

25–26 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of robbery and self-indulgence. You blind Pharisee, first clean the inside of the cup and of the dish, so that the outside of it may become clean also.

This fifth woe in the series of seven carries forward the charge that the scribes and Pharisees do the less important thing while neglecting the more important. They are more concerned that they appear on the outside as righteous while neglecting to cleanse the inner, hidden realities of the heart.

The language is obviously metaphoric. Capitalizing on the emphasis put upon the matter of purities, Yeshua views the Pharisees themselves as the very cups and plates about which they appear obsessed in matters of purity. While Yeshua's words here are not a lesson on levels of purity,¹ it is clear that He is using the intricate laws of purities that were being developed by the Pharisees as a fitting illustration of His point: they are meticulous about washing utensils so that no impurities might be intermingled with their food, but they fail to see themselves as vessels that likewise need to be pure.

This "inner/outer" motif is found in the Sermon on the Mount as well. There, anger (a matter of the heart) is the root of murder (an external act), and lust (an inner reality) is manifest in adultery (another external act). The emphasis of the Sermon is that true sanctification must begin in the heart, not in amassing purity laws that would guard the externals but could be maintained without reference to a cleansing of the conscience before God Who sees all. Yeshua's emphasis is that what is internal (in the Sermon this is spoken of as darkness or light, cf. 6:23) will inevitably manifest itself in the external. One must seek to be righteous first and foremost before the Almighty, Who knows the heart, before one can be truly righteous in the sight of men. This same motif informs Yeshua's teaching (15:11ff, cf. Mk 7:14ff) that it is not what goes into the mouth (an external thing) that defiles but what comes out (words of the heart) that pollute.

In short, Yeshua is charging the Pharisees with having an impure heart. While they would not think of eating from a dish or drinking from a cup that was ritually impure, they have no problem "drinking" and "eating" from an impure heart.

Yeshua charges them with being inwardly full of "robbery" and "self-indulgence." The Greek word ἀρπαγή (*harpagē*) can have the basic sense of "robbery" or "thievery" but can also extend to mean "extortion" or even "illegal seizure of property" (cf. Heb 10:34).² The robbery with which Yeshua charges these Pharisees is not stealing material things *per se* but misrepresenting the teachings of God (Torah) and thus robbing the people of what God had given

1 It is possible that the formative *halachah* regarding the purity of vessels was known by Yeshua, though this is questionable since the authorities referenced in m.*Kelim* 1.2 (for instance) are post-destruction. In the Mishnah, a distinction is made between uncleanness of the outside of a receptacle and the inside. Ritual impurity from the outside of a cup could be conveyed to the inside if the outside was moist, but otherwise the outside does not make the inside unclean. On the whole matter of the ritual purity of vessels, see J. Neusner, "First Cleanse the Inside: Halakhic Background of a Controversial Saying," *NTS* 22 (1976), 486–95; H. Maccoby, "The Washing of Cups," *JSNT* 14 (1982), 3–15.

2 ἀρπαγή is found only in our Matthew text, the corresponding parallel in Lk 11:39, and Heb 10:34.

to them. “Self-indulgence” translates the Greek ἀκρασία (*akrasia*)¹ which seems to have the basic sense of “lack of self-control.”² Allison-Davies suggest that the “accusation charges the scribes and Pharisees with economic and sexual sins (cf. Amos 2:6–8),” though they note that both of these “were standard fare for ancient polemic.”³ More likely the charge of “self-indulgence” relates to the Pharisees thirst for the applause of men, a motive which drives their activities but neglects the matters of the heart.

Luke’s parallel (Lk 11:38–40) gives some interesting insights and contains some clear differences. First, the context in which Luke records Yeshua’s words is that of a meal being shared with a Pharisee, who was surprised that Yeshua did not first ceremonially wash before eating. Second, instead of claiming that the Pharisees were inwardly full of “robbery and self-indulgence,” Luke has “full of robbery and wickedness.”⁴ Third, Yeshua’s conclusion seems vastly different in Luke’s version than in Matthew’s. For Matthew, the solution is to “clean the inside of the cup first” in order that the outside may become clean. In Luke, however, the solution is “give that which is within as charity” which then makes all things clean.

