

***REDISCOVER JESUS, PART 44: “TAKE CARE HOW YOU HANDLE  
GOD’S WORD”  
LUKE 11:45-52  
Ps. Eric Yee***

## **Personal Introduction**

Hi everyone. If you don't know me, my name is Eric and I'm a pastor at HMCC of Jakarta, and it's my privilege to preach the Word of God to us today.

## **Sermon Series Introduction**

We're currently in Part 44 of our sermon series called "Rediscover Jesus," where we're going through the Gospel of Luke together.

So let's get right into today's sermon: "Take Care How You Handle God's Word."

## **Sermon Introduction**

Have you ever been to a restaurant where there was a sign that read, "No outside food or drink?"

<Show no-outside-food-or-drink-sign.png>



There was an occasion where my family went out for lunch at a restaurant where there was that sign put up. After we had finished our meal and paid the bill, our kids asked for chocolate crackers to eat.

But as we opened it to give to our kids, one of the waiters came over and said something like, "I'm so sorry, but no outside food is allowed."

Tina and I were a bit dumbfounded to say the least because we're quite sure that the "No outside food or drink" rule wasn't meant to be applied to kids' snacks after the bill has been paid and the customers are about to leave.

That rule is supposed to apply to those who would bring their own food and drinks from home or another restaurant, so that they wouldn't have to purchase food and drinks at *that* restaurant.

So it felt like a total mishandling or misuse of that rule. And it honestly left us feeling a bit sour. We asked our kids to quickly shove the rest of the crackers in their mouth, and then we left.

And so, unfortunately, that one waiter's *mishandling* of the "No outside food or drink" rule *hindered* us from wanting to enter through the doors of that restaurant again.

Now it's one thing to mishandle a restaurant rule, but it's on an entirely different level to mishandle God's Word. And it's one thing if the consequence is not entering into a restaurant again, but it's on an entirely different level if the consequence is not entering the kingdom of God at all.

And that's what we're going to look at more today.

## **The One Thing**

***Take care how you handle God's Word,  
so as not to hinder others from entering God's kingdom.***

## **Scripture Introduction**

Turn your Bibles to Luke 11:45-52.

Just want to give a bit of context before jumping into today's passage.

In the passage immediately before this, a Pharisee invites Jesus over to dine with him with his other Pharisee and lawyer friends. And as they're about to eat, the Pharisee is astonished that Jesus doesn't perform the *traditional* but *not Scriptural* handwashing ritual to ensure that his hands are ceremonially clean before eating.

In response, Jesus gives three "woes" (or warnings or indictments) against the Pharisees, where he basically charges them of *only* being *outwardly* devoted to God while being *inwardly* full of greed and wickedness. And he calls them "fools" for thinking that they can fool God with such outward cleanliness while their hearts remain unclean.

And that's where we are in today's passage, as we'll continue to see Jesus' interaction with *another* group of people at the dining table of the Pharisee's house.

## **Scripture Reading**

Let's read Luke 11:45-52.

<sup>45</sup> One of the lawyers answered him, "Teacher, in saying these things you insult us also." <sup>46</sup> 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. <sup>47</sup> Woe to you! For you build the tombs of the prophets whom your fathers killed. <sup>48</sup> So you are witnesses and you consent to the deeds of your fathers, for they killed them, and you build their tombs. <sup>49</sup> Therefore also the Wisdom of God said, 'I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and persecute,' <sup>50</sup> so that the blood of all the prophets, shed from the foundation of the world, may be charged against this generation, <sup>51</sup> 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. <sup>52</sup> 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."

This is God's Word.

## **Overview**

We'll look at this passage in three parts, where we'll see the three "woes" (or three indictments) that Jesus charges against the religious lawyers. He says that they are...

- I. Guilty of adding burdens to God's Word (vv. 45-46)
- II. Guilty of killing prophets of God's Word (vv. 47-51)
- III. Guilty of depriving people of God's Word (v. 52)

## **I. Guilty of adding burdens to God's Word (vv. 45-46)**

Verse 45 again says this:

<sup>45</sup> One of the lawyers answered him, "Teacher, in saying these things you insult us also."

The first thing we need to realize is the *distinction* and *overlap* between what it meant to be a *lawyer* and what it meant to be a *Pharisee*.

