

THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

A Message of Hope and Fulfillment For Those Longing For God

The Problem With Religion

Luke 11: 37-54

After the drama of the exorcism of the mute man and the objections that Jesus cast out demons by the power of the prince of demons, along with the demand for a sign that His message was authentic, the curiosity of a Pharisee is aroused. He, along with some of his fellow Pharisees and scribal lawyers, invite Jesus to share a meal with the obvious intention of further exploring His claims and teaching. Before they can even come to the table, however, Jesus already has run afoul of their traditions. It is the perfect opening for Him to set the record straight between religion and true spirituality.

I. The Ritual Cleansing and Lessons of the Heart (vv. 37-41)

- A. The tradition of ceremonial hand washing as a symbol of purity
- B. Religious appearance that covers an evil heart
- C. That which comes from the heart reveals the true character of the individual

II. Woe to You: Principles of True and False Spirituality (vv. 42-52)

- A. Majoring on the minor points while neglecting the truly important (v. 42)
- B. The dangers of spiritual pride (v. 43)
- C. The pitfalls of dead religion, especially among religious leaders (v. 44)
- D. The insidious evil of legalism (v. 46)
- E. Those who fail to learn from history are destined to repeat it (vv. 47-51)
- F. The higher standard of those who teach (v. 52)

III. Familiarity Breeds Contempt

- A. Religious practice and spiritual disciplines often arise from a passion to know and to obey the Lord. In time, however, the form may outlast the passion and even be passed down to successive generations (Rev. 2:1-7).
- B. Sacred worship and love for God may be replaced by religious habit and ritual to the extent that the latter is mistaken for the former. Soon we are evaluating spirituality on the basis of external practice while rationalizing, or even ignoring, the cold darkness prevailing in the heart.
- C. By the time Jesus came to His people, their apostasy was complete and the generation of His day bore the brunt of dead orthodoxy (v. 51b). Let this be a lesson and a warning for us!

Now when He had spoken, a Pharisee asked Him to have lunch with him; and He went in, and reclined at the table. When the Pharisee saw it, he was surprised that He had not first ceremonially washed before the meal. 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. But woe to you Pharisees! For you pay tithe of mint and rue and every kind of garden herb, and yet disregard justice and the love of God; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others. Woe to you Pharisees! For you love the chief seats in the synagogues and the respectful greetings in the market places. Woe to you! For you are like concealed tombs, and the people who walk over them are unaware of it." One of the lawyers said to Him in reply, "Teacher, when You say this, You

