

“CORRECTING RELIGIOUS MISTAKES”

**I. Introduction**

- A. One of the recurring themes in the Gospels is the friction that we see between Jesus and the Pharisees.
- B. The Pharisees were the religious heroes among pious Jews in Jesus’s day.
- C. They were the ones who were serious about upholding God’s law, and they led the people by their teaching and their example.
- D. While Jesus made it clear that he had not come to abolish the law but to fulfill it, he still had many clashes with the Pharisees over their handling of the law.
- E. Jesus confronted them for adding their own traditions to the law and for thinking that they could merit God’s favor by their keeping of the law.
- F. In the text that we are studying today, we see how Jesus used the opportunity that was presented to him when he was a guest in the home of one Pharisee to correct some of the Pharisees’ mistaken notions about religion.

**II. On the Sabbath**

- A. Luke begins this passage by telling us that Jesus went to dine in the home of a ruler of the Pharisees one Sabbath day.
  - 1. The very mention of the terms ‘Pharisee’ and ‘Sabbath’ in the same sentence should alert us that a dispute is about to unfold.
  - 2. Luke has already told us about a number of disputes between Jesus and the Pharisees that had to do with the subject of the proper keeping of the Sabbath.

3. The Pharisees took offense at the fact that Jesus did not abide by the traditions that they had added to the Fourth Commandment.
  4. Jesus performed a number of healings on the Sabbath, even though the Pharisees had strict rules about what kinds of situations made it permissible to extend relief to the sick and hurting on the Sabbath.
  5. In their view, the only way such activity was not a violation of the Sabbath was if it was done in response to a life-and-death situation.
  6. But the healings that Jesus performed on the Sabbath did not meet that criteria, and this caused the Pharisees to see those healings as instances of breaking the Sabbath.
  7. As we have noted in previous sermons in our study of Luke, there was nothing in God's law to support the Pharisees' line of reasoning on this.
  8. Jesus's Sabbath conflicts with the Pharisees did not come about because he had a relaxed attitude toward keeping the Sabbath.
  9. Our Lord was fully committed to upholding each and every one of God's commandments, including the Fourth Commandment.
  10. He believed that there were ten commandments, not just nine.
  11. However, he was not willing to be bound by the Pharisees extra-biblical traditions.
- B. Our text tells us that the Pharisees were watching Jesus very carefully when he entered the house for this meal.
1. This clues us in to the fact that this invitation was not really extended to Jesus as an expression of hospitality.
  2. While the host may have had some genuine interest in hearing the things that Jesus had to say, it is clear that he and his fellow Pharisees were mainly looking for evidence that they could use

against Jesus.

3. It is possible that they were setting a trap for Jesus on this occasion.
  4. We cannot know for sure, but it could be that they had purposely invited this man who was suffering from dropsy in order to incite Jesus to perform a healing on the Sabbath.
  5. On the other hand, feasts of this nature were semi-public events in that culture, and people who had not been formally invited to the meal were permitted to gather in the courtyard to listen to the dinner conversation.
  6. That being the case, it could be that the man with dropsy was just part of the crowd that was gathered around the perimeter of the dining area.
  7. Either way, it is clear that the Pharisees were taking a great interest in how Jesus would respond to this situation.
  8. They thought that this would give them grounds for lodging a complaint against Jesus with the ruling council, the Sanhedrin.
- C. Dropsy, or edema, is a condition in which bodily tissue swells up due to a collection of excess bodily fluids.
1. It may have been an indication that this man was experiencing some kind of organ failure.
  2. As soon as Jesus saw this man, he knew what the Pharisees were thinking.
  3. So he asked them, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?"
  4. It was a simple, and brilliant, question.
  5. If they said that it was lawful, they would be endorsing Jesus's Sabbath healings.

6. If they said that it was not lawful, they would come across as heartless.
  7. When the Pharisees had nothing to say in response, Jesus took the man and healed him.
  8. Then he pointed out that the Pharisees would not hesitate to save a son or an ox that fell into a well on the Sabbath day.
  9. In other words, they would not make their children or even their animals wait until after the Sabbath was over before they could be rescued.
  10. In the same way, there was no reason why the man with dropsy had to wait until after the Sabbath to be healed.
- D. The Sabbath is a day to rest from our labors, but it is not a day to rest from extending compassion to those who are in need.
1. The Sabbath is a day for man's benefit.
  2. It goes against the intent of the Sabbath to say that it is wrong to heal on the Sabbath.
  3. While we should not let other activities hinder us from attending public worship on the Lord's Day, the sanctifying of the Sabbath should never be construed in a manner that prevents real human needs from being met.
  4. This is why the Westminster Confession of Faith includes works of necessity and mercy when it talks about the activities that are appropriate on the Lord's Day.
  5. The fact that the Pharisees interpreted the Fourth Commandment in the way that they did revealed their mistaken thinking about the law.

6. For them, keeping God's law was not a matter of loving God and loving their neighbor.
7. Because they viewed their law-keeping as the means of securing God's blessings, it was really a matter of calculated self-interest for them.

