

# CONCERNING THE WAY

March 20, 2012

## LESSON 132: THE GOSPEL OF LUKE



### Chapter 11

**Luke 11:1-4** Once Jesus was praying in a certain place. After he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples." (2) So he told them, "Whenever you pray you are to say, 'Father, may your name be kept holy. May your kingdom come. (3) Keep giving us every day our daily bread, (4) and forgive us our sins, as we forgive everyone who sins against us. And never bring us into temptation.'"

- We see Jesus praying often in the gospels. He prayed at the time of His baptism (3:21), and at the time of the choosing of His disciples (6:12). He was often alone praying (5:16; 9:18) and also prayed with others around (9:28-29). He prayed for Peter (22:32), and He prayed in the garden before His betrayal (22:40-44). He even prayed on the cross (23:46).
- It was the regular custom for a Rabbi to teach his disciples a simple prayer that they might use regularly. John had done that for his disciples, and now Jesus' disciples came asking him to do the same for them. This is Luke's version of the Lord's Prayer. It's a little shorter than Matthew's in Matthew 6:9-13, but it teaches about how to pray and what to pray for.
- Let's unpack this model prayer that Jesus gave us. He begins by calling on God in an intimate way, Father. As we have talked about before, if you have trusted Christ for your salvation, you have been adopted into God's family. You are His son or daughter, and now have the privilege of calling Him Father, and He is so much more than your earthly father could ever be. We're not coming to someone in prayer that we wonder if He has our best interests in mind, but someone who delights in supplying His children's needs.
- He then made five requests. The first two have to do with God's interests. We should pay attention to the order of the Lord's Prayer. Before we ask for anything for ourselves, God and his glory, and the reverence He deserves, come first.
- The first request is that God's name be "treated as" holy. The Greek word means "to set apart or sanctify". So we should ask that God's reputation be honored and respected by everyone.
- The second request was "your kingdom come". John the Baptist, Jesus, the Twelve, and the 70 had been preaching about the coming of God's kingdom. When a person prays for the coming of the kingdom, he is agreeing with Jesus and His followers in asking the Father to bring the Kingdom of God to earth.
- The third request was for daily bread. Of course, this doesn't just mean bread, but it means nourishing and filling food. It is asking for food that we need to sustain our lives for the day. This also represents any physical need. We're not to worry about the unknown future, but to live a day at a time.
- The fourth request has to do with our relationship to God—the forgiveness of past sins. Luke had already linked the forgiveness of sins to faith (7:36-50). When you ask God for forgiveness of your sins you are expressing faith that God will forgive you. Then we give proof of our faith by forgiving others.
- The fifth request is "never bring us into temptation". But why do we need to pray that since God does

not want people to sin? It means that we are to pray that we be kept from situations that would cause us to sin. However, God sometimes allows those situations to test and challenge us.

- You can use this prayer just like Jesus gave it, but if you do, let it not be just something you say over and over, but a model or start of a sincere conversation with your heavenly Father. It's worth reading what Jesus said before the prayer in Matthew, about how NOT to pray:

**Matthew 6:5-8 "And whenever you pray, don't be like the hypocrites who love to stand in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they will be seen by people. Truly I tell you, they have their full reward! (6) But whenever you pray, go into your room, close the door, and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. (7) "When you are praying, don't say meaningless words like the gentiles do, for they think they will be heard because of their wordiness. (8) Don't be like them, because your Father knows what you need before you ask him.**

