

Scribes, Pharisees, and Prophets

by Anton Bosch

This sermon delves into Luke chapter 11, focusing on the interactions between Jesus, the Pharisees, and the lawyers. It highlights the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and lawyers, who prioritize external appearances over internal righteousness, burdening others with rules they themselves do not follow. Jesus warns of the consequences of rejecting prophets and the key of knowledge. The sermon emphasizes the importance of understanding God's message, repentance, discerning true prophets, and being obedient to God's word.

Scripture: Luke 11:37, Nehemiah 8:8, 1 Corinthians 1:30, Colossians 2:3, Matthew 11:28, James 1:22, Jeremiah 29:13, Matthew 7:15, Hebrews 4:12, Acts 3:22

Topics: "Hypocrisy", "True Righteousness"

Description

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Transcript

So, let's turn to the word, and we're in Luke chapter 11, Luke chapter 11, and we'll read 37 through 54, a long passage, and we've split this passage into two groups, dealing with the Pharisees last week and we'll deal with the lawyers this week. So, Luke chapter 11, reading from verse 37. And as he spoke, a certain Pharisee asked him to dine with him, and so he went in and sat down to eat.

When the Pharisee saw it, he marveled that he had not first washed before dinner. Then the Lord said to him, Now you Pharisees make the outside of the cup and dish clean, but your inward part is full of greed and wickedness. Foolish ones, did not he who made the outside make the inside also? But rather give alms of such things as you have, then indeed all things are clean to you.

But woe to you, Pharisees, for you tithe mint and rue and all manner of herbs and pass by justice and the love of God. These you ought to have done without leaving the others undone. Woe to you, Pharisees, for you love the best seats in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces.

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you are like graves which are not seen, and the men who walk over them are not aware of them. Then one of the lawyers answered and said to him, Teacher,

by saying these things you reproach us also. And he said, Woe to you also, lawyers, for you load men with burdens hard to bear, and you yourselves do not touch the burdens with one of your fingers.

Woe to you, for you build the tombs of the prophets, and your fathers kill them. In fact, you bear witness that you approve the deeds of your fathers, that they indeed kill them, and you build their tombs. Therefore the wisdom of God also said, I will send them prophets and apostles, and some of them they will kill and persecute, that the blood of the prophets which was shed from the foundation of the world may be required of this generation.

From the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, a Zechariah who perished between the altar and the temple, yes, I say to you, it shall be required of this generation. Woe to you, lawyers, for you have taken away the key of knowledge. You did not enter in yourselves, and those who were entering in you hindered.

And as he said these things to them, the scribes and the Pharisees began to assail him vehemently, and to cross-examine him about many things, lying in wait for him, and seeking to catch him in something, he might say, that they might accuse him. So we're beginning in verse 45, and one of the lawyers answered and said to him, Teacher, by saying these things you reproach us also. Now the lawyers we mentioned last week, the lawyers and the Pharisees were separate, and yet they were connected.

There were some of the Pharisees who were lawyers, but not all lawyers were necessarily Pharisees, and most Pharisees were not lawyers. The word lawyer is also, and obviously the word lawyer means someone who is schooled in the law. That was their function, that is what they did.

But they were also called scribes, and so depending on the translation, and also depending on the manuscript, some places it calls them scribes, some places it called lawyers, and some places it calls them doctors. Not medical doctors, but doctors of theology. So who were the scribes? Well, first of all, the word scribe means someone who writes, and so they were writers in the sense that they translated, didn't translate, but they copied scripture.

Remember they didn't have Xerox machines or printing presses, so everything was hand-copied, so they would do that. But they would also do secular writing. They would write bills of sale, they would write legal documents, they would copy legal documents for legal purposes, and so they would be sort of secretaries in that sense.

But their prime function was to write scripture, and because they were copying scripture all the time, they had become very familiar with the scripture, so they really became the theologians of the day. The Pharisees were a little different in the sense that the Pharisees obviously had a political agenda. The Pharisees were evangelical, not in the modern sense, but they preached the message of Judaism.

Jesus accused them, he said, you go to the ends of the earth to make disciples. And so they were preachers of the law. The lawyers were not preachers of the law as much.

