

Title: **UNGODLINESS**
 IN THE HOUSE OF GOD
Text: Luke 20:1-8
Subject: *Pharisees Questioning Christ's Authority*
Date: Sunday Evening—January 23, 2005
Tape # Y-58b
Readings: *Rex Bartley and Bob Duff*
Introduction:

The title of my message tonight is **UNGODLINESS IN THE HOUSE OF GOD**. Our text will be Luke 20:1-8. In this passage of Scripture we see our Lord Jesus Christ walking in the temple with his disciples, teaching and preaching the gospel. As he walked back and forth through the house of God, a multitude gathered around and listened intently to his every word.

The event recorded here took place the day after our Lord cursed the barren fig tree and drove the money changers from the temple, two days after his entrance into Jerusalem.

In the crowd listening to our Savior's doctrine were those chief priests, scribes, and elders who were determined to destroy the Master, his doctrine, and his people.

Once more, they thought they had a perfect opportunity to discredit him. The Lord Jesus had come into Jerusalem accepting the praises of men as the Messiah, the Christ of God. He entered the house of God, drove

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out the money changers, and set things in order as the Master of the house.

On top of all that, he called the house of God his house. Thus declaring himself to be God! Now, as he preached the gospel of God in the house of God, contrary to the accepted traditions and customs of the Jews, these great, respected, scholarly infidels, who were the religious leaders of the Jewish world, demanded of the Lord Jesus the source of his authority. Read the story with me (Luke 20:1-8).

(Luke 20:1-8) And it came to pass, *that* on one of those days, as he taught the people in the temple, and preached the gospel, the chief priests and the scribes came upon *him* with the elders, (2) And spake unto him, saying, Tell us, by what authority doest thou these things? or who is he that gave thee this authority? (3) And he answered and said unto them, I will also ask you one thing; and answer me: (4) The baptism of John, was it from heaven, or of men? (5) And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven; he will say, Why then believed ye him not? (6) But and if we say, Of men; all the people will stone us: for they be persuaded that John was a prophet. (7) And they answered, that they could not tell whence *it was*. (8) And Jesus said unto them,

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Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things.

What determined hatred these Chief Priests, and Scribes, and Elders, had for the Son of God! What had the Lord Jesus done? He had preached the gospel to the poor. He had gone about healing all manner of sickness and disease among the people. Was this the cause of all their hatred and malignity? Strange as that may seem, it was. That is cause enough to Satan and his seed. It always has been and always will be, so long as the world shall stand. Is the offence of the cross ceased? Oh no! Let any of God's servants in the present hour preach the gospel the Master preached, declaring that salvation is in his name alone, throwing the all goodness and righteousness of men to the ground and declaring, that Christ's blood and righteousness are the solitary cause of a sinner's acceptance with God, and the religious leaders around him will rise up against him like angry hornet's buzzing around his head.

Proposition: When the religious, spiritual leaders of a church, denomination, nation, or age do not know God, when spiritual leaders are really infidels, those who blindly follow their blind guides do so to the eternal peril of their souls, and to the eternal peril of all who are under their influence!

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Divisions: I want to show you four spiritual evils, four glaring matters of ungodliness which stand out in these verses, as beacons to warn us.

1. The Evil Of Spiritual Ignorance
2. The Evil Of Religious Curiosity
3. The Evil Of Religious Pride
4. The Evil Of Spiritual Dishonesty

SPIRITUAL IGNORANCE

I. *First*, Luke shows us **the evil of spiritual ignorance** displayed in these religious men.

You may think, “Pastor, how can you say that spiritual ignorance is an evil? Can a person be faulted for his ignorance in the things of God?”

Yes, a person can and should be, indeed shall be, held accountable by God for that which he could have known and should have known, had he simply walked in the light God gave him. Do you understand the implications of what I have just said? **Not only will God Almighty hold you accountable at the day of judgment for everything you have heard and despised concerning the gospel of his dear Son, he will hold you accountable for everything you could have heard had you chosen to do so!**

Those things are true of all men; but they are especially true concerning those men who assume the

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responsibility of teaching others, and preaching to others, and leading others in the name of God.