The simplest distinction between the two is the difference between having a job or *profession* and having a religious “political” *party* (so to speak). For example, you can be a lawyer by profession and a Democrat by political party, or a lawyer by profession and a Republican by political party. Similarly, in first century Jewish society, you could be a *religious* lawyer by profession and a Pharisee by *religious* “political” party, or you could be a *religious* lawyer by profession and a Sadducee by *religious* “political” party.<sup>1</sup>

The “lawyers” here were *religious* lawyers by *profession*. They were also known as “scribes” (cf. Luke 11:53; Matt. 23:1-29) and “experts in the law” (NIV), so *all* those terms—“lawyers,” “scribes,” and “experts in the law”—can be used synonymously. And their job was to give scribal interpretations of the Old Testament Law to be regarded as authoritative.

And it just so happened that many of the *lawyers* were also *Pharisees* by religious “political” *party*, which is why we often see the lawyers and Pharisees being grouped together in Scripture as the Jewish religious authorities of the day (e.g., Luke 7:30).

So as Jesus just gave three “woes” to the *Pharisees*, one of the religious *lawyers* at the dining table respectfully calls Jesus, “Teacher,” and basically says, “Many of us lawyers are *also* Pharisees, so are you saying the same things about us? It *sounds* like you’re including us in your woes against the Pharisees, but I just want to make sure that’s *really* what you mean to say.”

Now if someone were to say that to you, how do you think you would be inclined to respond. Maybe “Oh, no, no, no; that’s *not* what I meant” or “I’m sorry you took it that way; let me try to clarify.”

Essentially, the lawyer is giving Jesus an opportunity to *excuse* the lawyers in his “woes” against the Pharisees. He’s hoping that Jesus will somehow *clarify* that he’s *not* talking about lawyers—*just* the Pharisees.

But that’s *not* what Jesus does at all. Instead, he makes what was previously *implicit* for the lawyers now as *explicit* as can be, and he doubles down with three *more* “woes” *specifically* for the lawyers.

Verse 46 says this:

<sup>46</sup> 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.

The “burdens” that Jesus is talking about are all the scribal interpretations that the lawyers *added* to God’s Law. Their intention was supposedly to *clarify* God’s Law, but it actually *added* to it.

In effect, their scribal interpretations were held to an even *higher* standard than God’s Law because their reasoning was that, if it was a serious matter to offend the Mosaic Law, which was sometimes *hard* to understand, then it was a *more* serious matter to offend the scribal interpretations of the Law that made everything *clear* (*Mishnah Sanhedrin* 11:3).<sup>2</sup> So basically, all these scribal interpretations of the Law were *not* just mere *suggestions* of how to practice the Law, but they were effectively laying down new *laws* on top of God’s Law.

To give one example, on the Sabbath day, the Mosaic Law states that they are *not* to do any work (Exod. 20:8-11). So to *ensure* that no work was being done on the Sabbath, there were 39 classifications of labor listed out, with each category having many subdivisions of minute prohibitions (*Mishnah Shabbath* 7:2).

And within one of those subdivisions, one scribal interpretation that functioned as an “add-on” to God’s Law was that they forbade the carrying of anything equal to or heavier than a dried fig, which was considered the standard measure of human food (*Mishnah Shabbath* 7:4). So on the Sabbath, you were permitted to carry something that weighed less than a dried fig, but if you happened to put it down and

<sup>1</sup> Leon L. Morris, *Luke*, TNTC (Nottingham, England: IVP, 2008), 223.

<sup>2</sup> Leon L. Morris, *Luke*, TNTC (Nottingham, England: IVP, 2008), 223.

pick it up again, you would have been liable of breaking the Sabbath because you already reached your quota of what was permissible to carry for the day.

Eventually, these scribal interpretations grew to a list of no less than six thousand laws on top of God's law.<sup>3</sup> So you can begin to imagine how burdensome these *added* laws were to the average Jew.

In essence, the religious lawyers did not rightly handle God's Word.

Now you may be thinking, "Why would people do such a thing?" or "How is that even helpful?" But even as we're asking that, we should recognize that, as followers of Christ, we can subtly fall into *adding* to God's Word as well.

For example, Scripture says that we are to meditate on God's Word (Ps. 1:2) and store it up in our hearts (Ps. 119:11), but we can then *add* to it by saying that we *must* read and mediate on Scripture every morning.

Now, that's been my practice pretty much ever since I became a Christian, and I would highly recommend it, but nowhere does Scripture *command* that we read the Bible every morning. The *principle* of regular Bible intake is definitely all over Scripture, but Scripture does *not* command daily morning Bible reading.