- One of the greatest things that was ever said about family worship is the Rabbinic saying, "He who prays within his house surrounds it with a wall that is stronger than iron."
- But some bad practices had crept into the Jewish habits of prayer. I should point out that this isn't just a Jewish failing; they can and do happen to any of us.
  - Prayer for many Jews became formalized. There were two things that every Jew was supposed to use every day. The first was the Shema, which consists of three short passages of scripture-- Deuteronomy 6:4-9; Deuteronomy 11:13-21; Numbers 15:37-41. Shema gets its name from the verse which was the center of the whole thing: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord."
  - The full Shema had to be recited by every Jew every morning and every evening. It had to be said as early as possible. It had to be said as soon as the light was strong enough to let you distinguish between blue and white. It had to be said before the third hour, that is, 9 a.m.; and in the evening it had to be said before 9 p.m. If it was five minutes before 9, no matter where you were, at home, in the street, at work, in the synagogue, you must stop and say it.
  - There were many Jews who loved the Shema and who repeated it with reverence and adoration and love; but of course there were many more that blabbered their way through it, and went on their way. The Shema for many became a vain repetition, which men mumbled through like some spell or incantation. Of course we Christians shouldn't criticize, because how many times do we say grace repetitively and quickly just to get to the food as fast as we can!
  - The second thing which every Jew had to repeat daily was called the Shemoneh 'Esreh which means The Eighteen. It consisted of eighteen prayers, and was, and still is, an essential part of the synagogue service. Most of these prayers are short, and nearly all of them are very beautiful.
  - The twelfth goes like this: *"Let Thy mercy, O Lord, be showed upon the upright, the humble, the elders of thy people Israel, and the rest of its teachers; be favorable to the pious strangers amongst us, and to us all. Give thou a good reward to those who sincerely trust in thy name, that our lot may be cast among them in the world to come, that our hope be not deceived. Praised be thou, O Lord, who art the hope and confidence of the faithful."*
  - You couldn't find a more beautiful liturgy in any Christian church than the Shemoneh 'Esreh. The law was that the Jew must recite it three times a day, once in the morning, once in the afternoon, and once in the evening.
  - The same thing happened again. The devout Jew prayed it with loving devotion; but there were many that just babbled it as a formula. They even came up with a summary which you could use,

if you didn't have the time or the memory to repeat the whole eighteen.

- Also, the Jewish liturgy had stated prayers for all occasions. There was hardly an event in life which didn't have a formula of prayer. There was prayer before and after each meal; there were prayers in connection with the light, the fire, the lightning, on seeing the new moon, comets, rain, thunderstorm, or at seeing the ocean, lakes, rivers, on receiving good news, on using new furniture, on entering or leaving a city. Everything had its prayer. Now, there is something really beautiful about this in a way. It was meant to remind the Jew that every happening in life should be brought into the presence of God.
- But the danger of prescribed prayers is formalism, and just repeating the prayers with very little meaning. The great Rabbis knew that and tried to guard against it. "If a man," they said, "says his prayers, as if to get through a set task, that is no prayer." "Do not look on prayer as a formal duty, but as an act of humility by which to obtain the mercy of God."
- Still further, the devout Jew had set times for prayer. The hours were the third, the sixth and the ninth hours, that is, 9 a.m., 12 noon and 3 p.m... Wherever you were at those times you were bound to pray. Again this could easily be something that had no meaning to you. Muslims have the same custom of praying at set times of the day.
- There was a tendency to connect prayer with certain places, and especially with the synagogue. There were certain Rabbis who said that prayer was only effective if it was offered in the Temple or in the synagogue. So many Jews practiced going to the Temple at the hours of prayer. In the first days of the Christian Church, even the disciples of Jesus thought like this, because we read of Peter and John going up to the Temple at the hour of prayer (Acts 3:1).
- The danger here was that people might come to think of God as being confined to certain holy places and forget that the whole earth is the temple of God. The wisest of the Rabbis saw this. They said, "God says to Israel, pray in the synagogue of your city; if you cannot, pray in the field; if you cannot, pray in your house; if you cannot, pray on your bed; if you cannot, commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still."
- Then there was among the Jews a tendency toward long prayers. Again, that is not just a Jewish tendency. In 18th century worship in Scotland they thought the longer you prayed the more devoted to God you were. In Scottish services there was a verse by verse lecture on scripture which lasted for an hour, and a sermon which lasted for another hour. Prayers were lengthy and spontaneous. Dr. W. D. Maxwell writes, "The efficacy of prayer was measured by its ardor and its fluency, and not least by its fervid lengthiness." Rabbi Levi said, "Whoever is long in prayer is heard." I myself remember as a young man sitting in prayer meetings listening to someone's prayer go on and on and on, and those were the people respected as most spiritual.
- There was--and still is--a kind of subconscious idea that if men "pound long enough on God's door", he will answer; that God can be talked, and even pestered, into giving in. The wisest Rabbis were well aware of this danger. "Let a man's words before God always be few, as it is said, 'Be not rash with your mouth, and let not your heart be hasty to utter a word before God; for God is in heaven, and you upon earth, therefore let your words be few'" (Ecclesiastes 5:2). "The best adoration consists in keeping silence." It is easy to confuse long-windedness with godliness, and eloquence with devotion, and that's the mistake that many of the Jews made then and many Christians have made as well.
- The last fault which Jesus found with some of the Jews was that they prayed to be seen by people. The way Jews prayed made this easy to do. The Jew prayed standing, with hands stretched out, palms upwards, and with head bowed. Prayer had to be said at 9 a.m., 12 midday, and 3 p.m. It had to be said