Matt 23:25–26	Luke 11:39–41
<p>Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of robbery and self-indulgence. You blind Pharisee, first clean the inside of the cup [and of the dish], so that the outside of it may become clean also.</p> <p>Οὐαὶ ὑμῖν, γραμματεῖς καὶ Φαρισαῖοι ὑποκριταί, ὅτι καθαρίζετε τὸ ἔξωθεν τοῦ ποτηρίου καὶ τῆς παραψίδος, ἔσωθεν δὲ γέμουσιν ἐξ ἀρπαγῆς καὶ ἀκρασίας. Θαρσαῖε τυφλε, καθάρισον πρῶτον τὸ ἐντὸς τοῦ ποτηρίου [καὶ τῆς παραψίδος], ἵνα γένηται καὶ τὸ ἐκτὸς αὐτοῦ καθαρόν.</p>	<p>But the Lord said to him, “Now you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and of the platter; but inside of you, you are full of robbery and wickedness. You foolish ones, did not He who made the outside make the inside also? But give that which is within as charity, and then all things are clean for you.</p> <p>εἶπεν δὲ ὁ κύριος πρὸς αὐτὸν. νῦν ὑμεῖς οἱ Φαρισαῖοι τὸ ἔξωθεν τοῦ ποτηρίου καὶ τοῦ πίνακος καθαρίζετε, τὸ δὲ ἔσωθεν ὑμῶν γέμει ἀρπαγῆς καὶ πονηρίας. ἄφρονες, οὐχ ὁ ποιήσας τὸ ἔξωθεν καὶ τὸ ἔσωθεν ἐποίησεν; πλὴν τὰ ἐνὸτα δότε ἐλεημοσύνην, καὶ ἰδοὺ πάντα καθαρὰ ὑμῖν ἐστίν.</p>

It may well be that we have two separate occasions upon which Yeshua used the same illustration (cups and plates) to make His point about the necessity of cleansing the heart. If so, this could well explain the use of “wickedness” in place of Matthew’s “self-indulgence.” Even then, Yeshua’s use of “wickedness” in Luke’s story may give insight to what “self-indulgence” means in Matthew’s retelling: the wickedness that lodges in the heart betrays itself in the demand for a position of prominence, which feeds self-indulgent pride. In this respect, Luke’s conclusion is not different than Matthew’s, for to “give that which is within as charity” means to act with the good of others in

1 ἀκρασία is found only here and in 1Cor 7:5. Cf. Psalms of Sol 4.3 (Lxx).

2 So BDAG, “ἀκρασία.”

3 Allison-Davies, *Matthew*, 3.298.

4 Other minor differences have given rise to some variant readings in the manuscripts.

mind, not as a means of gaining public notoriety.¹

We should not presume that Yeshua was the only one in His day that saw the hypocrisy of Pharisees and confronted it. Rabban Gamliel,² who was a prominent figure at Yavneh (and thus shortly after the destruction) is recorded as saying:

Rabban Gamaliel had issued a proclamation [saying]. No disciple whose character [inside] does not correspond to his exterior [outside] may enter the Beit ha-Midrash. On that day many benches were added. Johanan said: There is a difference of opinion on this matter between Abba Yosef b. Dosetai and the Rabbis: one [authority] says that four hundred stools were added, and the other says seven hundred. Rabban Gamaliel became alarmed and said: Perhaps, God forbid, I withheld Torah from Israel! (b.*Berachot* 28a)

His alarm was apparently because he felt he had excluded students from his Yeshiva who should have been admitted. But one could read this another way. The obvious exaggeration of how many benches were added might be an indication that those who joined lacked a true self-assessment. Given Yeshua's perspective, we might have expected current students to leave had they been honest. Still, that Rabban Gamliel was known for emphasizing the need for the inner to match the outer would suggest that he too recognized a problem that existed within the academic community.³

Another rabbinic saying:

