

What Should We Do?

(Luke 3:7-14)

I. Introduction

- A. Robert Schuller Ministries commissioned the Gallup people to do a survey.
1. Over 1000 people were asked questions pertaining to their religious beliefs:
 - a. 45% of those who said religion was not important claimed to be Christian
 - b. 51% who said they made no effort to follow Jesus were “Christian.”
 - c. So a lot of Christians don’t see either religion or Jesus as important!
 2. Which raises question, “*In what sense do they see themselves as Christian*”
 - a. **Heritage:** They come from long line of Christian (like “Irish-American”)
 - b. **Parentage:** They were brought up in a church (like they are Republican)
 - c. **Elimination:** They’re not Islamic, Jewish, Buddhist or Hindu, so...
 - 1) I read about a Georgia couple who are atheist, or agnostic (*not sure*)
 - 2) They went to church—expected, programs for kids, business contacts
 3. For some, being Christian is more convenience than it is conviction
 - a. They are Christians by heritage and tradition, which are important things
 - 1) Christian traditions at Christmas and Easter are very important
 - 2) Christian symbols at weddings and funerals are also important
 - b. But as for making any real different in everyday life— not so much
- B. What should be different about our lives because we are Christians?
1. There are some rather obvious external differences that faith makes
 - a. **Worship:** On Sunday mornings, Christians go to church, not golf course
 - 1) We recognize a need to worship, to remind ourselves that God reigns
 - 2) We also recognize a need for fellowship, to gain strength from others
 - b. **Scripture:** Christians are people who read and recognize the Bible
 - 1) We see in Holy Scripture the authoritative voice of God for us
 - 2) When Christians get together, we generally focus on Bible study
 - c. **Morality:** Christians worship a holy God and are called to be holy people
 - 1) Christians believe than sin is a bad thing, and we try to avoid sin
 - 2) There are certain things we don’t do because we believe it is sinful

2. **Problem:** The Pharisees were all very concerned with these three things:
 - a. **Worship:** They prayed, tithed and fasted... and made sure you knew it
 - b. **Scripture:** These were people who read, studied and discussed the Bible
 - c. **Morality:** They were a holy people; it's what word "Pharisee" meant!
- C. The Pharisees were folks who were different because of faith— too different
 1. These were seriously men, but just a little hung up on external things
 - a. We like to chuckle about those "bruised and bleeding" Pharisees
 - 1) They wouldn't look at a woman; closed their eyes & fell down a lot
 - 2) You have to admit, they were serious! *Don't want to be that serious!*
 - b. I once stopped by my sister's house when travelling with best friend
 - 1) She offered coffee; he said, "*O don't drink coffee; I'm a Christian*"
 - 2) Sonya said, "*I'm Christian too; I don't let it make an idiot out of me*"
 - c. Are we just a little worried that faith may make idiots our of us?
 2. In our reading for Tuesday, the high and holy Pharisees go on road trip
 - a. They travelled out to hear this new preacher who was baptizing folks
 - b. The problem is, their religion became his sermon—they were scorched
 - c. In the process, John tells us what faith will mean for our everyday life

II. What Should We Do: Repent (Luke 3:7-9)

A. John was evidently one of those shy and retiring types (**Luke 3:7-9**).

John said to the crowds coming out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

1. That seems to be a rather harsh way to begin a sermon?
 - a. Matthew includes these exact words at the beginning of John's sermon.
 - 1) He tells us John is addressing the Pharisees and Sadducees (**Mt 3:7**).
 - 2) John's condemnation is specific, directed at the religious leaders
 - b. John makes it plain to them that God expects "fruit worthy of repentance"
 - 1) The holiness of these high and holy theologians was only lip-service.
 - 2) They focused on the flawless repetition of ritual and the right rites
 - c. In fact, they had come out to John for one more ritual—his baptism