They were really academics, they were experts, but they were not so much in the public as the Pharisees were. The lawyers began in the Bologna captivity. Remember that when Judah was taken into captivity to Babylon for 70 years, the temple had been destroyed, and so there was no opportunity for sacrifice.

The priesthood had no function anymore because the priesthood operates in the context of the temple, and so they began to teach the people, and we'll see a scripture that deals with that in a few moments. And so these guys were experts in the law. They interpreted the law.

They did not so much apply the law. There's a difference between those two things. Just by the way, I need to watch my time.

But in interpreting, you're simply looking at what the text says. So part of what I'm doing this morning is I'm interpreting. I'm interpreting what does the text say.

But then there's another dimension to preaching, and that is application, and that is when we say, what does the text mean to us today? What must you do? How does it affect you? How does this impact your life? And so those are the two different things. And even today, there are preachers who say, well, my job is not to bring application. My job is simply to interpret.

I don't agree with that. I don't believe that that is right. Our job is to bring application as well.

So the Pharisees would be those who would do interpretation plus application. The lawyers did not bring so much application. They simply interpreted what does the law say.

Now remember that when we speak about the law, they were not just about the law, but they were also about the traditions. They were more about the traditions than they were about the law. So, and of course, as lawyers, we have many jokes about lawyers today, and I certainly don't regard them as generally good people.

I'm sure there are good lawyers around. But generally, their job is to find loopholes in the law, to justify something which shouldn't happen, or to get something passed that shouldn't pass. And again, I understand these are broad generalizations, and they're based on my experience.

But these guys did exactly that. A lot of the time, they were interested in finding loopholes for themselves while at the same time stringently applying the details of the traditions on the people. And we'll see Jesus make a reference to that later.

So one of the lawyers, so Jesus is speaking to the Pharisees, they're in this house, they're having a meal, and he's speaking to the Pharisees, and one of the lawyer's answers said, you're getting at us also. There's a saying that if you throw a stone into a pack of dogs, the one that yelps loudest is the one that got hit. So he got hit.

He knew that the shoe fits. And so he says, well, you know, we like to think that we're better than the Pharisees. They're all emotional.

They're all evangelical in that sense. We're just about the law. And basically, Jesus says, no, you're just as bad.

And so he says in verse 46, woe to you also, lawyers. So he said, woe to the Pharisees. Now he's saying, woe to you, lawyers.

For you load men with burdens hard to bear, and you yourselves do not touch the burdens with one of your fingers. Now let me deal with the last part of the verse again. When he says you do not touch the burdens with one of your fingers, it can mean one of two things.

Either it means that you don't submit yourself to the same rules that you impose on others, and there is an aspect to that. Remember, this is all about legalism and legalist preachers. And of course, we have legalist preachers today.

We have legalistic churches today. And we have legalistic denominations today. And generally, legalists often have two sets of rules.

One set of rules for the leaders and another set of rules for the people. And so there is that aspect to them. But remember, these guys were at the same time fastidious about keeping the details of the law.

They would measure everything in great detail. In fact, speaking to the Pharisees, Jesus said that you tithe on the herbs that you put in your stew. And so I think that the primary meaning here really is that you lay burdens on the people and you don't help them to carry those burdens.

And this is the very nature of legalism. Legalism makes Christianity hard and doesn't help people to live those lives. It's easy to be a legalistic preacher because you just lay down the law.

And many preachers are good at that. And it's pretty easy. But that doesn't help anyone very much.

It's one thing to know what you should do. It's another thing to know how to do that. And that's the problem.

They were just telling people, this is what you've got to do. You've got to tithe. You've got to attend the feasts.

You've got to keep the Sabbath. You've got to keep the law. And not only the Ten Commandments, but the 613 Commandments.

And in addition to that, the 60-odd thousand additional rules that they had made, particularly as far as the Sabbath was concerned. And we've spoken about that before. There are many examples which I'm not going to get into this morning.

But the most minute little details as to what you're allowed to do and what you're not allowed to do on the Sabbath or in any other matter. So they make it hard for the people. But they don't help the people by equipping them to keep these rules.

And of course, we need to be careful in our own lives. Some Christians are hard on themselves. They lay all sorts of rules upon themselves without finding ways of being able to live under those rules.