wherever a man might be, and it was easy for a man to make sure that at these hours he was at a busy street corner, or in a crowded city square, so that all the world might see how devoted he was.

- In effect, Jesus lays down two great rules for prayer.
  - He insists that all true prayer must be offered to God. The real fault of the people whom Jesus was criticizing was that they were praying to men and not to God. Whether in public or in private prayer, a person should have no thought in his mind and no desire in his heart but God.
  - He says that we must always remember that the God to whom we pray is a God of love who is more ready to answer than we are to pray. We do not come to a God who has to be coaxed, or pestered into answering our prayers. We come to one whose wants to answer our prayers.

**Luke 11:5-8** Then he said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, let me borrow three loaves of bread. (6) A friend of mine on a trip has dropped in on me, and I don't have anything to serve him.' (7) Suppose he answers from inside, 'Stop bothering me! The door is already locked, and my children are with me in bed. I can't get up and give you anything!' (8) I tell you, even though he doesn't want to get up and give him anything because he is his friend, he will get up and give him whatever he needs because of his persistence.

- People often traveled late in the evening to avoid the heat of the midday sun. Remember in the east hospitality is a sacred duty; and it was not enough to just give the guest a little snack; they had to be given a big spread. In the villages bread was baked at home. Only enough for the day was baked because, if it got stale, no one would want to eat it.
- In the east no one would knock on a door unless it was an emergency. In the morning the door was opened and stayed open all day, because there wasn't much privacy; but if the door was shut, that was a definite sign that the people there did not want to be disturbed.
- The poorer houses consisted of one room with only one little window. The floor was just beaten earth covered with dried reeds and rushes. The room was divided into two parts by a low platform. Two-thirds of it was on ground level. The other third was slightly raised. On the raised part the charcoal stove burned all night, and the whole family slept around it, not on raised beds but on sleeping mats. Families were usually large and they slept close together for warmth. If you got up you disturbed the whole family. Also, in the villages it was the custom to bring the livestock, the chickens and the goats, into the house at night.
- So the man who was in bed did not want to get up. But the determined borrower knocked and knocked with "shameless persistence" – that's what the Greek word means - until finally the man, knowing that by this time the whole family was disturbed anyway, got up and gave him what he needed.

**Luke 11:9-10** So I say to you: Keep asking, and it will be given you. Keep searching, and you will find. Keep knocking, and the door will be opened for you. (10) For everyone who keeps asking will receive, and the person who keeps searching will find, and the person who keeps knocking will have the door opened.

- The lesson of this parable is not to be persistent in prayer; it is not that we have to pound on God's door until we finally wear Him out to give us what we want. The point here is based on contrast. What Jesus says is, "If a cranky neighbor can in the end be compelled by a friend's shameless persistence into giving him what he needs, how much more will God who is a loving Father supply all his children's needs?"
- This does not mean we shouldn't be intense and persistent in prayer. But it does mean this, that we are

not convincing God to change His mind and give us what we want, but going to one who knows our needs better than we know them ourselves and who has an infinitely generous heart towards us. If we don't receive what we pray for, it is not because God grudgingly refuses to give it but because he has something better for us, or possibly because the timing is not quite right. There is no such thing as unanswered prayer. The answer may not be the answer we wanted or expected; but even when the answer is "no" it is an answer from the love and the wisdom of God.