That man who speaks to, teaches, leads, and preaches to others in the name of God better have a firm, well-grounded assurance concerning few things.

Speaking to you as I now do, in God's name, I assume a tremendous weight of responsibility. Knowing what I do of God's character, his Word, and the seriousness of this business, I would not dare speak another word, or continue another day in the work of the ministry, if I were not certain of these things. I say to any man, old or young, who is just chomping at the bit to be a preacher, before you assume this work, you better be certain that...

- You know God and the gospel of his grace.
- God has called you and sent you to this work.
- You have a message from God.
- You faithfully proclaim God's message.

You see, though you are responsible for your own souls, standing here as a watchman over your souls I am also responsible for your souls.

What does all that have to do with this text? Just this. — **These chief priests, scribes, and elders stand before us as glaring examples of the fact that those who hold**

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highest place in the religious world are often totally ignorant of the things of God.

These men were not peons. They were the most highly trained, specialized religious scholars, selected from an elite group of elite men. They were not just priests, they were the chief priests. They were not just teachers, they were the scribes. They were not just elders, they were the elders.

These men were regarded by the religious world of their day as the very source and fountain of all spiritual knowledge. They were, for the most part, direct descendants of Aaron; and they could prove it.

Their doctrine had the full weight and force of mainstream, historic Jewish tradition; and they could prove it.

But these men did not know God from a box of rocks!

Spiritually, they were totally blind. They had the Scriptures memorized, categorized, and compartmentalized; but they had absolutely no understanding of the message of the Book. They could tell you everything you could want to know about God and his Son, the Christ, the Messiah, except one thing. They could not tell you who he is! They could not spot him when he stood in their midst!

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DIVINE REVELATION

Spiritual knowledge comes by divine revelation. I wonder if we will ever learn this. In spiritual matters nothing matters except spiritual matters. Worldly approval, academic scholarship, historic approval, celebrated fame, religious order, religious tradition are all meaningless. Indeed, these things are an absolute hindrance unless we are taught of God. We know nothing until God, by his Spirit, causes the light of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ to shine in our hearts. **Christ must be revealed in us!**

Once that happens, once Christ is revealed in a person, he is unceasingly taught of God and convinced of three things. These three things are the most important truths we ever consider. They are infinitely deep. We can never fully learn them. Yet, if we are taught of God, we will never cease to learn them, as long as we live in this world. They are...

- Sin - My Own!
- Righteousness — Accomplished by Christ!
- Judgment — Finished at Calvary!

(John 16:8-11) "And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: (9) Of sin, because they believe not on me; (10) Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and

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ye see me no more; (11) Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged."

(Romans 8:1) "*There is* therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."

(2 Corinthians 5:21) "For he hath made him *to be* sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him."

TRY THE SPIRITS

as you care for your soul and for the souls of your families and all who may be influenced by you, try the spirits to see whether they be of God (1 John 4:1-3).

(1 John 4:1-3) "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. (2) Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: (3) And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that *spirit* of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world."

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Spiritual ignorance, ignorance of Christ and his gospel, among preachers, teachers, and religious leaders is an inexcusable evil by which multitudes are being led to hell. When blind men are led by blind men, both fall into the ditch.

WILLFUL IGNORANCE

Yet, there is more to aggravate the wickedness of their ignorance. They were wilfully ignorant of Christ. Their ignorance arose from their enmity against the Master. It was the fruit of their malice toward and hatred of Christ and his doctrine. Our Lord's miraculous works spoke for themselves. None but God could do the work he did. So Nicodemus recognized that fact (John 3:2). And every man with common sense recognizes it. But these men refused the obvious, because to acknowledge the obvious would require that they acknowledge Christ and his doctrine.

RELIGIOUS CURIOSITY

II. The second evil, the second display of ungodliness we see in these men, and often see in the house of God today is **the evil of religious curiosity**.

