

Deconstructing Unbelief, Part 2

Luke 11:45-54

In our study of Luke's Gospel, we're in Luke 11. You can turn there in your Bibles. Luke chapter 11, this is the first woe that Jesus pronounces upon them in verses 46. "One of the lawyers answered him, 'Teacher, in saying these things you insult us also.'" Then this in verse 46. "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.'"

Jesus is deconstructing unbelief. He's deconstructing the unbelief that is informing their religion. He's pulling back the curtain and he's going back there and he's saying, this is what explains your hypocrisy. It's unbelief. So he's going to deconstruct the unbelieving scholarship, you might say, of the law experts and the lawyers and the scribes. Unbelief obscures the law. Simply put, unbelief obscures, or we might say, hides the law. Unbelief obscures the law. Why did the Pharisees tithe their salt and pepper? Because the law experts have taught them

to. This is the first woe that Jesus pronounces upon them in verses 46. "One of the lawyers answered him, 'Teacher, in saying these things you insult us also.'" Then this in verse 46. "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 lawyers, they're the teachers of the law, also known in Scripture as the scribes. They are the law experts, the law teachers. The majority of the Pharisees were laymen. The lawyers are professionals. They're the educated ones. They're the ones who studied under the rabbinical schools. They're the ones who studied all the tradition of the oral tradition and the written tradition. They're the trained theologians. So these guys are the seminary professors. And it's through their close association with these Pharisees and the influence of Pharisee money, the scribes were able to broaden their popular appeal. They were able to come out from behind the ivory tower and come into the mainstream.

It'd be one thing if their teaching remained tucked away safely hidden in some ivory tower, hidden in obscurity, some scholarly theological journal that no one but other academics are ever gonna read. But no, they got out there and mixed in

public. They liked the attention. They liked the feeling of being the one with the answers. So they came out from outside of their ivory tower, and they accompanied the Pharisees. They're often paired together, scribes and Pharisees.

Their teaching infected everyone and as their teaching infected everyone, it burdened them significantly with heavy, heavy burdens. The verb there "to load people with," or "to burden people," it's directly related to the noun that's in the same sentence, the noun burden and that noun for burden refers to like a ship's cargo, which is rather apropos of a word picture because it conveys the weight of a burden.

Think about how much cargo goes into a ship and think about you offloading that ship one box at a time, to go to some freighter, some cargo carrier that goes across one of our major oceans and think about you being burdened with offloading that ship by yourself. Think about the many varieties of cargo that's contained in a ship. And all of that is being freighted into popular religion.

It's like a ship's cargo; it's too much for a person to carry. It's impossible. It requires a ship's hold to carry all these burdens. So the number of burdens, the weight, the variety of burdens, impossible for anyone to carry by himself. It's like

a ship's cargo and there's nothing but an ocean-going freighter that can carry all this weight. That obscured the true intention of God in the law of tithing by covering over with this burden of minutia. But let me give you just a few examples pertaining to the Sabbath in particular.

The Mishna Shabbat goes into great detail on what may and may not be carried as a burden on the Sabbath day. And that concern about what can be carried and how far and how much and all the rest, carried on a Sabbath day, that concern is related to commentary that comes from Jeremiah chapter 17 where God tells Jeremiah. Tells him, "Jeremiah, you go stand at the gates of Jerusalem and you confront the people who are going in and out of the gates carrying burdens. They are working on the Sabbath day."

You remember the law, it said back in the Ten Commandments, exodus chapter 20:8 through 11. God says, "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy." Holiness is not meant to be a burden of minutia. Holiness, drawing near to holiness is meant to be a joyful occasion of worship. God says, "Six days you shall labor, do all your work." So do all your work on the other six days of the week. I made six other days for you to do all the work that your heart desires. "But when you get to the seventh, the

seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it, you shall do no work. You or your son or your daughter or your male servant or your female servant."