**Luke 11:11-13 "What father among you, if his son asks for bread, would give him a stone, or if he asks for a fish, would give him a snake instead of the fish? (12) Or if he asks for an egg, would he give him a scorpion? (13) So if you who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who keep asking him!"**

- This analogy means that the heavenly Father gives His children what is good for them, not what harms them. Jesus encourages the people of God to ask, and says that the best gift is the Holy Spirit. The heavenly Father gives both heavenly gifts and earthly gifts.
- Verse 13 is a good example of why you have to read the Bible in its historical context to fully understand the meaning. Remember, this was before the cross, and before Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit was "poured out" on all believers. Here Israel was still in the dispensation, or age, of the Mosaic Law. Under the old covenant, the Holy Spirit only came on specific individuals for specific missions. The period while Christ was on earth was a transition time where a group of people was being prepared for this outpouring. John the Baptist, for example, had been "filled with the Holy Ghost" throughout his life (Luke 1:15), and now Christ was promising the Holy Spirit to all who would sincerely ask for Him. Believers today don't have to pray for the Holy Spirit because this prayer was answered at Pentecost (see Romans 8:9). All believers are given the Holy Spirit to indwell them permanently at their conversion. The body of every believer is a "sanctuary of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have received from God" (1 Corinthians 6:19).

**Luke 11:14-20 Jesus was driving a demon out of a man who was unable to talk. When the demon had gone out, the man began to speak, and the crowds were amazed. (15) But some of them said, "He drives out demons by Beelzebul, the ruler of the demons." (16) Others, wanting to test Jesus, kept asking him for a sign from heaven. (17) Since he knew what they were thinking, he said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself is devastated, and a divided household collapses. (18) Now if Satan is divided against himself, how can his kingdom last? For you say that I drive out demons by Beelzebul. (19) And if I drive out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your own followers drive them out? That is why they will be your judges! (20) But if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come to you.**

- As with other incidents where Jesus has cast out demons, the crowds were amazed. But now we see that some in the crowd are rejecting Him and trying to trap Him.
- This name "Beelzebul" is given for the prince of demons, Satan. So they were accusing Jesus of being possessed by Satan himself. A second group wanted Jesus to show a sign from heaven. They were probably not sincere because Luke says that they were testing Him.
- Notice Jesus said, "by whom do your own followers drive them out?" This group that was slandering Jesus must have been Pharisees, who had their own "followers" who tried to cast out demons.
- First, Jesus said it would be ridiculous for Satan to drive out his own demons, for then he would be

weakening his position and kingdom. Second, Jesus pointed out the double standard of those who were accusing Him. If their followers drove out demons, they claimed it was done by the power of God. So since Jesus cast out demons, it also had to be by God's power, which proves the King was there in front of them.

**Luke 11:21-23 "When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own mansion, his property is safe. (22) But when a stronger man than he attacks him and defeats him, he'll take away his armor in which he trusted and divide his plunder. (23) The person who isn't with me is against me, and the person who doesn't gather with me scatters."**

- Jesus' parable of the strong man and the stronger man has been interpreted in different ways. But considering the context (vv. 17-20) the strong man refers to Satan, and the stronger man to Christ Himself. Luke may have had in mind Jesus' temptation experience, or the Resurrection, or maybe the future binding of Satan. The point of the parable, however, is that Jesus is the stronger One, and so He has the right to "divide his plunder". The plunder includes formerly demon-possessed people who no longer belong to Satan.
- Luke finishes this section with the saying of Jesus that he who was not with him was against him. The people who were watching had to make up their minds. If they thought Jesus was casting out demons by the power of Satan, then they were actively against Him. There is no place for neutrality in the Christian life. The person who does nothing for the cause of Christ automatically helps the evil one. You're either on the way or in the way.

