

**Luke 11:37-44**  
**Oct 13, 2019**

**Open with Prayer**

**HOOK:**

Q: What is “legalism?” [Let people engage: Legalism is an attempt to gain favor with God or to impress our fellow man by doing certain things (or avoiding other things), without regard to the condition of our hearts before God.]

Q: What do you think is at the root of legalism? What drives the legalist? [Let people engage: The sin of pride, because the legalist thinks that he is able to commend himself to God by his own good deeds. Invariably, he is only looking at externals, not at his heart. The legalist’s pride motivates him to exalt himself in the sight of others by his outward behavior, again neglecting to see the corruption of his own heart.

**Transition:** Last week, we wrapped up Luke’s last illustration by reminding us that each of us is either controlled by light or darkness. The light Jesus brings is not only external, like a “lamp unto our feet and light unto path,” but it is also internal. If we are receptive to Jesus and His Word, our hearts are filled with light and, we become children of light.

But Jesus has more to say about this because the Pharisees thought they “saw the light” as they studied the Law. In this next set of verses, Jesus exposes the Pharisees’ legalism, and thus their heart condition. By doing so, Jesus which reveals that they aren’t “seeing the light” as well as they thought!

Q: To get us started, why do you think a Pharisee invited Him to his home for a meal? [Let people engage]

Let’s begin with v.37-44.

**BOOK:**

*Six Woes*

<sup>37</sup> When Jesus had finished speaking, a Pharisee invited him to eat with him; so he went in and reclined at the table. <sup>38</sup> But the Pharisee, noticing that Jesus did not first wash before the meal, was surprised.

<sup>39</sup> Then the Lord said to him, “Now then, you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness. <sup>40</sup> You foolish people! Did not the one who made the outside make the inside also? <sup>41</sup> But give what is inside the dish to the poor, and everything will be clean for you.

<sup>42</sup> “Woe to you Pharisees, because you give God a tenth of your mint, rue and all other kinds of garden herbs, but you neglect justice and the love of God. You should have practiced the latter without leaving the former undone.

<sup>43</sup> “Woe to you Pharisees, because you love the most important seats in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces.

<sup>44</sup> “Woe to you, because you are like unmarked graves, which men walk over without knowing it.”

**Process Observations/Questions:**

Q: What did you most like about this passage? What resonated with you? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you least like about this passage? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you find in this passage that you didn't understand? [Let people engage]

Q: What do we learn about Jesus in this passage? [Let people engage]

**LOOK:**

Christianity is primarily a matter of the heart. Everything flows from a heart relationship with God, who transforms our hearts when He regenerates us. The Jewish religious leaders seemingly were seeking after God, but in reality, they were self-seeking. They didn't see themselves as sinners in need of a Savior. They saw themselves as good people because they kept the Law. But in reality, they didn't keep the Law because they didn't apply it on the heart level. Thus, Jesus in effect said that if they would be as careful about clean hearts as they were about clean hands, then they would be what they ought to be.

**Close in Prayer**

### **Commentaries for Today's Lesson:**

**Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Vol. 1, pp. 217-218). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.**

#### **Hypocrisy (Luke 11:37–44)**

At this stage in Christ's ministry, when the religious leaders were bent on destroying Him, why would a Pharisee invite Him to his home for a meal? If he had been sincerely seeking truth, he would have talked with our Lord privately. It seems obvious that he was looking for an opportunity to accuse Jesus, and he thought he had it when Jesus did not practice the ceremonial washing before eating (Mark 7:2–3). Knowing what the host was thinking, Jesus responded by giving a “spiritual analysis” of the Pharisees.

***He exposed their folly (vv. 37–41).*** The basic error of the Pharisees was thinking that righteousness was only a matter of external actions, and they minimized internal attitudes. They were very careful to keep the outside clean, but they ignored the wickedness within. They seemed to forget that the same God who created the outside also created the inside, the “inner person” that also needs cleansing (Ps. 51:6, 10).

The Pharisees boasted of their giving (Matt. 6:1–4; Luke 18:11–12), but they did not give *what was within* to the Lord. The way to make the *outside* pure is to make the *inside* pure (Luke 11:41). Kenneth Wuest translates this verse, “Rather, the things which are inside give as alms, and behold, all things are clean to you” (WUEST). The way to clean up a dirty vocabulary is not to brush your teeth but to cleanse your heart.

***He denounced their sins (vv. 42–44).*** These six “woes” parallel the “woes” in Matthew 23. Jesus started with the sins of the Pharisees (Luke 11:42–44) and then turned to the sins of the scribes, for it was their interpretations of the Law that formed the basis for the whole pharisaical system (Luke 11:45–52).

The first three “woes” denounce the Pharisees for their *wrong priorities*. They were careful about tithing even the tiny leaves and seeds from the herbs, but they forgot about important things like justice and love (Micah 6:7–8). They majored on the minors! Jesus did not say they should stop tithing but that they should put their religious activities into proper perspective.