So not you and not your slaves. Not you and not someone you own. Not you or someone you employ. I'm concerned about everybody in this economy. Nobody, not even, get this, not even your livestock. Don't even burden your animals that have no soul. Your livestock, get this and also not just for you Israelites, not just for you Jews, "but for the sojourner who's within your gates." The foreigner, the alien the stranger. Protect them from work on the Sabbath day as well.

"For," here's the pattern, "in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, all that's within them." Okay, so he could've done that on a single day in a single moment. He didn't have to go days. He could've done it with a breath. He could've done it with a thought. But he said, No, I'm giving them a pattern. Six days work, one day rest. "He rested on the seventh day." The lord ceased from his labor. "Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day, made it holy." He wants us to rest. He wants us to find rest in him on the Sabbath day.

The Sabbath day, the Sabbath principle that we still try to practice here on our Sundays, the Lord's day. The Sabbath

principle is that we may find refreshment in the Lord our God. It's not to burden ourselves with all kinds of other junk and distraction and entertainment and everything else that, that all the pagans do. It's not for that. It is for us to enjoy rest in the Lord our God. Rest with his people. Rest and encouragement and understanding of the truth, right from the very beginning. Right from the very beginning when God gave the law about the Sabbath, which is a law of blessing, not of burden, but of blessing. There's a man, remember caught gathering sticks on the Sabbath day in Numbers. I mean, he didn't get ten steps from Sinai. He's already breaking the Sabbath.

All the way through Israel's history, it continued. The Jews continued to violate the Sabbath. The surrounding nations had no problem buying, selling, trading on the Sabbath day and they enticed the Jews into it. You want to make a little money on the side? They're all in, they're all in there learning the law, let's, let's do a little business. You make a little extra money get something nice for your wife. There's no harm in making a little money.

Just before Jerusalem is sacked by the Babylonians, God sent Jeremiah into the city gates to confront the people as they transacted business on the Sabbath. It says in Jeremiah 17:21,

"Thus says the Lord: Take care for the sake of your lives, and do not bear a burden on the Sabbath day or bring it in by the gates of Jerusalem. Don't carry a burden out of your houses on the Sabbath or do any work. But keep the Sabbath day holy, as I commanded your fathers."

Now just stop there for a second and think. If you're listening to Jeremiah and you're carrying your wares getting ready to sell to the surrounding nations and you're coming through the gates of Jerusalem. You're like, yeah, I'm gonna go make a little money. And Jeremiah's there crying out to you, confronting you for carrying that burden, you know exactly what he's talking about, don't you? You go back to Exodus chapter 20 and you, "remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy." I'm not keeping it holy. I'm not setting it apart. I'm not making it the most important day of spiritual rest of the week. I'm treatin' it like any other day. Stop what I'm doing. Take the burden back, drop it off and spend time worshiping the Lord.

So the lawyers read Jeremiah 17:21, 22, and just like that lawyer in Luke 10:29 who desires to justify himself saying, "And who is my neighbor?" I mean let's define terms, Jesus. In the same way, the lawyers here, the scribes, they ask the question,

that question about everything and here it is again. "And what is a burden?" What is a burden? Let's get our definition right.

Here are a few. And I'm telling you, this is a few out of an elaborate amount of detail that it would take a long, long time just to read: Mishna Shabbat. A tailor, someone who sews clothes, men's clothes. A tailor should not go out with his needle close to nightfall on the Sabbath eve lest he forget and carry. Even though his needle may be stuck into his garment, just where tailors keep their needles, that's a burden.

Nor the scribe with his quill, his pen, which is stuck behind his ear in the manner of scribes. Can't carry the quill pen in your ear or the needle in your belt, is what a burden is, the scribes are saying. Nor, I love this part. I just had to include this. Nor may he remove lice from his garments, that is with the needle or the quill. Can't pick out lice. That's work on the Sabbath. Leave it alone.

