

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

How to Evangelize Religious People

Scripture: Luke 11:37-44

Code: 42-164

Open your Bible to the eleventh chapter of Luke's gospel. Luke chapter 11, verses 37 through 44 is the text that will unfold before us. Before we look at that text, however, just some things that may help to set it up in your mind. For most people, I would think, who are sort of on the outside looking in--that is non-Christian people--it must seem strange that the most severe warnings, the most fierce denunciations that ever came out of the mouth of Jesus were directed at the most religious people. I mean, the average person who doesn't know the true God and is not Christ's religion is just sort of a blend of all kinds of things that tends to mark good people generally. And since Jesus was a religious figure, it would seem to most people that He would respect and affirm other religious people, and that the more religious you were, the more affirmation you would expect to receive from Jesus.

Now especially would that be true if you were a religious Jew and you were devoted to the Old Testament Scripture. You know, that is not only an attitude that people on the outside have, that's a growing attitude of people on the inside of the church today, that somehow we're all linked together, that even if they don't believe the gospel or know Christ, if they're devoutly religious, they're the good people and probably in the end the Lord will take them into His heaven.

But Jesus did not accept religious people. In fact, He kept His fiercest threats for them. You see, Jesus was not about sentimentality; He was about truth. Jesus is truth personified. He is the living manifestation of the holy law of God, and as such, He perfectly understood that religion, spiritual teaching, contrary to the truth comes from hell and sends people there. Anything but the truth is a damning deception that has the greatest power to destroy souls forever because it gives the illusion that all is well. In fact, I would go so far as to say that of all the evils in the world, of all the sins in the world, of all the iniquities in the world, our Lord knew that religion was the worst--false religion--and especially false Judaism and false Christianity. And that's why the severest eternal judgment will be rendered for the religious who perverted the Old Testament and the New Testament.

The leaders of Jewish religion were perverters of the Old Testament, as well as deniers of the Messiah, haters of the Messiah, and eventually manipulated Rome to take His life. They perverted the Old Testament; they rejected its true message and therefore in their spiritual deadness and blindness they were unable to perceive the truth of the New Covenant and Christ. The judgment on them is really a result of their own willful rejection.

Go back to verse 14 for a moment, chapter 11. He was casting out a demon; it was dumb. It came about that when the demon had gone out, the dumb man spoke, and the multitude marveled. But some of them said--and this they said because this had been the lie that had been penetrating their culture, authored by the Pharisees and the scribes. This was their spin on Jesus, and they had circulated it in Galilee and in Judea, and it finally took root among the populous. And so some of them said He cast out demons by Beelzebul, the ruler of the demons. Their conclusion was that Jesus did what He did by demonic power, by satanic power. That's how far from God they were. When God was in their midst, they thought He was the devil.

And down in verse 29, as the crowds were increasing, drawn by the power of His miracles and His teaching, He began to say, "This generation is a wicked generation." They had manifested their wickedness in the perversion of their own religion and the rejection of the Messiah, the Son of God Himself. In fact, they were worse than the worst of people. It would be more tolerable in the day of judgment for Sodom and Gomorrah than it would be for Chorazin and Bethsaida and Capernaum. In other words, hell is hotter for the people who rejected Jesus Christ coming out of a perverted Judaism than for the population of Sodom and the cities of the plain who were engaged in the most vile kind of homosexuality, even trying to rape angels.

Religion is not a virtue. It is not man ascending to the highest level of his nobility; it is man descending to the lowest level. It is man abandoning the true God. Romans 1 says, "and thinking himself to be wise he becomes a fool and creates gods and religions of his own making."

In Matthew chapter 23 Jesus called the Pharisees sons of hell (verse 15). And in verse 33 He said, "How will he escape the sentence of hell?" And He said, "What you do is go around and make more sons of hell by your religious influence." I wish I could stand here and tell you that I was supportive of religion, but I have to stand where my Lord stood. He was supportive of the truth, but not religion. The account in our text is the story of one of the super religious. It's the story of a Pharisee who, with the others who were Pharisees and all who followed their teaching, needed to be awakened to his true condition. It's a tragic story about very religious people, devout, moral, fastidious, scrupulous people who revered the Old Testament, people who lived for ceremony, people who monitored very carefully their public conduct, people who spoke all the time about God. The Pharisees actually possessed intense moral sensibilities. They had very active consciences that could easily be offended. They had strong religious convictions. And that's why I say it would seem to just an outside observer that they would be Jesus' favorite people--most likely to be accepted by Him and Him by them. They really should be, shouldn't they, the most eager to repent, the most eager to believe, the most eager to enter the Kingdom?