### III. On Status

- A. In the next part of the passage, Jesus tells a parable to the people who had been invited to this meal at the Pharisee's house.
  1. He was prompted to do this when he noticed that the guests scrambled to find the places of honor at the meal.
  2. This is not surprising in light of what we know about the desire that most Pharisees had for the praise and recognition of men.
  3. They were guided by something that is referred to in our day as status-anxiety.
  4. They found their sense of self-worth in the way other people saw them.
  5. This is not something that was unique to Pharisees.
  6. It is a temptation that afflicts all of us at one time or another.
  7. It is the temptation to be driven by the desire to earn the accolades, the approval, and perhaps even the envy of others.
  8. It is the temptation to live your life in hopes of gaining acceptance with the so-called "in-crowd."
  9. As C.S. Lewis once warned, "Unless you take measures to prevent it, this desire is going to be one of the chief motives of your life." [*The Weight of Glory*, 151-2]

- B. In his parable, Jesus says that if you are invited to a wedding feast, you should not take your place in a seat of honor but in one of the lowest seats.
1. If you sit in a high place, you are opening yourself up to the prospect of having to give up your seat to someone who is more important than you are, and that would be embarrassing.
  2. But if you sit in a low place, the host may invite you to come up to a higher place.
  3. Now, Jesus did not tell this parable in order to give practical advice on how to avoid embarrassment at public functions.
  4. We have to remember that the parables illustrate what the kingdom of God is like.
  5. There is no boasting or self-importance in God's kingdom.
  6. None of us can claim God's approval as a right on the grounds of the positions we hold, or our reputation in the eyes of others, or the good opinion that we may have of ourselves.
  7. The kingdom of God belongs to those who are poor in spirit.
  8. The only people who will be honored in God's kingdom are those who humble themselves before the Lord.
  9. And the key to cultivating humility is to keep your focus on God rather than on yourself.
  10. If you think often about who God is and about the price that Christ paid to redeem you, you will be ashamed of your pride whenever you see it flaring up.
  11. You will learn to go about your life with a healthy suspicion of your proud heart and its desire to exalt itself above others.
  12. You will be more apt to esteem others better than yourself.

#### IV. On Generosity

- A. This brings us to the last three verses of our passage, where Jesus addresses the man who invited him to this meal.
1. Jesus tells this man that when he gives a banquet, he should not invite his friends and family, but those who are poor and lame.
  2. Now, in saying this, Jesus certainly does not mean that it is wrong to invite your friends and family over for a meal.
  3. There were times in Jesus's own life when he enjoyed the company of his closest friends.
  4. There is nothing wrong with that.
  5. But the point that Jesus is making here is that it is no evidence of having a generous heart if a person only extends hospitality and kindness when it is likely to be reciprocated.
  6. To be big-hearted only toward those who will show the same big-heartedness to you is as much a matter of helping yourself as it is of helping others.
  7. If you only show interest in the people who are able to do something for you in return, then you are not really loving people.
  8. You are simply using them.
- B. It is important to understand that this can even be true of the generosity that we extend to people who have no possibility of paying us back.
1. The fact that a particular individual is not able to return your favor does not automatically mean that you are not acting out of self-interest.
  2. If you are charitable because you are trying to get others to recognize and respect you, then you are not truly being generous.

3. You are serving yourself.
  4. If you help people in need because you are trying to earn God's approval, you are not truly showing kindness.
  5. You are using people in hopes of getting something from God.
  6. This is why Martin Luther said in his treatise *On the Freedom of a Christian* that we cannot even do good works until we are set free from trying to do them to secure or retain God's favor.
  7. Anyone who does good works in hopes of putting God in his debt is acting out of self-interest, not out of love.
- C. Our text ends with Jesus saying that those who serve others without looking for any payback will receive a reward at "the resurrection of the just."
1. This phrase refers to the resurrection of those who have already been declared just through faith in Christ.
  2. While every human being will be raised from the dead on the last day, only believers will participate in the resurrection of the just.
  3. The rest of humanity will be raised to shame and everlasting contempt.
  4. This is the resurrection that is being talked about in Revelation 20 when it speaks of those who will be brought before the great white throne and judged on the basis of what is recorded in the book of deeds.
  5. Believers will not go through that judgment, because our names are written in the other book that is mentioned in Revelation 20, the book of life.
  6. The resurrection of the just is not a resurrection to judgment, but a resurrection to eternal life.



7. As John Fesko explains, "What awaits the believer is not a second verdict at the final judgment but rather his bodily resurrection, the revelation of the verdict that has already been passed in his justification." [*Justification*, 324]
- D. Jesus's teaching in our text does tell us that believers will be rewarded on the last day according to our deeds, but this does not mean that the reward will be on account of our deeds.
1. The reward that we receive on that day will not be given to us because we have merited it.
  2. It is impossible for us to merit anything from God, because even our best deeds are still polluted by our sin.
  3. What Jesus is telling us in this verse is that the measure of the reward that we are given in the kingdom will be commensurate with the good that we have done in this life.
  4. God does not owe us anything for our good works, because they aren't in themselves good in his sight.
  5. But because he has already accepted us in Christ, he is pleased to accept our imperfect works and even to reward them.
- E. We have to exercise caution in our handling of passages that speak of future rewards for our works.
1. It is not uncommon for people to think that such passages indicate that believers will be judged on the last day on the basis of their works.
  2. Such thinking undermines the Bible's teaching on justification by faith alone.
  3. It denies what the Bible says is true of those who have been justified by faith.

4. Paul says in Romans 5 that those who have been justified have peace with God, enjoy a right standing with God, and have the hope of the glory of God.
5. If you trust in Jesus Christ, then you are already in possession of these things, and they can never be taken away from you.
6. Of course, it is true that our good works serve as evidence that we really possess saving faith.
7. True faith in Christ always produces some measure of good works and a life that is characterized by striving after new obedience.
8. But we must never think that our works will be the basis of God's final acceptance of us.
9. To think that is to fall into the biggest religious mistake of all, the mistake of thinking that our works can contribute to our salvation.
10. As Paul says in Romans 11, if salvation "is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace." (v. 6)