Within and without you shall overlay it (Ex 25:10) [speaking of the Ark of the Covenant]. Raba said: Any scholar whose inside is not like his outside, is no scholar. Abaye, or, as some say, Rabbah b. Ulla said: He is called abominable, as it is said: How much less one that is abominable and impure, a man who drinks iniquity like water (Job 15:16). R. Samuel b. Nahmani, in the name of R. Jonathan: What is the meaning of the scriptural statement: Wherefore is there a price in the hand of a fool, to buy wisdom, seeing he hath no understanding? (Prov 17:16), i.e., woe unto the enemies of the scholars, who occupy themselves with the Torah, but have no fear of heaven! (b.*Yoma* 72b)

Though this dialog is later, it does demonstrate that the same assessment Yeshua gives in our text was an ongoing concern of the Rabbis as well, i.e., those who have the outward appearance of piety but whose true heart is otherwise. Even as the Ark was overlaid with gold both inside and out, so a true student of the Torah will have actions that flow from the purity of heart.

The imperative which Yeshua gives in our text is “clean the inside” (καθάρισον, *katharison*), literally, “purify the inside.” In other words, put as much effort into purity of heart as you put into ceremonial purity of objects. But the primary point is that purity of heart requires a faith relationship with God and an acceptance of His way of forgiveness. In the final analysis, Yesh-

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- 1 Some have suggested that the different conclusion between Matthew and Luke relate to the two Aramaic words, דבא, “clean, pure” and דקא, “charity” (and the related verbs), which may have been confused. But this is highly speculative.
 - 2 This was Rabban Gamliel II, of Yavneh fame, and thus post-destruction.
 - 3 Lachs (*A Rabbinic Commentary on the New Testament*, p. 371) gives a further insight on this saying of Rabban Gamliel.

ua's rebuke to these Pharisees comes back to their rejection of Him, for it is through Him that one stands righteous before the Father. Their blindness primarily exists in their failure to recognize that Yeshua is the Messiah promised by the prophets. In failing to assess the true nature of their hearts, they found no reason to seek for a Savior. "He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him" (Jn 1:11).

We learn a great lesson from this passage, and it is this: religious practice, even the most ardent kind, falls woefully short if it is not matched by a heart that has humbly submitted itself to the greatness of God's grace in Yeshua. Of all the sects of 1st Century Judaisms, the Pharisees were known as the most meticulous in respect to *halachic* particulars. If any should be praised for their Torah zeal, it would have been them. Yet here Yeshua compares them to cups and dishes that are full of dregs and worse, who not only carry about with them the filth of arrogant self-indulgence, but serve their religion to others on cups and plates that defile. This is, therefore, a warning to each of us. Let us strive for purity of heart first, and only then will our outward actions be acceptable to the One in Whose grace we stand.

27–28 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like white-washed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. So you, too, outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

Luke (11:44) parallels, in part, this saying of Yeshua:

Woe to you! For you are like concealed tombs, and the people who walk over them are unaware of it."

This sixth woe continues the same message, changing only the metaphor, as Calvin notes:

This is a different metaphor, but the meaning is the same; for he compares them to sepulchres, which the men of the world ambitiously construct with great beauty and splendor. As a painting or engraving on sepulchres draws the eyes of men upon them, while inwardly they contain stinking carcasses; so Christ says that hypocrites deceive by their outward appearance, because they are full of deceit and iniquity.¹

Luke's words amount to the same thing, for tombs were whitewashed (or covered with dust or powder which the Greek word *κόμμις*, *konis*, indicates) not only to fill in the imperfections of the limestone but also to give a ready surface for ornamentation and to make them conspicuous so that they could be avoided in order not to contract ritual impurity. Unmarked graves would therefore be "hidden sources of ritual impurity."

The written Torah declares that a person is unclean from a corpse if he touches it or is in the same room with it (Num 19:11-15). The Pharisees extended the communication of impurity to any object overshadowed by a corpse (or part of a corpse) or any object whose shadow contacts a corpse or tomb (m.*Oholot* 16.1, 2). The Oral Torah further elaborates the means by which impurity is transmitted from a corpse to an object. Whether these extra rab-

¹ Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Gospels*, ad. loc., Matt 23:27.