Others read and meditate on Scripture during their lunch breaks, or in the evening before they go to sleep—and there's nothing wrong with that. And as much as daily morning Bible intake has been a discipline throughout my Christian life, I've also missed a few days from time to time because I woke up late and my days were packed.

Now is it a *sin* to miss a day of Scripture reading and meditating on God's Word?

I think we all know the answer is, "No." But some of us are very reluctant to *really* believe it. We feel especially guilty when we miss a morning of Bible reading and perhaps you're even judging me for saying that I've missed a few mornings before.

Again, don't get me wrong. I am all for daily morning Bible intake, but we must be careful *not* to make that a new law by which we judge ourselves and everyone around us, when there is no such law in Scripture.

Another example is that Scripture undoubtedly calls every follower of Jesus Christ to "make disciples" (Matt. 28:19). But we then say that making disciples means that we *must* meet with someone one-on-one on a weekly basis, where we discuss the Bible, go through accountability questions, or go through a certain curriculum. I've done all of that before—and yes, that is *one way* to disciple someone—but nowhere does Scripture *command* that we meet with someone one-on-one on a weekly basis to do a list of things together.

The *principle* of making discipling, which means to intentionally help someone else to follow Jesus, is definitely all over Scripture (Matt. 4:19; 8:22; 9:9; 10:38; 16:24; 19:21; Mark 1:17; 2:14; 8:34; 10:21; Luke 5:27; 9:23; 18:22; John 1:43; 8:12; 10:27; 12:26; 21:19, 22), but aside from the primary context of the local church, Scripture does *not* command a certain personal discipling methodology.

Are Christians in *sin* if they have not met up with someone this past week one-on-one to share personally, study the Bible, pray together, and hold each other accountable?

Again, I think we all know the answer is, "No." But some of us are very reluctant to *really* believe it. Perhaps we pride ourselves in all the people we're meeting and we judge those who aren't meeting up with someone on a weekly basis.

But are sleep-deprived mothers who are nursing their newborns supposed to suck it up to meet one-on-one with another sister this week, lest they be in *sin*? Are we to expect that working adults will disciple the same way as university students and high school students? Or singles compared to those married with young kids? It *will* and *should* look different for each of us.

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<sup>3</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Luke*, rev. ed., PTW (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013).

The primary question is *not*, “Have you disciplined in such and such way?” but “Can you self-consciously, sincerely say that you’re being intentional about helping others to follow Jesus?” That *may* look like meeting one-on-one with someone each week to intentionally ask each other accountability questions, but it also may look like having intentional conversations after Sunday Celebration or LIFE Group, inviting people over for meals and sharing personally about your struggles and how your relationship with Jesus makes a difference, running errands with others and having more intentional conversation about each other’s followership of Christ along the way, or a something else.

God has undoubtedly called every believer to make disciples, but we must be careful *not* to make a certain *form* of that a *new law* by which we judge ourselves and everyone around us, when there is no such law in Scripture.

And perhaps there are *other* ways we do this that we need to think about. The truth is that we *all* have this tendency to mishandle God’s Word—*adding* to it and *using* it as a standard to measure ourselves and others—so this should give us pause to examine our lives and our thinking and see where this might be the case.

But an important question to ask ourselves is this: Why do we do this? Why do we have a tendency to supposedly *clarify* but really *add* to God’s Word, establishing for ourselves and others standards that are simply *not* in Scripture?

We may *think* that it’s because we’re zealous for God’s Word and that these are just the best ways to live out God’s Word. No doubt, that’s what the religious lawyers thought about themselves.

But in our heart of hearts, the reason we do this is because, in our sinful nature, we’re all self-righteous. We all have a have a default works-righteousness mentality, where we think that it’s by our own good works that we make ourselves acceptable.

And so, we unwittingly turn God’s Law into something more bite-sized that we can achieve on our own.

It’s easy to think that we’re loving God if loving God is all about reading the Bible every morning. It’s easy to think that we’re loving others if loving others is all about meeting one-on-one with someone each week for some sort of discipling agenda.

We can achieve those things, and we can convince ourselves that we’re not that bad—we’re actually pretty good and righteous people. And anyone who *cannot* live up to those *new laws* that we’ve set up for ourselves, *they* are really the bad ones. *They’re* the sinners, but *not us*.