**Luke 11:24-26 "Whenever an unclean spirit goes out of a person, it wanders through dry places looking for a place to rest but doesn't find any. So it says, 'I will go back to my home that I left.' (25) When it arrives, it finds it swept clean and put in order. (26) Then it goes and brings with it seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they go in and settle there. And so the final condition of that person is worse than the first."**

- Jesus was probably referring here to the man who was formerly demon-possessed and was making him a symbol of everyone who was demon-possessed. It was critical that this man also accept what Jesus was saying about His being the Messiah, or he would end up worse than before. Matthew recorded that Jesus compared this situation to what would happen to the generation of people who were listening to Him (Matthew 12:45).

**Luke 11:27-28 As Jesus was saying this, a woman in the crowd raised her voice and said to him, "How blessed is the womb that gave birth to you and the breasts that nursed you!" (28) But he said, "Rather, how blessed are those who hear God's word and obey it!"**

- A woman shouted out that it must have been wonderful to have been Jesus' mother. The idea of physical relationship was even more important in that day. The whole nation took pride in the fact that they descended from Abraham (see John 8:33-39). Jesus pointed out that a physical relationship was unimportant compared with hearing and obeying the Word of God.
- Jesus did not deny that "blessed is the womb that gave birth to you". The angel Gabriel had said to Mary: "Blessed are you among women" (Luke 1:28), and Elizabeth had said the same (Luke 1:42). The Lord Jesus honored and cared for His mother, but He could not encourage the tendency to worship her that you can see in what this woman in the crowd said, and in the Catholic Church today. The real

blessedness, even of His mother, was that she did “hear God’s word, and obeyed it.”

**Luke 11:29-32** Now as the crowds continued to throng around Jesus, he went on to say, **"This generation is an evil generation. It craves a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah. (30) For just as Jonah became a sign to the people of Nineveh, so the Son of Man will be a sign to this generation. (31) The queen of the south will stand up at the judgment with the people of this generation and will condemn them, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon. But look, something greater than Solomon is here! (32) The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and will condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah. But look, something greater than Jonah is here!"**

- The Pharisees asked Jesus for a sign (Matthew 12:38; Mark 8:11) which Luke did not mention. A sign was a confirming miracle which showed that the spoken message was true. Never mind that He had been doing signs already, like healing and casting out demons. They must have wanted to see something more spectacular like moving a star or writing His name in big gold letters in the sky. “The sign of Jonah” must have been the message Jonah spoke to the Ninevites about his experience with the whale, surviving three days and nights in its belly. The people of Nineveh believed what Jonah said, even if they had no physical evidence. The Queen of the South traveled a great distance to listen to Solomon’s wisdom (1 Kings 10). She acted on what she heard, without any external confirmation. The point is that the generation that was listening to Jesus’ words did not have as much faith as some Gentiles who listened to the words of God in earlier times. So even Gentiles will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it.
- Our generation also will be condemned by these groups at the judgment. Think of the advantages we have now that they didn’t have. Everyone has access to a Bible, the word of God. It is easy to get now, but it came to us at a great cost. There was a time when it was death to teach the English Bible. They were very expensive and rare; some gave a load of hay for a few chapters of James or one of Paul’s letters in English. William Tyndale gave England its first printed Bible. To do that, he suffered, "poverty, exile, bitter absence from friends, hunger and thirst and cold, great dangers and innumerable other hard and sharp fightings." In 1536 he was burned at the stake. We have the privilege of having the Bible and that privilege is a responsibility that we will answer for.
- We have freedom to worship; and that, too, is a privilege which cost people their lives. The tragedy is that so many people have used that freedom in order not to worship at all. That privilege, too, is a responsibility we will answer for.
- If a person has Christ, and Christ's book, and Christ's church, he is the heir of all the privileges of God; and if he neglects them or refuses them he, like the Jews in the time of Jesus, is a man under condemnation.

**Luke 11:33-36** **"No one lights a lamp and puts it in a hiding place or under a basket, but on a lampstand, so that those who come in may see its light. (34) Your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eye is healthy, your whole body is full of light. But when it is evil, your body is full of darkness. (35) Therefore, be careful that the light in you isn't darkness. (36) Now if your whole body is full of light, with no part of it in darkness, it will be as full of light as when a lamp gives you light with its rays."**

- Jesus was telling the Jews if they could see spiritually what He was saying, it would give light to their whole being. But they had become spiritually blind and their whole persons were stumbling around in the dark. They couldn’t see clearly.