What multitudes there are who are curious about spiritual things! The more mysterious a matter is, the more their curiosity is peaked. They care nothing for

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plainly revealed truth. They despise things that are obvious and important, needful and vital. But, they love to talk about and debate obscure things. In verses 27-37 the Sadducees asked the Master a trick question about the resurrection. Mind you, they did not believe in the resurrection, but they wanted to debate it!

People like the Scribes and their companions abound in every generation. They are all alike enemies to the pure truths of the gospel. Their religion is nothing but curiosity. You will be wise to avoid them as you would the plague (1 Tim. 1:4).

(1 Timothy 1:4) Neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith.

RELIGIOUS PRIDE

III. Third, these religious hypocrite's also show us the horrid **evil of religious pride** and arrogance.

Here is a group of men, pretending that they are doing God's service, daring to challenge the incarnate God himself about his authority, moved by nothing but envy, jealousy, arrogance, and pride. They were not even slightly motivated by the glory of God. Their only concern was their own position and power! They said, "*By what authority doest thou these things?*"

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They could not refute his doctrine. They could not make any charge of wickedness stick. They could not deny the power of God displayed in his works. The only thing left was to challenge his right to do the things he did in the name of God. They were asking...

- By what authority do you preach? Who ordained you?
- What right do you have to curse a fig tree, created by God?
- How dare you come into the house of God and set things in order, without consulting us?

Nothing makes a lost religious man more arrogant, insecure, envious, and malicious than the sight of another man doing the will of God...

- Preaching the truth of God, he refuses to preach.
- Consecrated to the glory of God, while he is consecrated to nothing but himself.
- Secure in the place of God, while he senses nothing but insecurity.
- At rest in the will of God, when he cannot find a moment's rest in his soul.

It is spiritual pride and arrogance, especially among religious leaders, which keeps men from bowing to the truth of God when plainly confronted with it; and the embarrassment of having that wickedness exposed in

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their own hearts makes those who normally appear to be so sugary sweet raging persecutors. **It was the spiritual arrogance of these men which drug them down to hell.**

- Everyone acknowledged that John the Baptist was a prophet of God; but these fine men were not about to sit at the feet of such an unacceptable teacher.
- Because they would not hear God's servant, they could not believe God's Son. — Christ declared and displayed, in undeniable ways, his messiahship and Godhood; but they refused to believe him. It would simply have cost them too much!
- Because they refused to hear God's messenger and refused to believe God's Son, they despised God's ordinance — Believer's Baptism.

SPIRITUAL DISHONESTY

IV. Spiritual ignorance always leads to spiritual arrogance; and spiritual ignorance and arrogance always produce **the evil of spiritual dishonesty.**

Those who are, by their willful unbelief, prejudiced against the truth of God, in the attempt to justify themselves will, without hesitation lie and act in dishonesty to their own consciences. Like these chief priests, scribes, and elders, they will display this dishonest behavior in the name of honoring God and in the house of God. **There is nothing dishonest men will**

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not do to save face before men. Our Lord did not ask these men a hard, perplexing, question. He just asked them whether John's ministry was of God or of men.

(Luke 20:3-4) And he answered and said unto them, I will also ask you one thing; and answer me: (4) The baptism of John, was it from heaven, or of men?

These men did not even think about giving a plain, honest, strait forward answer. Immediately, they put their heads together, not to find out the truth, but to figure out how to save face. Look at verse 31.

(Luke 20:5-7) And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven; he will say, Why then believed ye him not? (6) But and if we say, Of men; all the people will stone us: for they be persuaded that John was a prophet. (7) And they answered, that they could not tell whence *it was*.

Rather than speak the truth, they told a direct and obvious lie. They said, "*We cannot tell.*" In reply to our Lord's question whether John's baptism was from heaven or of men, "*they answered that they could not tell.*" That was a bald-faced lie. They could have told, but they would not. They knew that if they said what they really believed they would condemn themselves. If they

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confessed that John was a prophet sent from God, they would be guilty of a gross inconsistency in not believing his testimony about Christ as...

