

Religion, rules & radical repentance

There are two methods of studying nature – special and general. These may be symbolized by the flower and the landscape, the moth and the mountain, the microscope and the telescope. There are the same two methods of Bible study – special and general, the individual passage or chapter or book, and the whole Book. It is possible in both instances to lose the general view in the special details, as one may watch a moth and miss a mountain, emphasizing the particular text and losing the drift of the whole section in which it is found. Actions in Scripture are often grouped with an underlying connection, and so it is here. There are four distinct episodes and yet one single thought. Instead, therefore, of dwelling on minutiae, let us gain an idea of the whole passage in relation to this one thought – namely, the growing opposition of Christ's enemies. Out of this situation emerges a 4-fold picture of our Lord.

W.H. Griffith Thomas *Outline Studies in the Gospel of Luke* p. 108

a. New covenant, new wine (5:27-39)

5:27,28 Do we recognize the radical discipleship exhibited by Levi?

[1] [5:27] The Talmud distinguishes two classes of [*telonai*, tax-collectors]: the *Gabbai* or tax-gatherer (e.g. of income-tax or poll-tax), and the *Mokhes* or custom-house officer. The latter was specially hated, as having greater opportunities for vexatious exactions, especially from the poor. Levi was one of the latter. **Alfred Plummer** *The Gospel According to St Luke* p. 159

[2] [5:27] This must have meant a considerable sacrifice, for tax collectors were normally wealthy. Matthew must have been the richest of the apostles. We should not miss the quiet heroism involved in this. If following Jesus had not worked out for the fishermen, they could have returned to their trade without difficulty. But when Levi walked out of his job he was through. They would surely never take back a man who had simply abandoned his tax office. His following of Jesus was a final commitment. **Leon Morris** *Luke* p. 119

[3] [5:28] Luke alone mentions this. Note the characteristic [*panta*, all], and comp. v.11. The fact illustrates the doctrine, to which Luke often bears witness, that riches are a peril and an impediment, and that the kingdom of God is specially preached to the poor. **Alfred Plummer** *The Gospel According to St Luke* p. 159

5:29-32 Contrast Levi's passion for people with the 'religion' of these leaders

[4] [5:29] It may be safely asserted that there is no grace in the man who cares nothing about the salvation of his fellow men. The heart which is really taught by the Holy Ghost, will always be full of love, charity, and compassion. The soul which

has been truly called of God, will earnestly desire that others may experience the same calling. A converted man will not wish to go to heaven alone. **J.C. Ryle** *Luke Vol 1* p. 149

[5] [5:30] The tyranny of pseudo-orthodoxy which they had established, and the terrorism with which it was enforced, were denounced by our Lord (11:37-54) in terms which the burning force can best be understood by seeing from the Talmud how crushing were the 'secular chains' in which they had striven to bind the free conscience of the people – chains which it became His compassion to burst. **F.W. Farrar** *Luke (Cambridge Greek Testament)* p. 170



Harry Ironside

'... Hence the need of daily, and constant, self-judgment ...'

"... through the infirmity of the flesh we do fail again and again – yea, will always fail if we turn the eyes of our hearts away from Christ. Hence the need of daily, and constant, self-judgment which, we have seen, is the true meaning of sincere repentance."

- Harry Ironside, *Except Ye Repent*, p.69

5:33-35 To what is Christ alluding? (John 3:28-30)

[6] [5:33-39] The Jewish nation fasted on the Day of Atonement (Lv. 16:29) and also on four days in memory of the destruction of Jerusalem (Zc. 7:3,5; 8:19), although it is not certain that the latter were universally observed. Individuals might fast at other times for a variety of reasons, especially as a sign of religious zeal in the sight of God. The Pharisees developed the practice of fasting twice weekly on Mondays and Thursdays in intercession for the nation as a whole. **I. Howard Marshall** *Luke* p. 221

5:36-39 Explain the wineskins illustration (Jer. 31:31-34)

[7] The incompatibility of the old and the new is thus stressed. The new does not just repair the old; rather, the old must give way. What is interesting here is Luke's emphasis on the difference between (Pharisaic) Judaism and Christianity – whereas he is otherwise at pains to stress the continuity between them. **Joseph A. Fitzmyer** *The Gospel According to Luke Vol. 1* p. 597

b. Withered hearts – & the true significance of the Sabbath (6:1-11)

6:1-5 Is Christ undermining the Law? (1 Samuel 21:1-6; Matt. 5:17-20)

[8] [6:3] It was a case of “hunger.” This, and this only, justified the departure from a divine law. In this spirit we ought to consider the often mooted question, what may and what may not be done on the Christian Sunday. When Sunday is deliberately made a day for doing secular things which need not necessarily be done on Sunday, and might easily have been done before Sunday, there is an open breach of the fourth commandment. Neither here, nor elsewhere, does our Lord Jesus Christ sanction such use of the Sunday. The works that He sanctions, are works of necessity and mercy, not of money-making, business, pleasure-seeking, and amusement. **J.C. Ryle** *Luke* Vol 1 p. 164