They also put *reputation* above *character*. They thought that sitting in the right seats and being acknowledged by the right people would make them spiritual. Reputation is what people think we are; character is what God knows we are.

The comparison in Luke 11:44 must have infuriated the host and the other Pharisees who were present. The Jews had to be especially careful about ceremonial defilement from dead bodies (Num. 19:11–22; note especially v. 16), so they made sure the graves were carefully marked. But the Pharisees were like *unmarked graves* that did not look like graves at all! This meant that they were *unconsciously defiling others when they thought they were helping them become holier!* Instead of helping people, the Pharisees were harming them.

**Martin, J. A. (1985). *Isaiah*. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p.237)**

*e. Jesus accused and questioned by the Pharisees (11:37–44) (Matt. 23:1–36; Mark 12:38–40).*

11:37–41. **A Pharisee invited** Jesus to dinner. **Jesus did not** engage in the ritual washing **before the meal**, which completely **surprised ... the Pharisee**. Jesus focused on **greed**, a

characteristic of the Pharisees, and said that they should be as concerned with the cleansing of **the inside** as they were with washing **the outside** of the body. One indication that they were clean on the inside would be their willingness to give material things to the poor. This meant not that their act of giving would atone for their sins, but that it would show a proper relationship to the Law and to God.

11:42–44. Jesus next pronounced three woes (pronouncements of condemnation) on the **Pharisees** for disregarding **justice and the love of God**. They were bound up in the ritual of the Law, tithing even small **garden herbs**. This made them hypocrites (cf. 12:1). They were filled with pride, loving **the most important seats in the synagogues**. And rather than guiding the people aright, they caused people who followed them to be contaminated, just as **unmarked graves**, when walked on, would defile a Jew without his knowing it (Num. 19:16). The Pharisees feared contamination from ritual uncleanness, but Jesus pointed out that their greed, pride, and wickedness contaminated the entire nation.

**Stein, R. H. (1992). Luke (Vol. 24, pp. 339-344). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.**

## Context

At this point Luke introduced an incident that Matthew placed in a different location (Matt 15:1–9). Luke’s placement of the account emphasizes the need to keep one’s eyes “good” (Luke 11:34). The setting, Jesus’ dining at a Pharisee’s home, provides a context for a series of judgmental woes on the Pharisees and the experts in the law. After being criticized again, this time for neglecting the ceremonial washing before a meal (11:37–38), instead of defending himself Jesus attacked his opponents by proclaiming the need for an inner purity of heart as the basis for one’s external behavior (11:39–40). Luke then added a saying concerning almsgiving, a favorite Lukan theme, followed by two sets of three woes each (11:42–44, 46–52). Luke concluded the passage with a summary displaying the hostility of the Pharisees and experts of the law toward Jesus (11:53–54). In comparing the woes in Luke with those in Matthew, it is apparent that Luke modified the tradition to facilitate his Gentile audience’s understanding of it.

## Comments

**11:37 When Jesus had finished speaking.** This ties the present account closely to the preceding one.

**A Pharisee.** See comments on 5:17. This Pharisee was a person who kept both the oral and written law “perfectly” in regard to its external commandments but lost sight of the more important internal or spiritual requirements of the law.

**Reclined at the table.** Reclining was the usual posture for a Sabbath meal. Compare Luke 14:10; 17:7 and see comments on 22:14.

**11:38 Wash before the meal.** This practice was due to the oral tradition (cf. Mark 7:2–4); the OT has no such requirement. The purpose of such washing was ceremonial, not hygienic. Whether or not Jesus omitted it intentionally was irrelevant to Luke’s purpose. In Matt 15:1–2 Jesus is criticized because his disciples did not wash, but here Jesus is attacked directly.

**Was surprised.** “Surprised” is literally *amazed*. See comments on 2:18; 9:43.

**11:39 Then the Lord said to him.** See comments on 7:13.

**Clean the outside of the cup and dish.** Jesus was not accusing the Pharisees of washing the outside of cups but not the inside but that the Pharisaic traditions were equivalent to this because their entire concern was focused on external actions rather than on the more important internal condition.

**Greed and wickedness.** The Pharisees are described elsewhere as lovers of money (cf. 16:14) and unscrupulous in their pursuit of it (20:47). Compare *Assumption of Moses* 7:6–9.

**11:40 You foolish people!** Compare Luke 12:20.

**The one who made?** This is a circumlocution for God. This rhetorical question implies that since God made both, both the inside and outside should be cleaned. How to cleanse the inside from greed and wickedness is the subject of the next verse. God is the ultimate Maker, even of cups made by humans.

**11:41** This verse has no parallel in the other Gospels. Here, as in 16:9, Luke argued the need for a correct attitude toward and use of possessions. In the context of greed an appropriate cleansing of the inner heart is through repentance leading to generosity/alms for the poor (cf. 19:8).

**Give what is inside [the dish].** This can be translated as an accusative of respect, “as far as what is inside the dish is concerned,” or as an accusative of direct object, “give the things inside the cup” as alms. The latter is preferable.