But can any of us honestly say that we love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength? Can any of us read the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) and honestly say that we love our neighbor as ourselves? Can any of us read the Sermon on the Mount and say that we have not broken God’s law (Matt. 5-7)?

If we read Scripture honestly, we should see that *all* of us fall short of God’s standards. *All* of us are sinners; *none* is righteous (Rom. 3:10, 23). In fact, part of the purpose of God’s Law is to *show* us just how *sinful* we really are, so that we would finally see our great need for and God’s great provision of a perfect law-keeping *Savior* on our behalf (Rom. 7:7-25).

But like the lawyers, we don’t naturally want to acknowledge our sin—we don’t want to admit that we’re really *that* bad. And so, we unwittingly create more manageable and achievable laws that are *not* prescribed in Scripture to give the illusion that we’re somehow keeping God’s Law—that *we’re* really good and acceptable people and it’s those *others* who *aren’t* doing what we’re doing who are really the bad and guilty ones.

So the scribal interpretations of God’s Law were a source of pride and self-righteousness for the lawyers, but they were heavy, unbiblical burdens for the people. They weighed them down with guilt and shame. And worse, it says that the lawyers themselves would not touch the burdens with one of their fingers.

The New International Version translates verse 46 like this:

**Luke 11:46 (NIV)** = Jesus replied, “And you experts in the law, 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.**

The lawyers expected much but helped little. They resembled the Egyptian taskmasters who demanded bricks from the Israelites but gave them no straw, and then beat them when they couldn’t meet the brick requirements (Exod. 5). They put heavy burdens on the people but would not lift one finger to help them.

This is in stark contrast to *Jesus*, who by “the *finger of God*” *helped* a mute man but casting out a demon from him so that he could speak again, which is what started this entire episode in this chapter (Luke 11:14, 20).

Jesus doesn’t lay heavy burdens on us and then leave us to carry them on our own. Rather, he says, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.... For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matt. 11:28, 30).

Why is Jesus’ yoke easy and burden light? Because *he* does all the carrying.

The gospel—or the good news—of Jesus Christ is that, even though God created us and we are accountable to him for keeping his Law, we have all broken his Law, and rightfully deserve punishment for our disobedience. But in love, God sent his Son, Jesus Christ to perfectly obey the Law on our behalf, to fully take the punishment for our law-breaking, and to resurrect to give us a new heart that desires to obey God from the inside out. So now, if we have repented of our sins and have believed in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, then the weight of Law and the weight of our law-breaking fell on him, and we are forever forgiven and counted righteous in God’s sight.

The religious lawyers added burdens to God’s Law and then expected the people to be able to bear the burden on their own. But Jesus, knowing that *none* of us could bear the weight of God’s Law, bore it all on our behalf—if we would only respond with repentance and faith, giving our lives fully to him.

And as *followers* of Christ, we follow in *his* footsteps as Scripture calls us *also* to...

“Bear *one another’s* burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2).

The Christian life is *not* an “everyone for themselves” kind of life, but it is a “I *need* my brothers and sisters to help me, and I need to *help* my brothers and sisters” kind of life.

And if you’re a member of our church, that’s the kind of life that we’ve committed to live together. The fifth commitment in our Membership Covenant, which combines 1 Corinthians 12:26 and Galatians 6:2, says this:

“We will rejoice at one another’s happiness and endeavor with tenderness and sympathy to bear one another’s burdens and sorrows.”

As spiritual family to one another, we don’t just say, “Follow Christ” and then leave each other to fend for ourselves, but we intentionally *help* one another to follow Jesus. That’s the heart of *discipling*—and that’s the heart of *Christ*, who “sympathizes with our weaknesses” and provides us mercy and grace to *help* us in our time of need (Heb. 4:15-16).

As followers of Christ, we are *not* to add to one another’s burdens like the *lawyers*, but we are to bear one another’s burdens like *Jesus*.

I know that we don’t do this perfectly, but this is the heart that we’re committed to cultivate and grow in together as a spiritual family.

So the first indictment against the lawyers was that they are guilty of adding burdens to God’s Word; and the second indictment against them was that they are...

## II. Guilty of killing prophets of God's Word (vv. 47-51)

Verses 47-48 say this:

<sup>47</sup> Woe to you! For you build the tombs of the prophets whom your fathers killed. <sup>48</sup> So you are witnesses and you consent to the deeds of your fathers, for they killed them, and you build their tombs.