We need to be careful of one another. It's easy to lay laws down for other people when we won't live under those laws. And it's easy to condemn others rather than to help others.

And that really is the problem. This is what Jesus is addressing. It's one thing to put a load or a burden on someone else.

It's another thing to help that person carry that load. Remember it was Jesus who said, take my yoke upon you, because my yoke is easy and my burden is light. You see, the difference between Jesus and the Pharisees, or the scribes, is that the scribes said, there are the rules.

Keep the rules. And Jesus said, no, I will come under the yoke with you. I will carry the load and the burden with you.

And so he's not telling us what to do. He is helping us in doing the will of God. Now verse 47, woe to you, for you build the tombs of the prophets, and your fathers killed them.

Now, this gets a little bit more difficult because they're building tombs, or monuments if you will, to the prophets. Remember the prophets of the Old Testament, the major prophets, minor prophets. Now, you build tombs for the prophets, and your fathers killed them.

Now, it would seem that what Jesus is saying is you're honoring them, because surely when you build a tomb or a monument, it's honoring the memory of that person. But in fact, Jesus is actually saying, no, when you build those tombs, you're not honoring the prophets, you're in fact honoring your fathers who killed the prophets. You see, the only prophet that Israel ever liked was a dead prophet.

And unfortunately, the same today is true, that those preachers who will speak prophetically into our lives are the ones that we don't like. We kill the messenger, because we don't like the message. But obviously, in our religious, sanctimonious attitude, we'll say we honor the preachers, we respect the preachers, but in fact, we don't.

And of course, this is still true today, prophets, preachers are still stoned and still killed today. Now, obviously, there are some that deserve to be stoned, because they are false prophets. There is a preacher not so far from here who is crying Bambi right now, because he has been pointed out as being a fraud.

And yet he's saying, I'm being persecuted for Christ. No, you're not being persecuted for Christ, you're being persecuted because of your own lies and your own misdeeds. And so there are prophets that need to be stoned, but there are other prophets that need to be heard, the true prophets.

And that was always the case in the Old Testament. There was this one king who had a whole tribe of prophets, and they would all say what he wanted them to say. But there was one prophet who would speak the truth.

And of course, he never got consulted. And then one day, the king called him and said, well, you know, what do you say? And he said, what's the good of me saying anything, because you're not going to listen to me, you're going to listen to them anyhow. So it's not a, this is not a new problem.

So you build the tombs of the prophets, and your fathers killed them, and we see how this plays out. In fact, you bear witness that you approve the deeds of your fathers, for they indeed killed them, and you build their tombs. So again, you say, well, I'm reading into it, because they're building the tombs, so they're honoring the prophets.

But in fact, what Jesus will say is, I will send them prophets and apostles, and some of them they will kill and persecute. So what Jesus is saying is, you say, well, we honor Jeremiah, and Daniel, and Malachi, and those prophets. But then Jesus says, when prophets come to you, and the prophets come to them, two in particular, John the Baptist, and Jesus.

And what did they do with them? They killed them. And so they are doing exactly the same as what their fathers did. So Jesus is, that's the basis of Jesus's argument.

He's not saying, well, you know, I think that you're disrespecting the prophets by building tombs for them. No, he says, I know you're doing that, because you're going to kill the prophets again. You've already killed John.

And while we understand it wasn't Israel, it was Herod who killed John, the Jews were complicit, because they hated John, because he spoke the truth to them. And so they will do the same thing. You're going to

do the same thing that your fathers did.

So Jesus is saying, don't tell me that you honor the prophets, because you're not honoring the prophets right now. Jesus was standing right in their midst, and we see at the end of this passage, at the end of the chapter, verse 53, I think it is, they began to look for a reason to entrap him. And so they were no different to their fathers.

Now just a technical thing at the beginning of the verse, therefore, the wisdom of God also said, now, when you read that, it seems that he is quoting from the Old Testament. In fact, he's not quoting from the Old Testament. So what does he mean by the wisdom of God? Well, there is no other quote, not in secular Judaic writings, nor in the Old Testament that says this.

So who's saying this? Jesus is saying this. He is speaking as the wisdom of God. Now obviously he can't say to them, I am saying to you, because they didn't respect him.

They didn't regard him as anything. So he simply says, the wisdom of God says. But we know in 1 Corinthians 1, verse 30, of him are you in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God.