If one takes out straw that is to feed an animal. He may take out no more than a cow's mouthful. I've never done that experiment, but I imagine it's only a little bit. I don't know. Might be a lot, I don't' know. But he can't take out much more than a cow's mouthful. The idea is that any more is a burden and burdens can't be carried on a Sabbath. So you can shove some



straw into your cow's mouth and then you're absolved of liability. If it's pea stalks, a camel's mouthful. Evidently this is a larger than a cow's mouthful. I don't know. If one is not liable with a cow's mouthful of pea stalks, well, then they're not fit for a cow. Grain ears, ears of grain, a lamb's mouthful. Grasses, a kid, a goat, a young goat's mouthful. And the list goes on and on and on like this. It's grueling.

If one, here's another one, if one carries something out of his house on the Sabbath, whether in his right hand or his left hand, in his bosom or on his shoulder, he is liable. Liable means guilty. Guilty means you need to pay the penalty of a sinner guilt offering. He is liable because, after all, the right hand or the left hand or the bosom or the shoulder are the customary ways of carrying things.

But if he makes this burden carrying completely inconvenient for himself and he carries something out on top of his hands, like not in the palm, but you try to carry this microphone on top of your hand balancing it or on his foot, or in his mouth, or on his elbow, or in his ear or in his hair, or in the bottom edge of his garment, or in his shoe or in his sandal, he's not liable for that is not the customary way of carrying.

I'm mean, I'm actually reading that. "That is not the customary way of carrying." Therefore, it's okay. Carry something in the normal way, make this easy for yourself, and you're guilty of violating the Sabbath burden bearing rules. But carry it in an uncomfortable, awkward, abnormal, inconvenient way, I mean, literally, make your burden even more burdensome. Hey, no problem! Carry whatever you want so long as you suffer for it. Suffering absolves you from all Sabbath liability.

Listen, this is just one of the sins that the lawyers are guilty of. Adding burdens like this, by proliferating oral tradition upon oral tradition, expansion after expansion upon the law itself. That's what A.T. Robertson calls, they're pettifogging interpretations. Pettifogging. P-e-t-t-i-f-o-g-g-i-n-g. I had to look it up, too. Pettifogging refers to placing undue emphasis on petty details. Any of you got a pettifogging friend. Yeah, I do, too.

This is exactly the right word for what these trifling lawyers are doing. They are pettifogging. In addition to proliferating burdens, pumping out stupid regulations like tenured bureaucrats, the lawyers had no compassion for what they're doing to common people. I mean, life is burdensome enough, isn't it? We all eat our bread by the sweat of our brow

and every single one of us, in the conduct of our life, in everything that we do, we commit sins every single day.

And we feel the shame and the weight of guilt in our sin. I mean, shouldn't spiritual leaders use their intellectual gifts and all their training and all their experience and position to give counsel that lifts people's burdens, whenever possible? I mean, shouldn't they help people with the truth and not hurt them with their pettifoggery?

Instead, Jesus said, "You lawyers, you yourselves don't even touch one of those burdens with one of your fingers." What does it mean, touch one of those burdens with your fingers? It can mean that they don't try to help people lift the burdens that they place upon them. It could be a little more complex here, that they don't personally experience the burdens that they place upon other people because the same interpretive imagination that they use to create and proliferate burdens, they use that same imagination as an ingenuity to get themselves out of carrying burdens.

So they avoid all the implications of their own teaching. Kind of like folks on capitol hill who make all kinds of law that they actually don't have to live by. So they wiggle out of it. They use that same cleverness that created the burden in the

first place to escape the implications of it. I think the lawyers here are guilty of both sins. I think there's due evidence; there are plenty of evidence for both viewpoints.

But I think that the verb here, which can be translated, the verb to touch, it can be translated to touch lightly, to apply a light touch to something. Metaphorically, it means to touch in a concerned way, to touch in a helpful way. The verb is actually used of a physician who gently feels around a sore spot on a person's injury. Or touches someone lightly on the neck or the wrist to check the pulse.

And I think that's what Jesus is using. He's using the verb in its sense here. I think he's using it to refer to their lack of compassion in applying a gentle touch to help people with burdens. They don't do that. They don't do anything to alleviate the pain of carrying what they create. They are so enamored with their own cleverness, in novel interpretation, they're so intoxicated with the power that they seem to wield of creating all these new traditions for people to follow. They think nothing of the implications that their own teaching has on just regular folks.