Here, “the prophets” are the Old Testament prophets who spoke God’s Word to his people and “your fathers” are the lawyers’ Jewish ancestors who rejected God’s Word from the prophets and who ended up killing them.

So why have the lawyers built the tombs of the prophets whom their fathers killed?

Matthew’s parallel account gives us a bit more insight into the lawyers’ thinking. It says this in...

Matthew 23:29-30 = “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and decorate the monuments of the righteous, saying, ‘If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.’

So in their own minds, the building of the prophets’ tombs was the Jewish religious authorities’ way of publicly *declaring* that their forefathers’ murders of the prophets were *wrong* and their way of *distancing* themselves from those wicked deeds. In their minds, it was a way to *honor* the former prophets of God’s Word.<sup>4</sup>

But that’s *not* how Jesus sees it. He sees their building of the prophets’ tombs as *consent* (or *agreement*) with their forefathers’ murders of the prophets.

How does Jesus reach that conclusion?

Verses 49-51 say this:

<sup>49</sup> Therefore also the Wisdom of God said, ‘I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and persecute,’ <sup>50</sup> so that the blood of all the prophets, shed from the foundation of the world, may be charged against this generation, <sup>51</sup> 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.

In the Matthew parallel account, instead of saying “the Wisdom of God said,” Jesus simply says, “Therefore I send you prophets...” (Matt. 23:34). So Jesus is *not* quoting a so-called book titled “the Wisdom of God,” but he is referring to *himself* as “the Wisdom of God.” He *is* divine wisdom (cf. 1 Cor. 1:24, 30).

Just think: who sends prophets? Prophets speak God’s Word, so only *God* sends prophets.

So Jesus is saying, “As the *wisdom* of God—as *God* himself—I will send you prophets and apostles, some of whom you will kill and persecute.”

Jesus knows the hearts of the Jewish religious authorities and what they will do.

Earlier in Luke, it was said that “the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected the purpose of God for themselves” (Luke 7:30). And in fact, by this point, Jesus has already told his 12 apostles *twice* that he will “be rejected by the elders and chief priests and *scribes* [that is, religious *lawyers*], and be killed, and on the third day be raised” (Luke 9:22, 44).

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<sup>4</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Luke*, rev. ed., PTW (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013).

In other words, you could say that Jesus is *prophesying directly* to the lawyers how they will reject and kill not only him—the Son of God, the Wisdom of God, the Word of God incarnate—but how they will *also* kill and persecute others he will send after him. And that’s exactly what we see happen throughout the book of Acts and church history. *All* the apostles except the apostle John were martyred.

So why is Jesus saying this to the lawyers? He’s *exposing* that they’re *no different* than their forefathers who rejected and killed the Old Testament prophets. Like their forefathers, they will *also* reject, persecute, and kill the Son of God and all those who sends afterwards to reveal God’s Word to them.

So in effect, their building of the prophets’ tombs was hypocritical. They say their forefathers were wrong and they would never do such a thing, but Jesus says that their *hearts* are the same and they’re actually going to do the *exact same* things that their forefathers did. And so, they “consent to the deeds of [their] fathers” and are just as guilty as them.

And then, Jesus takes it one step further. He says that the blood of *all* the prophets, shed from the foundation of the world, will be charged against “this generation,” and then he gives two examples—Abel and Zechariah.

Abel was the first martyr in Genesis; and Zechariah, who was openly and wickedly killed in the temple, was the last martyr in 2 Chronicles, which is the last book in the Hebrew Bible. Our English Old Testament ends with the book of Malachi, but in the Hebrew ordering of the Old Testament, it ends with 2 Chronicles.

So Jesus is saying, “From the first martyr to the last martyr in the Old Testament—and every martyr in between—their blood is on your hands. This evil generation will be judged guilty as if they killed *all* of them.”

But how is it *fair* that all the blood of the prophets from throughout the Old Testament should be charged against *that* generation, when *none* of them had *actually* killed those prophets?

Think back to earlier in this chapter, where Jesus said that the queen of the South and the men of Nineveh will rise up at the day of judgment to *condemn* “this generation” because they received so much less than they did, yet they repented, believed, and praised God. And behold, Jesus is so much greater than the wisdom of King Solomon and the preaching the prophet Jonah; he is the King of the kingdom of God and the Wisdom of God himself.

That generation had received the *greatest* revelation of God’s Word because the Word of God was standing *incarnate* right in front of them. And yet, Jesus knows their hearts and how they are set on rejecting and killing *him*.