**Luke 11:37-44** After Jesus had said this, a Pharisee invited him to have a meal with him. So Jesus went and took his place at the table. (38) The Pharisee was surprised to see that he didn't first wash before the meal. (39) But the Lord said to him, "Now you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and the dish, but on the inside you are full of greed and evil. (40) You fools! The one who made the outside made the inside, too, didn't he? (41) So give what is inside to the poor, and then everything will be clean for you. (42) "How terrible it will be for you Pharisees! For you give a tenth of your mint, spices, and every kind of herb, but you neglect justice and the love of God. These are the things you should have practiced, without neglecting the others. (43) How terrible it will be for you Pharisees! For you love to have the places of honor in the synagogues and to be greeted in the marketplaces. (44) How terrible it will be for you! For you are like unmarked graves, and people walk on them without realizing it."

- The Pharisee was surprised that Jesus did not wash his hands before eating. This wasn't about cleanliness but about ceremonial law. The law said that before a man ate he must wash his hands in a certain way and that he must also wash them between the courses. As usual every little detail was worked out. Large stone pots of water were kept especially for that purpose because ordinary water might be unclean; the amount of water used must be at least a "quarter of a log", that is, enough to fill one and a half egg-shells. First the water must be poured over the hands beginning at the tips of the fingers and running right up to the wrist. Then the palm of each hand must be cleansed by rubbing the fist of the other into it. Finally, water was again poured over the hand, this time beginning at the wrist and running down to the fingertips. To the Pharisee, to omit the slightest detail of this was to sin. Jesus' comment was that, they should be as particular about cleansing their hearts as they were about washing their hands.
- Jesus mentions some of the things that Pharisees practiced that showed they were more concerned with greed and their own pride than the love of God.
  - They were very meticulous about tithing – giving a percentage of everything they received to the temple. Now, tithing was not wrong, but their motives were wrong and their hearts were not in the right place, making them hypocrites.
  - The chief seats at the synagogue were the seats out in front facing the audience. In the congregation itself the best seats were at the front and they decreased in honor the further back they got. The advantage of these seats was that they could be seen by everyone!
  - The more exaggerated the greetings the Pharisees received in the streets the better they were pleased.
- The point of verse 44 is this - Numbers 19:16 says that "whoever in the open field touches a grave shall be unclean seven days." To be unclean was to be banned from all religious worship. Even if you touched a grave without meaning to it didn't matter, it made you unclean. Because the Pharisees were corrupt, anyone who came in contact with them was being infected with wrong ideas of God and of his demands.
- Two things about the Pharisees that stand out that Jesus condemned them for:
  - They concentrated on external things. Their hearts might be as black as hell; they might not care a bit about charity or justice; but as long as they went through the correct motions at the correct time they thought they were good in the eyes of God. Today in Christianity we have people that may be regular in their church attendance; they may be a diligent student of the Bible; they may

be a generous giver to the church; but their hearts are filled with pride and dishonesty.

- They concentrated on details. Compared with love and kindness, justice and generosity, the washing of hands and the giving of tithes with mathematical accuracy were unimportant details. How often church leaders and church people get lost in totally unimportant details of church government and administration, and even argue and fight about them, and forget what's important about the Christian life!

**Luke 11:45-54** Then one of the experts in the law said to him, "Teacher, when you say these things, you insult us, too." (46) Jesus said, "How terrible it will be for you experts in the law, too! For you load people with burdens that are hard to carry, yet you yourselves don't even lift one of your fingers to ease the burdens. (47) How terrible it will be for you! For you build monuments for the prophets, and it was your ancestors who killed them! (48) So you are witnesses and approve of the deeds of your ancestors, because they killed those for whom you are building monuments. (49) That is why the Wisdom of God said, 'I will send them prophets and apostles. They will kill some of them and persecute others,' (50) so that this generation will be charged with the blood of all the prophets that was shed since the foundation of the world, (51) from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who died between the altar and the sanctuary. Yes, I tell you, it will be charged against this generation! (52) How terrible it will be for you experts in the law! For you have taken away the key to knowledge. You didn't go in yourselves, and you kept out those who were trying to go in." (53) When Jesus left, the scribes and the Pharisees began to fiercely oppose him and to interrogate him about many things, (54) watching him closely in an effort to trap him in something he might say.