- The Lamb of God.
- The Eternal God.
- The Messiah.
- The Savior.
- The Judge of All.

Men and women will say anything rather than acknowledge themselves to be in the wrong. Lying is just one of the sins to which the human heart is most naturally inclined, and one of the most common evils in the world. Gehazi, Ananias, and Sapphira have more followers and imitators in the house of God than Peter and Paul.

LESSONS

1. You can mark this down as a matter of certainty. — **If God is pleased to use you, men will envy you, despise you, and do everything within their power to discredit you.** If they cannot destroy you, they will try to destroy your influence. — Our Lord Jesus found his most malicious enemies in the house of God (The Pharisees). — Paul found his greatest foes in the house of God (False Apostles, Judaizers). — Even the beloved John had his foes in the house of God (Diotrephes).

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2. The best way I know of to deal with those who oppose us, oppose the gospel of the grace of God, oppose the work we do, and oppose our God is to **ignore them**. — “Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things” (v. 8).
3. **Rarely do men and women rightly esteem and value the ministry of the gospel.**

In this passage, as he often did, our Lord Jesus highly commended John the Baptist and the ministry the Lord gave him in his day. Like John the Baptist, every true gospel preacher is sent of God...

- To point out the Lamb of God and declare his work.
- To prepare the way of the Lord.
- To call sinners to repentance, showing them the way of life in Christ.

(Isaiah 52:7) How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth!

- To leave all who believe not without excuse.

APPLICATION

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Now, let me see if the Lord will enable me to bring this home to you to whom it is directly applicable. There are some of you sitting before me right now, some of you who now hear my voice, who behave exactly like these men. Rather than simply bowing to Christ, you lie to yourself, to me, and to God. You attempt to justify yourself in your unbelief and soothe your conscience, by saying...

- “I want to believe, but I just cannot understand the doctrines of the gospel.” **Who cannot understand satisfaction and substitution?**
- “I am really trying to believe, but I just can’t.” **Who cannot fall, if he is willing to fall?**
- “I really want to be a Christian and serve the Lord, but not right now.”

Can I be perfectly honest with you? This may shock you. In fact, I hope it does. I hope it shocks you right into the arms of Christ. Your problem is really this — **YOU’RE A LIAR!** When you say, “I cannot believe on Christ,” the real truth is you will not. I can prove that to you from the Word of God.

Your real problem is that you love darkness rather than light (John 3:19) and have no desire to change. Therefore, you refuse to come to the Light. If you were willing to live up to the light God has already given you, if you were willing act upon the knowledge you already

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have, you would soon know the doctrine of Christ, come to Christ, and walk in the light with Christ (John 7:17).

(John 7:17) "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or *whether* I speak of myself."

Your problem is more than an inability to believe. Your problem is that you are so full of hatred toward God that you would rather call God a liar (1 John 5:10) and go to hell than admit that you are yourself a liar.

(1 John 5:1-14) Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him. (2) By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments. (3) For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous. (4) For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, *even* our faith. (5) Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God? (6) This is he that came by water and blood, *even* Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth. (7) For there are three that bear

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record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one. (8) And there are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one. (9) If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater: for this is the witness of God which he hath testified of his Son. (10) He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son. (11) And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. (12) He that hath the Son hath life; *and* he that hath not the Son of God hath not life. (13) These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God. (14) And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us:

Oh, may God give you an honest heart. Of this much I am sure...

- An honest heart is a believing heart.
- An unbelieving heart is a dishonest heart.

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I appeal to you once more, (Oh, may God the Holy Spirit speak to your heart!), before you slip out of this world into eternal hell, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.

(Romans 10:9-13) "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. (10) For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. (11) For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed. (12) For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. (13) For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."

God help you now, to believe on his Son. If you do, you have everlasting life. May God grant it for Christ's sake.

AMEN.