And how can we even begin to compare the worth of the blood of Christ? How precious is the blood of Jesus that even the blood of *all* the Old Testament prophets still falls short!

And so, arguing from the *lesser* to the *greater*, that generation stands guilty of the blood of all the prophets in the Old Testament because they will kill someone *infinitely greater* than *all* of them—the Son of God himself.

But *why* will they persecute and kill Jesus and those he sends after him? For the *same reason* that their forefathers did.

The basic message of all the Old Testament prophets was simply this: “Turn away from your sins in repentance and turn towards the LORD in faith.” Repent and believe. And their forefathers murdered them for that message.

And that was the same message that Jesus proclaimed in his ministry: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:15). And that generation will murder Jesus for that message.



But why is this message so offensive? Because it confronts us with our sin. It exposes our inadequacy. It tells us that we are *not* righteous, good, and acceptable in and of ourselves. And this is *especially* offensive for anyone who *thinks* that they're really *not* that bad—that it's enough to simply appear clean on the outside while our hearts remain unclean.

All of us naturally *recoil* when confronted with our sins rather than to *repent* of them. Our tendency is to justify *ourselves* rather than to have *God* justify us. We want to feel *proud* of what *we've* accomplished by our *own* blood, sweat, and tears, rather than to be *humbled* by what *Jesus* has accomplished for us by *his* blood poured out for us on the cross.

Our hearts don't naturally gravitate towards *embracing* Jesus as our Savior, but we're naturally *embittered* that anyone would dare confront us with our *need* for a Savior.

That's the sinful seed in all of us that, left unchecked by restraining grace, gives way to the same murderous intentions that Jesus is exposing here in the lawyers.

Now, at this point, it's very easy for some of us to think that this has very little relevance to us because *we* didn't kill Jesus Christ. We're not *that* generation.

But just think for a moment: who does that sound like? Wasn't it the very people that Jesus is charging with all the blood of the Old Testament prophets who said, "If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets" (Matt. 23:30)?

If you're *not* convinced that there's enough evil in your heart to do what the lawyers did in that generation, then you are in probably in the most danger of committing something like that.

Gordon MacDonald was the former president of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, a pastor, and the author of many Christian books. *But* he had an affair with his church secretary, and it led to him losing his ministry. By God's grace, his family stayed together and he was able to reconcile with his wife. But it was *especially* traumatic because he was a Christian leader who was respected worldwide.

Joe Novenson, who is now a pastor, was a seminary student when this scandal happened and went public. And he was wondering *how* in the world that someone like Gordon MacDonald could fall into such *heinous* sin. So he was audacious enough to contact him and ask him out to a meal, and he agreed! So Joe drove down from Philadelphia where he was in seminary to New York to have a meal with him. He asked him question after question, and was just floored by Gordon MacDonald's love for Jesus and his biblical wisdom.

Finally, near the end of the conversation, Joe mustered up the courage to ask one last question: "Dr. MacDonald, how could a man like you, who loves *Jesus* as much as you do, who believes the *Gospel* as much as you do, who believes the *Bible* like you do, who had such a rich ministry at the *local church* and around the *world* like you do—how could you have done what you did?"

And he said, "Joe, you understand that there's enough evil in your heart to destroy the world three times over, right?" "Yes, sir." "Joe, I didn't believe that about myself. And that's why I fell."<sup>5</sup>

This is a stark warning for *all* of us, because there's enough evil in our hearts to destroy the world three times over.

If we ever begin to forget how sinful we are and how prone to sin we are, we are in for a massive fall. And that should *rightfully* scare us—that we are capable of doing some of the most wicked things, even crucifying again the very Savior that we say we love (Heb. 6:6). And we would be wise *never* to forget that.

So guilty of adding burdens to God's Word, guilty of killing prophets of God's Word, and the third indictment against the lawyers was that they are...

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<sup>5</sup> Ligon Duncan, "The Sons of God" (lecture, Covenant Theology from Reformed Theological Seminary, 2016), <https://subsplash.com/+3c13/learn-about-rtts/mi/+47e3923>. See also Marc Fisher, "Clinton's Pastor With A Past," *Washington Post*, September 28, 1998, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/style/daily/clinpastor0928.htm?noredirect=on>.

### III. Guilty of depriving people of God's Word (v. 52)

Verse 52 says this:

<sup>52</sup> 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."