- These experts in the Law are the scribes, a separate group from the Pharisees. They were basically the nation's lawyers. They were responsible for guarding and interpreting the Law. Jesus charges the scribes with three crimes:
  - They laid on people the thousand and one details of the ceremonial law; but they did not keep them themselves, because they were experts in evasion. Here are some of their evasions.
    - Their man-made law said that you could go no further than 1,000 yards from your home on a Sabbath day. But if a rope was tied across to the end of the street, the end of the street became part of the scribe's residence and he could go 1,000 yards beyond that; if on the Friday evening before, he left at any location enough food for two meals, that place technically became his residence and he could go 1,000 yards beyond that!
    - One of the things you were forbidden to do on the Sabbath was the tying of knots, sailors' or camel drivers' knots and knots in ropes. But it was ok for a woman to tie the knot in her girdle. So, if a bucket of water had to be raised from a well a rope could not be knotted to it, but a woman's girdle could, and it could be raised with that!
    - To carry a burden was forbidden, but the man-made written law said "he who carries anything, whether it be in his right hand, or in his left hand, or in his bosom, or on his shoulder is guilty; but he who carries anything on the back of his hand, with his foot, or with his mouth, or with his elbow, or with his ear, or with his hair, or with his money bag turned upside down, or between his money bag and his shirt, or in the fold of his shirt or in his shoe, or in his sandal is guiltless, because he does not carry it in the usual way of carrying it out."

- It is incredible that men should ever have thought that God could have given or approved of laws like that, and that the working out of little details was a religious worship and the keeping of them a matter of life and death. But that was scribal religion.
- The attitude of the scribes to the prophets was inconsistent. They professed a deep admiration for the prophets. But the only prophets they admired were dead; when they met a living one they tried to kill him. They honored the dead prophets with tombs and memorials, but they dishonored the living ones with persecution and death.
- "Your new moons," said Isaiah, "and your appointed feasts my soul hates." "He has showed you, O man, what is good," said Micah; "and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God?" That was the heart of the prophetic message; and it was the opposite of scribal teaching. No wonder the scribes, with their external details, hated the prophets, and Jesus walked in the prophetic line. The murder of Zacharias is described in 2Chronicles 24:20-21.
- The scribes also shut the people off from scripture. Their interpretation of scripture was so bizarre that it was impossible for the ordinary man to understand it. In their hands scripture became a book of riddles. In their misguided cleverness they refused to see its plain meaning themselves, and they would not let anyone else see it either. The scriptures had become the privilege of the expert and a dark mystery to the common man.
- None of this is much out of date. There are still those who demand from others standards which they themselves can't and won't meet. There are still those whose religion is just legalism. There are still those who make the word of God so difficult that the mind of the common person is bewildered and does not know what to believe or to whom to listen to.
- "Foundation of the world" - It is important to note that the blood of God's prophets (beginning with Abel) has been shed "from the foundation of the world," not beginning four billion years after the foundation of the world. This is just a small mention here, but a confirmation that the world was created from start to finish in six literal days, and that the son of Adam was a real person.
- "Blood of Abel. Abel is considered by Jesus the first prophet—that is, a man who supernaturally receives and then proclaims inspired words from God. The Zechariah mentioned is probably "Zechariah the son of Jehoida the priest," who was stoned when he prophesied against the people under King Joash (2 Chronicles 24:20-24). So the whole period of time Jesus was talking about was the entire Old Testament period, since this Zechariah is the last prophet mentioned as having been executed for his testimony before John the Baptist. There may have been others that are not mentioned in the Bible.
- Not surprisingly, considering how Jesus sharply condemned them, in verse 53 we see that the opposition to Jesus is ramping up, and in the next seven chapters we'll see Jesus teach His disciples how to live under this opposition and persecution.