Jesus became for us wisdom from God. In Colossians 2, verse 3, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. So Jesus never called himself wisdom, and we need to be careful because there's a scripture in the book of Proverbs that speaks about wisdom coming forth, which people use to base the idea that Jesus was created or that Jesus was brought forth in the Old Testament.

Well, when Proverbs speaks about wisdom, it's not pointing directly at Jesus. And any prophecies or any statements in the book of Proverbs about wisdom do not directly apply to Jesus. But when Jesus says wisdom, the wisdom of God has said, I believe that he is speaking of himself.

He's basically saying, I contain the wisdom and the knowledge of God, because I'm God in the flesh, and I'm saying to you. Now they could not understand that. Today we're able to look back and we're able to understand that.

And so the question then simply is, what is our response to the prophets that he has sent today? Notice that he says, I will send them prophets and apostles. And so clearly he's referring to John the Baptist, he's referring to Jesus as prophets, and then there would be other New Testament prophets. But there would also be apostles, the 12 and Paul, and he would send them.

And what happened to them? Well, all of them, as far as we know, except John, the beloved, the rest of them were all martyred, some of them by the Romans and others by so-called believers. And so he is saying, I will send them prophets and apostles, and some of them they will kill and persecute. And the same is true today.

So the question simply is, what is your response to those preachers, let's not get too hung up on the word prophets, let's just call them preachers, those preachers who speak the truth into your life? There's only one of two, well, I guess there's three responses. You can just ignore it. And that would be a sad thing.

You can obey the word of the Lord, if it indeed is the word of the Lord. Or you can discredit the prophet or the preacher by seeking to kill him. Today we don't kill or stone preachers.

You could go to prison for that, maybe get a couple of years. But we kill their reputations. We kill their ministries.

We kill them in our own minds so that they don't exist as far as we're concerned. And I don't want to get into this idea of cancel culture, that's a terrible thing. And yet that's exactly what we do as far as we're concerned.

I'm never going to listen to him again. I'm never going to go to that church again, because that preacher pointed me out, spoke to me. I remember the stone and the dogs.

All right, so verse 50, that the blood, let's get the context again, verse 49, I will send them prophets and apostles, some of them they will kill and persecute, that the blood of the prophets, which was shed from the foundation of the world, may be required of this generation. So all of the prophets, the martyrdom of all of the prophets from the beginning, Jesus says is going to be required of this generation. Now just think about that.

Is that fair? Is that right, that God would lay the death, the murder of all of the Old Testament prophets on this generation? And here, when he speaks about this generation, he's meaning these people who are alive here and now. Yes, it is, because they would kill Jesus. And Jesus was the culmination, he was the completion, he was in fact contained all of the Old Testament prophets.

Everything that they ever said, everything they ever represented, was represented in Jesus. And so when they killed Jesus, they didn't just kill one prophet. They killed the whole, or attempted to kill the whole prophetic ministry, the whole prophetic message that began from Abel, he's going to say, right up to Zechariah.

So he says then, the blood of the prophets, which was shed from the foundation of the world, may be required from this generation, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who perished between the altar and the temple. Yes, I say to you, it shall be required of this generation. All right, now here we have some technical difficulties.

We all know who Abel was. Abel was the first man to be killed, to be murdered, by his brother Cain. Was Abel a prophet? Well, not in the true sense.

He made no prophecies, he made no statements as such. But was he a prophet in the sense that he portrayed a message, that he carried a message? Yes, he was called a righteous Abel. And by his sacrifice, he was in fact prophetically pointing to the coming of Jesus.

Remember what he did is he killed an animal. He shed blood in order to make a sacrifice. That wasn't the first time that happened.

But he did that against his brother, who was bringing his own labors, the vegetables that he had farmed, the sweat of his brow, he was bringing his own works. And God says, I don't accept that, I accept the sacrifice of blood that was shed. And so Abel was acting not, was not a prophet in that he went around preaching, but his life preached, and preached the coming of the Messiah, the coming sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ.

So in that sense, he is a prophet. And then Zechariah, well, I'm not going to bore you with all the theories, but there's many questions, many ideas as to who the Zechariah is. There are a couple of Zechariahs in

the Old Testament.