The picture that Jesus gives here is of a door that must be opened by a key, and once the door is open, a person can walk through the doorway to enter into a place.

So what is "the key of knowledge"? All throughout this passage, Jesus has been referring to *God's Word*. The "burdens" were scribal interpretations of *God's Word* that functioned as *additions* to God's Word. The "prophets" were messengers of *God's Word* that they were bent on persecuting and killing. And here, the final indictment is that the lawyers *took away* "the key of knowledge"—or God's Word—from God's people.

And what is the *place* that the religious authorities "did not enter" and that they "hindered" others from entering?

Matthew's parallel account gives us insight; it says this in...

Matthew 23:13 = "But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut **the kingdom of heaven** in people's faces. For you neither enter yourselves nor allow those who would enter to go in.

The place that a person does or does not enter is "the kingdom of heaven" (or the kingdom of God). And it's even more emphatically stated here; it's not *just* "you *hindered* those who were entering," but "you *shut* the kingdom of heaven in people's faces." It's the image of not just being reluctant to *unlock* the door, but it's someone *slamming* a door in your face.

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Now the irony to all this is that the lawyers *thought* they were actually *opening* up the door to understanding God's Word. That's why they clarified so much. But with no less than 6,000 additional laws, it all began to *obscure* God's Word. It became more about the scribal interpretations of God's Word than it was about God's Word itself. It just became about what the *scribes* said rather than what *God* has said.

They *took away* God's Word from God's people, when *God's Word* is what they really needed to enter the kingdom of God. And so, in effect, they were slamming the door shut, locking it, throwing away the key, and standing in front of the door to block people from entering.

God's Word tells us how to enter the kingdom of God because we could never figure it out on our own. God's Word is God's revelation that reveals to us who *God* is and who *we* are in relation to God. From beginning to end, it tells a single story of salvation that moves through creation, fall, redemption, and consummation—or how God made us, how we disobeyed him and deserve his judgment, how he has made a way of salvation for his people through the person and work of Jesus Christ, and how he will one day bring about the restoration and consummation of all his creation.

And at the end of Luke's Gospel account, the resurrected Jesus appeared to his disciples, and this is what is says in...

Luke 24:27, 44-47 = And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself... Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day

rise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.

So Jesus does the complete *opposite* of what the lawyers have done. He *opens* their minds to understand Scripture—and it's all about him. *That's* how you enter the kingdom of God; it's when you understand that all of God's Word is about Jesus, and how we can't actually follow the Law as we ought because of our sin, and how *he* is the sin-bearer and law-keeper; he's done it all. And the only way to *respond*—the only way to *enter* the kingdom of God—is to repent of our sins and believe in Jesus for the forgiveness of our sins, and to follow him as our Lord and Savior all the days of our lives.

*That's* what God's Word is all about.

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But sadly, the lawyers *blocked* people from seeing Jesus because they blocked people from even seeing *God's Word* itself and understanding it. Their scribal interpretations gave the impression that only the "experts in the law" could understand God's Word, but irony was that they themselves couldn't understand it. They read God's Word in light of *themselves* and what *they* must do rather than seeing their own inability and recognizing that everything points to *Jesus* and what *he* will do to accomplish salvation for sinners.

And so, unfortunately, the lawyers not only prevented *themselves* from entering—where they couldn't see Jesus, they rejected him, and ultimately they're going to kill him—but they also prevented or *hindered* others through obstructions.

So what does this have to do with us? Is this only for preacher and teachers of God's Word? No, because God holds *each of us* accountable for rightly knowing, understanding, and applying God's Word—for rightly *handling* God's Word.

When Jesus came, he held the Israelites responsible for knowing, understanding, and applying God's Word. He constantly said things like, "Have you not read...?" (Matt. 12:3, 5; 19:4; 22:31), "Have you never read in the Scriptures...?" (Matt. 21:42), or even, "You are wrong because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God" (Matt. 22:29; cf. Matt. 9:13; 12:7; 15:3; 21:13; John 3:10; et al.).

And not just Jesus, but Paul wrote New Testament letters to entire *congregations* assuming that they would read and understand, and even instructed them to have other churches read the letters (Col. 4:16; cf. John 20:30-31; 2 Cor. 1:13; Eph. 3:4; 1 Tim. 4:13; James 1:1, 22-25; 1 Peter 1:1; 2:2; 2 Peter 1:19; 1 John 5:13).