But just the opposite is true. And Jesus said He could identify with the prostitutes and the tax collectors and the scum and the riff-raff before He could identify with the Pharisees and the people who followed them. He said, "I can't identify with you at all because I have come to call sinners, not

the righteous, and you think you're righteous." You see, religion blinds people to the truth. Self-righteous works systems, which all religions are, feed pride, feed vanity, produce adept hypocrites. And the Pharisees are the greatest biblical examples of this because they were the most devout among the Jews. They were the main spiritual examples for the people. Yet their warped and distorted interpretation of the Old Testament cut them off from God completely. In fact, Jesus said to them, "You're of your father, the devil, and the reason you don't know Me is because you're of your father the devil."

Now I don't think all of them sought out to be hypocrites. I don't think all people who fall into false religion pursue those religions in order that they might become hypocrites. You just end up there. And all people in false religions are hypocrites. They are religious on the outside, but frankly they are evil on the inside because the only thing that can change the inside is the gospel. And so they're all hypocrites to one degree or another. They're making a better show than what's really going on inside. And that's what all religion does. Religious people become highly skilled at covering their corruption with external morality and ritual because it's all they can do.

The religion of the Pharisees was an empty deception: no love for God, no work of the Holy Spirit, no knowledge of the truth, no genuine righteousness, no real repentance--they were actors. Matthew 23 records a latter assault by the Pharisees by Jesus in which He said things like this: "Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites," verse 13 of Matthew 23. Verse 15, "Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites..." Verse 23, "Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites." Verse 25, "Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites." Verse 27, "Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites." Verse 29, "Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites." I think He wanted them to get the point. False religion is a kind of hypocrisy; it's covering; it's a game you play on the outside. You're creating an illusion.

Now in the text before us--go back to Luke chapter 11--Jesus mercifully--now mark that--mercifully confronts a hypocrite, a Pharisee. And He confronts him with the necessary purpose of facing his hypocrisy head on and disclosing it to the man. This is essential. Religious people can't be converted until they realize the hypocrisy of what they're involved in. This, folks, is a lesson on how to evangelize religious people--one of the very best, and the Lord gave a lot of these because He evangelized a lot of people one on one. Here is a great illustration of how you evangelize religious people, and in this case, extremely religious people. But don't expect a lot of good results. Drop down for a moment to verse 53, "And when He left there, the scribes and Pharisees began to be very hostile and to question Him closely on many subjects, plotting against Him, plotting to kill Him, by catching Him in something He might say."

Now that just reinforces the point, doesn't it, that they become so adept to the hypocrisy that they do not yield it up easily. Rather than repent of hypocrisy, they turn up their hatred for the one who confronted that, and they are successful in having Him removed.

Now as we look at the story, you're going to see the state of apostate Judaism; you're going to see the character of Pharisaism. But I want you to get beyond that also. You're going to see an example of all false religion and how it operates, how it functions in its blinding, iniquitous, deceptive hypocrisy. Religious hypocrites with unchanged hearts cut off from God are left to do nothing but be hypocrites. And we're very familiar with it, whether you're talking about the Roman Catholic Church, for example, the Greek Orthodox movement, Anglo-Catholicism, Hindus, Muslims--whatever you're talking about. It's the same kind of thing; it's all for show and absent of any reality.

Their religion was purely external. And what happens is this: in order to live out your religion and put on a convincing show, you elaborate the external, so you expand the emblems; you expand the functions; you expand the ceremonies; you expand the rituals; you proliferate the prescriptions. That's exactly what the Jews had done--way beyond the Old Testament. That's what the Roman Catholics, the Greek Orthodox have done--way beyond what the New Testament teaches, adding almost endless rituals, routines, ceremonies, regulations, because there's nothing on the inside--but you can create a bigger illusion that way.