2. But John is not going to baptize them until they change their lives.
 - a. He says the fruit inspector was coming and that the ax was at the root.
 - 1) The fruit that God was looking for was the fruit repentance.
 - 2) The ax would cut down every tree that did not bear this fruit.
 - b. John's message is painfully plain— *“To please God, you must repent”*
 - 1) His message, *“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near”* (**Matt 3:8**)
 - 2) That is also how Matthew sums up Jesus’ message (**Matt 4:17**)
 - c. John’s baptism wasn’t just ritual—it was about repentance (**Luke 3:3**)
He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins
- B. Why was repentance a problem for Pharisees? *Didn’t think they needed it!*
1. They were the holy ones; they were just like their daddy Abraham (**v. 8**)
 - a. They were proud of their heritage as Abraham's children... ***chosen!***
 - 1) Rejected Jesus because they were Abraham's children (**John 8:33**).
We are Abraham’s descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?”
 - 2) Jesus told the Pharisee they were exactly like their father (**Jn 8:44**)
You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desire
 - b. John tells them to save their old Abraham argument... and just repent!
 2. The one thing John insists that all people must do was to REPENT
 - a. That was the very thing the Pharisees felt they did not need to do at all!
 - 1) Norman Bales tells of brother who attacked after a sermon on grace.
 - 2) How dare he offer grace when God demand works—**Jam 2:10** (KJV)
For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all
 - 3) He screamed, *“So if we fail at even one little point, we missed it all”*
 - 4) **Bales:** Guy who most needed grace wasn’t open to hearing about it!
 - b. The Pharisees needed the lesson on repentance the most—and missed it
 - 1) They thought God was lucky to have them on His side (**Lk 18:11-12**)
‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers— or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’
 - 2) They didn’t need to change anything—they just came to be baptized
 - c. John insists that they needed to change a few things—like everything!

III. What Should We Do: Fruit of Repentance (Luke 3:10-14)

- A. The crowd is shocked and asks the obvious question, “*What should we do?*”
 - 1. If Pharisees (“holy ones”) are rejected, then what can we possibly do?
 - 2. John’s answer has nothing to do with ritual—he directs it at three groups
 - a. **General Crowd:** Fruit of repentance means sharing food and clothes.
 - b. **Tax Collector:** Fruit of repentance means conducting business honestly.
 - c. **Soldier:** Fruit of repentance is not abusing power, be content with wages
- B. One cannot come to God while abusing or being uncaring for other people.
 - 1. If your heart is closed to the poor, then you cannot come to God.
 - a. If you deal dishonestly and exploit others, you cannot come to God.
 - b. If you abuse power and walk over others, then you cannot come to God.
 - 2. John's list here is not exclusive, but he obviously intends it to be **inclusive**.
 - a. This isn’t **ALL** repentance means, but repentance means **ALL** of these
 - b. Religious folks are tempted to trust religiosity—worship, doctrine, moral
 - c. True religion and repentance is about doing good for others (Jam 1:27)
Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world

IV. Conclusion

- A. Two weeks ago, Glenn Beck urged Christians to sift thru their church web site
 - 1. He said that if you find the words “*social justice*,” then leave your church
 - 2. Why? Because the term “*social justice*” is a code word for “*communism*”
 - a. Any church stressing “*social justice*” is for communism and Obama
 - b. I don’t watch Fox (*or any pay TV*); my political commentator is Pat Paulsen
I’m neither left wing or right wing; I am more middle-of-the bird. If you have too much left-wing or right wing, you tend to fly around in concentric circles
 - 3. Mr. Beck is **wrong**; God demands social justice! (*No matter what you call it*)
 - a. We may disagree over **HOW** to best care for poor (*church & government*)
 - b. When John the Baptist called people to repent, he called for social justice
 - c. Our religion fails us when we forget to be concerned for poor (Isa 58:1-8)
- B. John saw repentance as seeing God and seeing people through God’s eyes
- C. So how is it that you see people? Have you repented and been baptized?