So all throughout Scripture, if you are part of God's people, we are *all* held responsible and accountable for rightly *handling* God's Word.

If you're not sure how to do that, I encourage you to continue to come to Sunday Celebration and join a LIFE Group, where week-in and week-out, we seek to read, understand, and apply God's Word together.

Maybe you don't know everyone there, or maybe you're tired, or it's too far—there's lots of reasons to maybe *not* go. But I encourage you to make the effort to go because it's a regular place where we can better understand what God's Word has to say and where we can grow together as a spiritual family as we're committed to living it out together.

There are regular opportunities in the life of the church to grow in rightly knowing, understanding, and applying God's Word in our lives.

But God's Word should *also* continue to reverberate in our *homes*. Whether you're single or married, I encourage you to make it a regular practice to read the Bible, pray in light of what you read, and sing songs of worship to God. And if you have kids, I encourage you to make family worship—where you read, pray, and sing—a daily part of what you do each morning or each night.

Husbands and fathers, please take the lead in this for your family. All you need to do is simply say, “I want our family to know, love, and follow God with all of our hearts—and that always begins with centering on his Word. So let’s read, pray, and sing each day at this time as a family.” And then follow through on that each day.

I’m not saying that a certain practice of family worship is a *must*, but it’s a suggestion for what *is* required of parents, which is to know, teach, and discuss God’s Word with your children on a regular basis (Deut. 6:4-9).

If you’re not sure where to begin with that, please talk with other couples and families to learn from and encourage one another to be rooted in God’s Word in your homes.

Still, not just in the church and in our homes, but God’s Word should continue to reverberate in other contexts throughout the week—in our schools, workplaces, gyms, and wherever else we find ourselves.

As we understand God’s Word, it should shape how we view what we do and how we do it. It should influence what’s important to us and what we talk about.

As followers of Christ, we *long* to *reveal* Jesus to those around us through our lives and our words, that they might also enter the kingdom of God.

Now having said all of that, we should recognize that this passage is stated as a *warning* for us.

Remember, the religious authorities took away God’s Word from *themselves* before they took it away from *others*.

For most of us, the danger isn’t that *others* will take away God’s Word, but *you* will take it away from yourself, your family, and others.

Even though God’s Word is *opened* to us each Lord’s Day and throughout the week in LIFE Group, we’re tempted *not* to prioritize gathering together under God’s Word.

Even though we have access to God’s Word in our homes, we’re tempted to keep it *closed*; thus, indirectly teaching ourselves, our spouses, and our kids that God’s Word is irrelevant to our everyday lives.

Even though *we* have entered the kingdom of God, we’re tempted to hinder *others* from God’s Word—not necessarily through adding burdens to God’s Word but by *not* sharing God’s Word at all with people.

So as we close, may we *not* be found guilty of adding burdens to God’s Word, guilty of killing prophets of God’s Word, or guilty of depriving people of God’s Word. Rather, may we be a church that *rightly* handles God’s Word—rightly knowing, understanding, and applying God’s Word—so as to *help* others to enter the kingdom of God.

## **Life Application**

They’re just a few questions for us to reflect on in light of this passage.

1. How have I been adding burdens to God’s Word?

If you’re not sure, think about what you often feel guilty about and ask yourself, “Is something that is prescribed in Scripture that I am violating? Or is this something I have added to Scripture that I feel guilty for not doing?”

Also, think about what you often judge others for, and ask yourself the same questions.

2. How have I underestimated the amount of sin that exists in my heart?

What are some sins that others have committed where you say to yourself, "I would *never* have done that"? Just remember that pride comes before the fall. That's what the lawyers said before they later had the Son of God himself crucified.

What are the *seed* forms of such sins in your life that you're justifying? If you haven't committed adultery, are you justifying pornography and lusting after others? If you haven't committed murder, are you justifying anger, gossip, and bitterness towards others?

3. How have I been depriving myself, my family, or others of God's Word?

If you're not sure, ask others for their input. Ask fellow brothers and sisters in Christ if they see that God's Word is what guides your decisions. Ask your spouse or children if they think that your family prioritizes God's Word together. Ask yourself if your friends outside of the church know that you're a follower of Christ who loves them and wants them to know Christ too.

## **The One Thing**

***Take care how you handle God's Word,  
so as not to hinder others from entering God's kingdom.***

## **Conclusion**

If you're able, can we all stand as we respond to God's Word together?