunderstanding of the law. Because they were changing the rules of it at every chance they could get. That they were making a game out of marriage. They were making a game out of God's law.

And this would, as I said, this would expect for some of them to move back. But God in his love was helping identify where their sin was. Jesus was using the law to help them see their need.

[23 : 53] Help them see that they are breakers of law. And this last point here. False religion is the only religion available to those who do not know the gospel.

It's the only religion available to them. Many parts of this world and many people you know, they only know what they can know. Just as funny as it was, it's like mom, she's making kind of a religion there.

She's trying to do something because she's seeking peace. She knows she's made to do it. If a person is honest with themselves, they know that there is a God. They know that there is a, there's something broken between them and God.

That creation tells us there's a God. Our conscience tells us that our relationship is broken with that God. So it is logical and reasonable that you would look around and say, What is available that I can build myself some kind of bridge to heaven?

Because I know that I must do something. And you can be very zealous about it and go about it. So the law and prophets were available to him. The truth, the law, Moses and the Torah, the prophets, the remainder of the Old Testament.

[24 : 53] And Jesus came in to fulfill it. And it says, since that time, seven times this critical turning point where Jesus is speaking. John was the first representative of the New Testament era.

He was the last representative of this Old Testament era. And he bridged the gap. And he came with the message that Jesus came, which was, repent for the kingdom of God is at hand.

And what the Pharisees didn't realize, that so many people didn't realize, is that the law does not offer the solution to the problem. Because you see, our problem is not the problem.

Our problem is that we don't know that we have a problem. That was the problem the Pharisees had. They did not realize that they did not, that they had a problem. They had taken the law that was supposed to identify the fact that they had a problem.

And they were using it now. Not as a standard, as we would teach, right, with kids. That the law would be laid down as a ruler beside your life to tell you that you're a sinner in need of a savior. They had taken that law.

[25 : 53] And now they were trying to build a religion to get them to God. And what is the good news of the kingdom? The good news is this, that the way into the kingdom is not by having kept the law perfectly, because nobody ever has.

It's certainly not as the Pharisees were trying. It's certainly not by finding loopholes in the law that you get into the kingdom. The good news is that the way into the kingdom is by God's gracious forgiveness of those who repent.

You see, the law can't forgive you. The law can tell you of your need of forgiveness. But the law can't forgive you. Only the gospel offers forgiveness. And here in this passage, it makes a statement, every man presses into it.

And that is something that I don't fully understand. As I look at it, I see two different things here. I see two different descriptions. I see in chapter number 15, I see the publicans and the Pharisees.

They are pushing now. They want to be part of this. They're wanting to say, I will follow you. I will count my costs. I will take up my cross. But I also see the Pharisees that are trying to enforce something.

[26 : 53] They are trying to go over the wall. As the story of Pilgrim's Progress would have, where people are always trying to get in by coming over the wall. And they're trying to do that. But what I do know that is very clear.

The Pharisees had missed what was really of value in God's eyes. While all of them that were, while others were around, were realizing it. People were coming to Jesus. People were realizing they were sinners.

They were realizing what Jesus was offering to them. But not the Pharisees. They were just going deeper and deeper in their false religion. So I ask you here. When you hear Jesus speak of God's law and the requirements of salvation, can I urge you, don't scoff.

Humble yourself. Run to Jesus for mercy and righteousness. Don't justify yourself. Run to Christ. Who alone can justify you before God?

And ask yourself today, have you made some sort of homemade religion that you're asking God to bless? That's what these Pharisees were doing.

[27 : 54] And they needed to repent. They needed to submit their lives to the Lord. And they needed to say, Jesus, whatever you say about money, that's the right thing. Jesus, whatever you say about repentance, that's the right thing.

I am no longer going to double down and hold on. I'm no longer going to scoff at your commands. I'm going to come with a broken and contrite spirit, and I'm going to see you as the Lord of my life.

Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, I ask that you would help me, Lord, and help this congregation today to truly have a heart for those that are trapped inside a false religion.

Lord, you know their hearts. You know their desire to justify themselves before other people. You know their desire to be accepted and approved. But, Lord, they're doing that before a jury that would never be the ones that would make a decision.

So, Father, now I pray that you would help me as I will ask some questions to those that are here. And, Lord, I pray that the Holy Spirit will bring conviction in those that people would answer honestly.

[28 : 56] With every head bowed and every eye closed, and we continue to pray, I just want you to know the deciding factor or test for all people, all religious people, is this.

What will you do with the words of Jesus? False believers deride and adapt religion to their desired lifestyle, but a true believer accepts knowing that they are sinners in need of a Savior.

Would you answer that question today? Are you trying to modify religion to fit a desired lifestyle that you have? Or have you surrendered your life to Jesus Christ as Lord?

And I would ask you today, not just before me, but I would love to pray for you. But before the God of heaven, would somebody in here today, would many people in here today say, I recognize that I have never known Jesus Christ as Lord of my life.

I have always tried to adapt Him and religion to meet my desired life. And today I recognize that I have a homemade religion that is damning.

[30 : 02] Is that your story today? Could I see your hand so that I can be in prayer for you? If you have questions about that, I would love to speak to you more about it. I'd love to take God's word and for you to look at the commands of Christ and to know them to be true and reject the false understanding.

Heavenly Father, I ask that you'd be with us today. Lord, as believers, we have this false religion and a false culture, Lord, that sometimes affects our way of thinking.

It finds its way into our home. It finds our way into the way that we treat other people. And Lord, I pray that we will reject it on every corner, that your words will stand in our lives, that you will be the one who leads and drives us.

I pray for those, Lord, that are listening today that recognize this and those that will be represented in our friends and family and people that we know that are hiding today in a homemade religion that will not protect them for all eternity.

One that will leave them exposed from the wrath that come.