**11:42** The first woe refers to their concern for minutiae, even to the tithing of herbs lest something “tithable” be overlooked. The oral traditions were much more explicit and extensive than the OT with regard to what one was supposed to tithe. Compare Deut 14:22–29; Lev 27:30–33; 2 Chr 31:5–12.

**Woe.** See comments on 6:24.

**To you Pharisees.** Jesus was neither condemning all Pharisees nor the Pharisaic movement in toto. Condemnation of hypocritical Pharisees can be found even within the Talmudic literature. In *Šota* 22b seven types of Pharisees are described. The first five are hypocritical: (1) the “shoulder” Pharisee, who wears his good actions on his shoulder for all to see; (2) the “wait-a-little” Pharisee, who finds excuses for putting off a good deed; (3) the “bruised” Pharisee, who to avoid looking at a woman runs into walls; (4) the “pestle” or hunched-over Pharisee, who walks bent over in pretended humility; and (5) the “ever-reckoning” Pharisee, who is always weighing his good deeds against his bad. But also mentioned are (6) the “God-fearing” Pharisee, who lives in holy awe and the fear of God, and (7) the “God-loving” Pharisee, who loves God from his heart. The kind of commitment that leads to the finest piety is also frequently accompanied by hypocrisy. Neither Pharisaism nor Christianity is exempt from this unfortunate tendency.

**All other kinds of garden herbs.** This is an overstatement for, according to the Pharisaic tradition, not every herb needed be tithed. See *Seb.* 9.1.

**You neglect justice.** This refers to human/social justice, not the divine judgment. The Pharisees were indifferent to the poor.

**The love of God.** “Love of God” means love *for* God (an objective genitive). The Matthean parallel has “mercy and faith” (Matt 23:23, RSV). For the close tie between the love of God and faith, see 10:25–37, “The Lukan Message”.

**You should have practiced the latter.** This statement is somewhat surprising. Jesus probably meant that tithing in general was commendable and not that they should follow all the oral traditions on tithing. Tithing herbs was not condemned; neglecting more important issues was. A visible preoccupation with the trivial while neglecting the most important is hypocrisy.

**Without leaving the former undone.** The Pharisaic concern for tithing was hypocritical because it was not accompanied by the much more important commandments to love God and to

love one's neighbor (i.e., not to neglect justice). Not only does Luke 11:42d echo Mic 6:8 but, more importantly, it summarizes the two commandments in Luke 10:27. See comments on 10:27.

**11:43** The second woe involves the pursuit of public recognition and self-aggrandizement. Compare 14:7–11 for a commentary on this verse.

**You love the most important seats in the synagogues.** This tendency toward social prominence is repeated in 20:46 (cf. Mark 12:38–40). Such a desire is condemned in Luke (cf. 9:46–48; 14:7–11; 18:14; 22:24–27).

**And greetings in the marketplaces.** This too is repeated in 20:46.

**11:44** The meaning of the third woe is not as clear as the first two. The parallel in Matt 23:27–28 is much easier to understand. Luke may have omitted the reference to “whitewashed tombs” in order avoid having to explain this Jewish practice meant to protect people from accidentally becoming ceremonially unclean by contact with a tomb (*Šeqal*. 5.1). The picture part of the analogy is clear. People were unknowingly walking over unmarked graves. But it is uncertain to what this refers. It may mean that the Pharisees were like walking dead and that those in contact with them (their followers) became unclean just as they would by contact with a dead body (Num 9:6–10; Lev 21:1–4, 11). Another possibility is that their followers were unconscious that contact with the Pharisees' teachings was death-giving.

### **The Lukan Message**

Each of the six woes is a variation on the central theme of the passage, which essentially addresses the concentration on external religious performance to the neglect of one's inner spiritual character. In the end, however, God judges the heart (16:15; Acts 1:24; 15:8). This same concentration on externals and outer appearances is encountered in the early church as well (Acts 11:1–18; 15:1–29). The passage also touches upon several Lukan ethical concerns. The narrow concentration on tithing herbs allowed the Pharisees to ignore their responsibility for justice to the poor and the outcast, thus permitting greed and wickedness to flourish unchecked (Luke 11:39–42). The love for money (16:14) caused the Pharisees to “devour” the homes of widows (20:47). An earlier woe against the rich is also appropriate here (6:24). Luke's reaction to greed is clear from his addition in 11:41—Sell and give alms to the poor. The importance of this theme is also stressed in 16:9–12; 19:8. To follow Jesus means leaving everything (see comments on 5:11). One way to guard against the sin of greed is to use of one's possessions wisely. Another is to love one's neighbor. This theme is described in 11:42 as the pursuit of justice. The pairing of the love of God with the love of justice cannot help but recall the two commandments that summarize the law (see comments on 10:27). Another way to avoid enslavement to externals is by remembering Jesus' teaching on true greatness. One should refrain from seeking one's own glory or exaltation. The woe against such pursuits in 11:43 is echoed throughout the Gospel.

**The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). (Lk 11:37-44). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.**