And remember that John the Baptist's father was also called Zechariah. There was one Zechariah who was killed, but not between the altar and the temple as far as we know. So we're not sure who this Zechariah is.

And I don't think it really matters that much, because what Jesus really is saying, and it's just one of those strange coincidences, and yes, there are coincidences, that Abel is the first letter of our alphabet. Remember Jesus is not speaking English. The Aramaic alphabet or the Greek alphabets are different, but we would say from A to Z, Abel to Zechariah.

So that's just a coincidence. But that's in fact what Jesus was doing. He was saying all the prophets from the first one to the last one.

He just puts names on them. But he's covering just the whole lot. And I don't think we should get too hung up on Zechariah.

So he's just saying all of them. I say to you, it shall be required of this generation. Verse 52, the second woe, I think.

Woe to you, lawyers, for you have taken away the key of knowledge. You did not enter in yourselves, and those who were entering in, you hindered. You took away the key of knowledge.

Obviously the key is that which opens a door, maybe opens a treasure house of knowledge. Without the key, you can't get into it. Without the key, you don't have access.

And of course, the knowledge is the knowledge of the holy, the knowledge about God, the knowledge about his word. In the beginning of these teachers, of these lawyers, and remember I said that this happened at the Babylonian captivity, where there was no temple and the priesthood had ceased to function. And so if we go to Nehemiah chapter 8 and verse 8, they now returned to Jerusalem to rebuild the city and the temple.

But one of the most important things was that these three leaders, Nehemiah and Zerubbabel and Ezra, said, well, it's one thing to rebuild the temple, but what we need to do more importantly is we need to rebuild the faith. And so the people insisted then that there be a reading of the scriptures and they read the Old Testament all day long. And so they read distinctly from the book in the law of God and they gave the sense and helped them understand the reading.

This is what the learned people tell us is where this ministry or this function of the scribes or the lawyers began. So these were priests, but they were specialized in giving the meaning of scripture. This was their function and I believe it was a legitimate function because this is still the function of preachers today.

This is what I believe to be my job and I don't know that I do it very well, but this is what I desire to do and that is to give the sense and to help people understand the reading of scripture. Not just reading the scripture, but understanding what it is saying. That was their function, was to give the meaning, to give the understanding, the sense.

And yet what were they doing? They were doing the exact opposite. They were taking away the key. They would give them access to knowledge.

And of course we can speak about preachers today and there are many preachers today who do exactly that, who confuse more than they enlighten and who teach all sorts of things that are irrelevant and of no value to the believer. That teach all sorts of doctrines and I'm not going to get into them this morning because I have enough trouble right now. But all sorts of doctrines that are of no value to the common believer.

And I shudder when I look and I listen to many preachers and I read many preachers. When I look at the stuff that preachers get into, the subjects they teach on that have no value other than to confuse people in their faith. I'm not suggesting that we keep people immature spiritually or intellectually.

You know I don't believe that. Believe that we need to be taught, we need to be informed, we need to know and understand. But you get into arguments about literally how many angels can fit on the head of a pin.

Or where did Cain get his wife from? Or did Adam have a belly button? Or the list goes on and on and on about all sorts of nonsense. What was, here's one that theologians and preachers will spend hours and hours on. What was the relationship between the first, second and third persons of the Trinity, between the Father, Son and Spirit in eternity past? What did they do? How did they relate to one another? The scripture doesn't tell us.

And even if we knew, what help does it give us in living our lives? How does it help us to carry the burdens that we have to carry? How does it help us to become more like Jesus? It has no value whatsoever. May God give me grace that I may never get into a place where I'm simply just confusing. And I know sometimes I confuse because I'm fallible and I don't always express myself the way I ought to.

But my job is not to confuse, my job is to enlighten, to give understanding, to get the sense and the meaning of what is God saying to me today. And that's why I preach the way I do. That's why I preach directly and why I call a spade a shovel.

Because we need to get the understanding of what is the scripture actually saying? And what is it saying to me? It's no good going away and saying, I understand what a scribe is and I understand what a Pharisee is and what a lawyer is. I understand why it's speaking about Abel and Zechariah. That is going to help you nothing if you don't get the message.

