

Bible Study Notes Nov. 12, 2014: (Luke 11:42-46)

⁴² *But woe unto you, Pharisees! for ye tithe mint and rue and all manner of herbs, and pass over judgment and the love of God: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.* ⁴³ *Woe unto you, Pharisees! for ye love the uppermost seats in the synagogues, and greetings in the markets.* ⁴⁴ *Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are as graves which appear not, and the men that walk over them are not aware of them.* ⁴⁵ *Then answered one of the lawyers, and said unto him, Master, thus saying thou reproachest us also.* ⁴⁶ *And he said, Woe unto you also, ye lawyers! for ye lade men with burdens grievous to be borne, and ye yourselves touch not the burdens with one of your fingers.*

Today's Gospel is of great importance for Orthodox Christians today. It shows that the love of God is more important than external aspects of our faith; the interior (spiritual) life is more important than looking good on the outside; and we are to avoid hypocrisy by practicing what we preach.

St. Theophylact says that while the Pharisees would make a tithe of even the most insignificant items, the Lord therefore is saying "*Just as you do not neglect these small matters, so you ought also to concern yourself with judgment and the love of God.*" Because they were unjust, ruining orphans and widows, He says "*You ought to have judgment*" meaning, you ought to judge fairly. And because they were scorers of God, carelessly performing holy deeds, He commands them to have love of God, for he who loves God does not perform with scorn the deeds of God. He says there are two types of love, love of God and love of neighbor and that love of neighbor means not tyrannizing or dealing with our neighbor unjustly, unfairly or dishonestly. When a man loves his neighbor (not for some worldly reason or because of a shameful passion, but according to God) it can be said that THIS is that love of God which God has commanded and which He accepts.

Concerning the love that the Pharisees had for getting the uppermost seat in the synagogues and greetings in the markets, St. Cyril of Alexandria says that this reproof is also beneficial to us. For it shows that they were fond of praise and indulged themselves in empty ostentation. He goes on to talk about how we should seek to please God, not men, and then God will justify us and bestow whatever honor or benefit He sees fit. St. Cyril also makes a connection with those who seek to look good on the outside, but are full of pride, vainglory, hypocrisy, etc. on the inside; as being like marble tombs that look beautiful and honorable on the outside, but inside are full of disgusting impurities and dead men's bones.

The rebuke to the Jewish lawyers was for their hypocrisy in telling others how they should fulfill burdensome particulars of the law, when they themselves did not fulfill those things at all. St. Theophylact says the lawyers were different from the Pharisees. The Pharisees thought of themselves as ascetics who were set apart from all the others. But the lawyers were scribes and teachers who answered other men's questions about the law. St. Cyril says that it was the lawyers themselves who acknowledged their guilt, since Christ addressed His reproofs to the Pharisees. When they accuse Christ of reproaching the lawyers, they admit that they are liable to the same accusations as the Pharisees, of one mind with them and partners of their evil deeds...if you hate reproof as being a reproach, show yourself superior to the faults with which you are charged: or rather do not regard as a reproach the word of correction...Far better would it be to love reproof and ask for deliverance from your maladies and healing for the ulcers of your soul. Far better were it rather to say, "Heal me, O Lord, and I shall be healed: save me, and I shall be saved: for You are my praise."

When a Christian takes their faith seriously and tries to love God and love their neighbor, as Christ commanded us, then their priorities are in the right order and naturally, their conduct in all other parts of their life will be in the right spirit. However, these Pharisees and lawyers were trying to appear to be righteous on the outside, while inwardly they were conspiring and scheming how they could get around the requirements of the Law and enrich themselves.

Something else in this Gospel that is easily overlooked is the practice of tithing itself. Just because the Pharisees had their priorities backwards, does not mean that the practice of tithing was wrong. In fact, some biblical scholars even try to say that since the practice of tithing is not literally specified in the Gospels, there is no need for Christians to tithe. However, when Christ says "*these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the*

*other undone,” it is implied that the practice of tithing should be practiced. One could also draw a similar conclusion regarding fasting: that since Christ did not spell out that Christians should fast on Wednesdays and Fridays or during Great Lent for 40 days, that it is not necessary to fast. It is well-known that most Christians today, especially non-Orthodox Christians, do not practice fasting. Yet, in *The Didache* (one of the earliest Apostolic writings from the 1st century), Christians were commanded to fast on Wednesdays and Fridays. When the Pharisees asked why Christ’s disciples did not fast, he replied that they did not need to fast while He (the heavenly Bridegroom) was with them, but that the days would come when they would fast.*

St. John Chrysostom in his homily on Ephesians 2 said, “Woe to him, it is said, who doeth not alms; and if this was the case under the Old Covenant, much more is it under the New. If, where the getting of wealth was allowed, and the enjoyment of it, and the care of it, there was such provision made for the succoring the poor, how much more in that Dispensation, where we are commanded to surrender all we have? For what did not they of old do? They gave tithes, and tithes again upon tithes for orphans, widows, and strangers; whereas someone was saying to me in astonishment at another, ‘Why, such a one gives tithes!’ What a load of disgrace does this expression imply, since what was not a matter of wonder with the Jews has come to be so in the case of the Christians? If there was danger then in omitting tithes, think how great it must be now.”

According to the Apostle Paul (I Cor. 9:9-14) “For it is written in the Law of Moses, “You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain.” Is it oxen God is concerned about? Or does He say it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written, that he who plows should plow in hope, and he who threshes in hope should be partaker of his hope. If we have sown spiritual things for you, is it a great thing if we reap your material things? If others are partakers of this right over you, are we not even more? Nevertheless we have not used this right, but endure all things lest we hinder the gospel of Christ. Do you not know that those who minister the holy things eat of the things of the temple, and those who serve at the altar partake of the offerings of the altar? Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel.”

Again, in Hebrews Chapter 7, a footnote in the Orthodox Study Bible says, “Note the importance of the tithe: The desire to enter into the ministrations of a priesthood is fulfilled when such a liturgical offering is made. Throughout the Old Testament, Israelites showed their continuing desire for God’s priesthood by continuing to give a tenth of all they received.”

As St. Cyril says, “Let us therefore flee from the malady of hypocrisy: and may there rather dwell within us a pure and uncorrupt mind, resplendent with glorious virtues. For this will unite us unto Christ; by Whom and with Whom to God the Father be praise and dominion, with the Holy Spirit, for ever and ever. Amen.”