This is not true with our Lord; not true it all. May it never be said of us, that we're like this. But listen, let's

just keep our eyes on him. If we keep our eyes on Christ, we'll never be like this. Let's just keep our eyes on him. Jesus carried the greatest burden that anyone could carry. He carried the spiritual burden of our guilt and our shame. All of our sin, all of our iniquity, all of our transgression, all of the accompanying impurity and defilement, all that sorrow and brokenness, he carried to Calvary. And by his grace he canceled the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.

He carried burdens to the hill, and he died to alleviate us of our burden. This is our example, this is our pattern. This is why Jesus could say, such a wonderful text of Scripture, "Come to me all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you," what? "rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you'll find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, my burden is light." There is yoke, there is a burden, but it's easy yoke and a light burden.

Look, these lawyers created the burdens. The Pharisees tried to carry them. And so, they both taught and influenced the common people to do the same thing. And, and that really is who Jesus is speaking to here. He's saying this is what you are doing. You're laboring and you're heavy laden so if you feel

this, come to me. These guys multiplied burdens that didn't help people at all. But Christ, in his meekness, Christ in his compassion, he comes to remove the yoke of slavery. He comes to save people from these onerous burdens and to bring them under his easy yoke to carry, very light burdens.

What are we to do with this, folks? Don't obscure the truth of God's Word from people. Don't obscure the truth of God's word from people and let me just say this, we are New Testament people, we love to live in the red letters of Scripture, don't we? But you cannot understand Jesus' words in the Gospels, you can't understand the way they're expounded in the all the writings of the New Testament. You can't understand that without going back to understanding the law and the prophets.

So don't obscure God's Word and especially, don't obscure the law of God. Paul said, Romans 7:12, "The law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good." Psalm 19, "The law of the Lord is perfect it revives, it converts the soul." That is it gives life. "The testimony of the Lord is sure," it's certain, it makes a simple, naïve, ignorant person wise, filled with understanding. Gives him discernment. "The precepts of the Lord are right." Righteousness rejoices the heart. "The commandment of the Lord is pure, it enlightens the eyes." You

can see clearly for miles and miles. Most importantly, you can see clearly for the next step.

Beloved, do not obscure the law of God. Don't obscure it by ignoring it. Don't obscure it by opining about it, about what you don't understand. Go back, read it, teach it to people. Study it for yourself. Learn the law. Love it, meditate upon it. Learn to share David's heart about it. "O, how I love your law," he said. Wrote Psalm 119. Many people think David is the author of that psalm. It could be Daniel. There may be some others. Love the law like the psalmist of Psalm 119 loves the law. Teach others to follow your example.

Bow with me in a word of prayer. Our Father, we thank you so much for a, just the penetrating wisdom of Jesus Christ. What a teacher. What a redeemer. What a Savior we have. We thank you that we're not on the other side of that table sitting from him like a scribe, hardened in our unbelief. We thank you that we are those whom you've made soft. You've made a, you've given us, taken out the heart of stone and given us a heart of flesh, one that's responsive to you. You've given us eyes to see and ears to hear. You've caused us to be born again that we might put our faith in Jesus Christ and trust him and him alone. We listen to the law. We've heard the prophetic voice speaking to us. And

drawing the, drawing the bead and putting the crosshairs on our own hearts.

And if we're, were we left there, we'd be crushed in despair. But then you were so gracious to point us to salvation in Christ that we might see him, high and lifted on up on that cross and see that he's dying for me. Dying for those who believe. Thank you so much for the Gospel that saves us. We thank you, for a redeemer who's powerful to save, one whom you accepted by raising him from the dead. We thank you that he lives even now. He sits at your right hand having accomplished our redemption. Having purchased our reconciliation. May we proclaim his praises even more so now that we've understood these things from Jesus. In his name we pray, amen.