And the preacher's job is to give the message. And for those who are watching online, if your preachers that you're watching and that you're listening are not helping you to bear the burdens, to live the life, to become like Jesus, find a decent preacher who is able to not take away the key of knowledge, but is able to unlock the door to know God. Not knowledge about theology, that helps nobody.

But to know God, to know His word, to know His will for me, to know how to live the life that He has called me to live. Verse 53, and as He said these things to them, the scribes and the Pharisees began to assail Him vehemently and to cross-examine Him about many things. So they began to attack Him.

And the word cross-examine here is a very good English word for what they were doing. When you cross-examine, and I'm sure we've all watched court cases and videos or movies on court cases, and when the lawyers cross-examine, they're trying to trip you up. They'll ask you a question and then they'll bombard you with a lot of stuff so you get all flustered, and then they'll ask you the same question again, and if your answer's slightly different, oh no, you said that then, you said this now, now you're a liar.

This is what they're trying to do, they're doing everything they can to trip Him up. Now remember that they had already tried to trip Him up on the washing of hands when we began last week. But that wasn't on Scripture, that was on their tradition.

And they would never be able to find anything against Him on truth and on the Word of God. But obviously they had much against Him concerning their vain or empty traditions. Now remember, let me put the context again as we come to the end.

We have seen in the Gospel of Luke how that Jesus' fame rises, crowds are following Him, He's now on His journey from Galilee down to Jerusalem. He's on His way to the cross. The sentiments are changing.

The people are becoming skeptical because the leaders of Israel are turning against Him. And part of what Luke is showing us here is how that the opposition is now increasing and will continue to increase until eventually the kangaroo court held the night before His crucifixion hands Him over to the Romans to be crucified. So this is the context of the passage.

And so they were lying in wait for Him and seeking to catch Him in something He might say that they might accuse Him. What a terrible statement about the Lord Jesus. Trying to find something in which to accuse Him.

The spotless, blameless, perfect Son of God. Never said a wrong word. I probably said a hundred wrong words in this 45 minutes.

Jesus never said the wrong word ever. Never thought the wrong thought. And yet they were looking for something to accuse Him on.

Now just think as we draw to a close. What if they'd spent the time trying to understand His message? But rather than understand His message, they're looking for an accusation. Why do they want to accuse Him? Because His message pointed the finger at their sin.

It's easy. I endure this every week on YouTube particularly. Every week there are fingers being pointed at me.

Oh, He said this. He said that. He's wrong on this.

He's wrong on that. And folks, I believe that most of the time it's the dog that got hit. But looking for an out, trying to put the blame on the preacher rather than repenting.

Oh, had these men repented, had they listened to His message, had they examined themselves in the light of what He was saying, things could have been so different for them. But rather they're sealing their fate as it were. And remember that Jesus spoke about judgment coming.

And I didn't want to get into that, but judgment was coming. Judgment was another 40 years away when the temple would be destroyed and that Israel would be scattered until 1948. For 2,000 years God's judgment and God's judgment still rests upon Israel and that judgment will not be lifted until they say, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

Judgment was coming and judgment is coming again. Judgment is coming to America because America has rejected the true prophets and has flocked behind false prophets and false messengers. May God help us that we may discern the difference between true prophets and false prophets, that we may obey

the message from God, whether we like the message or don't like the message, but that we may recognize that in fact this is God's word.

I need to be a doer of the word and not a hearer only. Father, we thank you for your word. We thank you that the Lord Jesus came and He was the ultimate prophet.

And Lord, that you have spoken in times past through the prophets, but you in these last days have spoken to us through your son. And Father, we thank you that He still speaks through His word. We thank you, Lord, that we have your word before us and that you're speaking to us.

Lord, forgive us for the many times that we turn away from the truth as we find it convicting us, whether it's preached by the preacher or whether it is there as we read the scriptures. But Lord, help us to be those who would see and understand. Lord, we pray that you would send preachers into our country, that you would send preachers into the city who will truly preach the word of God without compromise, with truth, and yet at the same time not laying burdens on people, but helping people to be like Jesus.

And so Lord, I pray that these things may be true and may be real. In Jesus' name I pray. I pray that you'd go with us now, keep us, protect us, bring us together again safely on Thursday, I pray in Jesus' name, amen.

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