[9] The absurdity of Pharisaism is just this, that it subordinates the end to the means. It was the duty of the high priest to preserve the life of David and his companions, having regard to their mission, even at the expense of the ritual commandment; for the rite exists for the theocracy, not the theocracy for the rite. **Frederic Godet** *Luke* p. 184

[10] [6:1-5] We should notice in this passage, *what excessive importance hypocrites attach to trifles*. ... It is a bad symptom of any man's state of soul, when he begins to put the second things in religion in the first place, and the first things in the second, or the things ordained by man above the things ordained by God. Let us beware of falling into this state of mind. There is something sadly wrong in our spiritual condition, when the only thing we look at in others is their outward Christianity, and the principal question we ask is, whether they worship in our communion, and use our ceremonial, and serve God in our way. Do they repent of sin? Do they believe on Christ? Are they living holy lives? These are the chief points to which our attention ought to be directed. The moment we begin to place anything in religion before these things, we are danger of becoming as thorough Pharisees as the accusers of the disciples. **J.C. Ryle** *Luke* Vol 1 pp. 159, 160

6:6,7 There are worse diseases than a withered hand! (Matt. 15:10-20)

[11] [6:6-11] The rabbis did not object to healing on the sabbath if

there was any danger to life and they interpreted this liberally. 'Whenever there is doubt whether life is in danger this overrides the Sabbath' (*Yoma* 8:6). But if there was no danger they were adamant. Such healing was not allowed. **Leon Morris** *Luke* p. 123

[12] [6:1-5] Let us cling to our Sabbath, as the best safeguard of our Country's religion. Let us defend it against the assaults of ignorant and mistaken men, who would fain turn the day of God into a day of business and pleasure. Above all, let us each strive to keep the day holy ourselves. Much of our spiritual prosperity depends, under God, on the manner in which we employ our Sundays. **J.C. Ryle** *Luke* Vol 1 p. 163

6:8-11 What do these sabbath worshippers not realize about that institution?

[13] [6:8] Here we have a striking example of the publicity of our Lord's miracles. He performs the cure of a disease with a few words, in the presence of a large assembly of persons unfriendly to Him, and in the face of open day. He does not do it suddenly or hurriedly. He does it in such a manner that the attention of the whole assembly is necessarily concentrated on the thing done. **J.C. Ryle** *Luke* Vol 1 p. 169

[14] The skillfulness of the question posed by the Lord (v.9) consists in its representing good omitted as evil committed. The question thus put answers itself; for what Pharisee would venture to make the prerogative of the Sabbath to consist in a permission to torture and kill with impunity

on that day? This question is one of those marks of genius, or rather one of those inspiration of the heart, which enhance our knowledge of Jesus. By reason of His compassion, He feels Himself responsible for all the suffering which He fails to relieve. **Frederic Godet** *Luke* p. 187

[15] [6:11] His violation of accepted traditions rests on two considerations. In Jesus' eyes any refusal to do good is to do evil ... In the context of his mission all soul-life stands under imminent threat of death and, therefore, under demand for decision (cf. 13:3; 9:23ff., 59f.). No longer is there any neutral ground, no longer any do-nothing alternative. **E. Earle Ellis** *The Gospel of Luke* p. 108

Much of our spiritual prosperity depends, under God, on the manner in which we employ our Sundays

– J.C. Ryle

'All, of every church, who are found wrong on these points, will be lost for evermore'

[16] We must make up our minds to see differences of this kind among Christians so long as the world stands. We may regret them much, because of the handle they give to an ignorant and prejudiced world. But they will exist, and are one of the many evidences of our fallen condition. About church government, about the manner of conducting public worship, about fasts and feasts, and saint's days, and ceremonials, Christians have never been entirely of one mind, even from the days of the apostles. On all these points the holiest and ablest servants of God have arrived at different conclusions. Argument, reasoning, persuasion, persecution, have all alike proved unable to produce unity. Let us, however, bless God that there are many points on which all true servants of God are thoroughly agreed. About sin

and salvation, about repentance, and faith, and holiness, there is a mighty unity among all believers, of every name, and nation, and people, and tongue. Let us make much of these points in our own personal religion. These, after all, are the principal things which we shall think of in the hour of death, and day of judgment. On other matters we must agree to differ. It will signify little at the last day what we thought about fasting, and eating, and drinking, and ceremonies. Did we repent, and bring forth fruits meet for repentance? Did we behold the Lamb of God by faith, and receive Him as our Saviour? All, of every church, who are found right on these points, will be saved. All, of every church, who are found wrong on these points, will be lost for evermore. **J.C. Ryle** *Luke* Vol 1 p. 153