Now the Pharisees lived for these rites and rituals and ceremonies. And the Lord knew you could get this guy's attention by violating one of them. That's what He did. Look at verse 37. "Now when He had spoken"--this follows up the message given in verses 33 and 36 in which He said to the Jewish people, essentially, "It's not that you don't have enough light, it's that you're blind." You remember our message on that? It's not a question of light; it's a question of sight. He had just given them the denunciations that we mentioned earlier, the prior sections of this chapter. And following all of this that He has spoken, exposing the fact that it's not a light problem, it's a sight problem--there's plenty of light; the light is everywhere in blazing clarity; Jesus is in their midst--it's a sight issue; they're blind in their sin. He then gives us an illustration of this blindness, this inability to see the light.

Here is a Pharisee, and I think this guy had some honest interest; I don't think he had a plot in mind; I don't think he was seeking to expose Jesus; I think he was curious. And it says a Pharisee asked Him to have lunch with him. And He went in and reclined at the table. That sounds pretty matter of fact. There were basically two main meals in the day, one was the word here which is the word for lunch; it was a brunch kind of thing, a little before noon. And then there was dinner later in the day. This is the word for lunch. So it was the meal after a few hours of work; and a significant meal, a meal that took some time. And so in the typical fashion it wasn't a snack, it wasn't on the run, and this required an invitation, and He went in and did what you do at a prolonged meal, to have a prolonged conversation--you recline at the table, extending yourself toward the table, your feet away from the table in a sort of comfortable posture on a kind of couch--you get ready for an extended meal and conversation.

And here is this Pharisee (from the Hebrew *parosh*, which means to separate). This is one who was a separated one. That's how they designated themselves. They were fundamentalists; they were non-priests; they were laymen. They were devoted extremely to the laws and the traditions. There were about 6,000 of them at the time. They had a long history, all the way back to the Babylonian exile. Their influence had been growing for 400 years since Ezra. They had come to be seen as the spiritual authorities to whom the people looked. They were self-righteous. They were evil. They were degenerate. They were hypocritical. They were filled with pride. They abused people for personal gain, etc.

But when this invitation came, it says the man asked Jesus to have lunch, and He went in and reclined at the table. At this point, Jesus has breached the code of the Pharisees, and He did it on purpose. And what surfaces, starting in verse 38, is the nature of false religion. Point one, they loved the symbolic; they loved the symbolic. Verse 38, "And when the Pharisee saw it, he was surprised that He had not first ceremonial washed before the meal." This isn't about hygiene, folks. This isn't about dirty hands. This is about ceremony, that He had not first ceremonial washed. It's actually the verb in the Greek, *baptizo*. They had developed a ceremonial washing that they did to demonstrate their cleanliness, to demonstrate their holiness. And in fact, this was an old thing, been around a long time--in case they might have touched a Gentile that day, God forbid, or touched something a Gentile touched, or touched something an unclean person touched, or touched something else unclean. This was to symbolize their holiness and their desire to be clean from all the defilements of the world. And the Mishnah actually describes how this was to be done. It even gets down to the amount of water. You were to use enough water to fill one and a half egg shells, and it was to be poured across the tips of the fingers, running down to the wrist, and then the hands were to be washed, symbolizing this bathing/cleansing.

There's nothing about that in the Old Testament. That was just a silly little symbol that they had developed publicly to parade their purity. In the fifteenth chapter of Matthew, "Some Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem and saying, 'Why do Your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread?'" I mean, this was a major breach. Of course Jesus said to them: "And why do you yourselves transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition?" That was the point.

Jesus ignored the tradition. You know what He was saying? He was purposely saying this, "I have no interest in being in your club." He was willing to insult this man at the very outset of this event. And this is how it is, my friend, with false religion. They love the symbols. When we were in Moscow a few months ago, slipped into a Greek Orthodox church--literally repulsed by extravagant symbolism. You stand in one spot and this parade goes on of people with all these elaborate dressings and head dresses and waving censors, and icons all over everywhere. It literally blasts your senses; it's so garish, bizarre, and people walking in endless circles and mumbling incomprehensible drivel and waving things in the air--and these poor, sad souls trying somehow to connect with the external. But

religion that has nothing inside proliferates the symbolic. Look at the Roman Catholic Church, just full of it...full of it. False religion loves symbols.

Secondly, false religion loves the sinful. Verse 39, "The Lord said to him"...this is very direct... "Now you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but inside of you, you are full of robbery and wickedness." Now this was an appropriate illustration for Jesus to use at a meal, right? He just sat down, and there's going to be a dish there. And anybody who is a decent host is going to make sure--and you know this--that the part you eat out of is clean. I've been to a lot of places for dinner; I can't ever remember turning the plate over to see if the bottom was clean. I frankly don't care if the bottom is clean; it's the top that concerns me 'cause that's what I'm going to be eating from. See, the more the symbols, the less the spiritual reality. Just mark it. Watch the Hindus; watch the Buddhists; watch all these false religions, just proliferating all this symbolism. And what's it all covering on the inside? Sin. The more the symbols, the less the reality.

And the Lord read his mind 'cause it doesn't say he said anything. It says he saw it and was surprised. That's what tells me the man didn't have an ulterior motive. It doesn't say he saw it and was glad because he caught Him in something. But he was surprised--didn't say he said anything. He didn't need to say anything; the Lord could read his mind. John 2, He knew what was in the heart of man. And even back in Luke chapter 2, verse 35--you remember that wonderful word from Simeon that said, "To the end the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed." The Lord did reveal hearts, still does. This is public. This is direct. And I'm sure Jesus wasn't the only one to dinner. If this Pharisee was going to have Jesus accept the invitation, believe me, he was going to have all his friends there. He said, "You know what your problem is, you clean the part of the plate that nobody eats from. You clean the part of the plate that doesn't matter. You clean the outside of the cup and the outside of the platter. It is pointless. All your symbolic stuff doesn't touch the inside that's filthy and putrid." And then He says it, verse 39, "Inside of you, you are full of robbery and wickedness." Would you call that a direct approach? That is the direct approach. In your heart you are wicked.

You say, "How could He say that?" Well, first of all, He is omniscient, so He knows. But more than that, He understands religion that is false is always a cover-up, always. Again, Matthew chapter 23, verse 25, "Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, you clean the outside of the cup and dish, inside you're full of robbery and self-indulgence. First clean the inside of the cup and the dish so that the outside of it may become clean also." You see, they loved sin on the inside. In John 3, Jesus said, "You men love darkness rather than light because their deeds are"...What?...are evil." Their soul was feeding on pride. Their soul was feeding on lust. Their soul is feeding on deception. As I stood in Moscow, in that Greek Orthodox church, all of this flooded into my mind, and I realized whatever these poor people think is going on, there is a show being carried off here by men whose hearts are filled with pride and greed and evil and corruption. And Jesus doesn't talk in general terms. He says, "Inside of you"...here He says..."robbery and wickedness." Later on in the account that occurred later in Matthew's recording of it, in Matthew 23, He talks about self-indulgence as well as robbery--robbery

(*harpage*). You know what that means? Plunder, pillage, rape, rapacity, the dictionary says. You literally are raping people. You are plundering them, not just their possessions, to carry off your symbols and to build your religious enterprises. You're not only raping their bank accounts, you're raping their souls. This is a term that has to do with violent force. You're making people twice the sons of hell that you are. You see, false religion is a rape. It is a plunder of souls.

Not just that, but wickedness (*poneria*)—badness, we would say. Interesting, looking up in a Greek lexicon, it said *badness*. That sounds like a twentieth-century word, doesn't it? Or twenty-first century word. Bad to the bone, we would say today--just bad down inside, an evil disposition. Malignity would be another word. Villainy would be another word. You are sons of hell. I'm telling you, this approach of Jesus is utterly contrary to every evangelistic strategy you hear being applied today. But where are you going to go if you don't get to the core of the issue? You can only get to the cross when you've gone through this kind of exposure. They love symbols on the outside; they love sin on the inside.

Third characteristic of false religion--they love the simplistic; they love the simplistic. They have to because they live in a compartmentalized world, and they can't possibly afford to think honestly or deeply about anything. And notice how Jesus deals with that. Verse 40, here's another unconventional way to address your host and his friends: "You fools." Whoa--whee! *Aphrones*--one word in Greek--fools, simpletons. You say, Wait a minute, I thought Jesus in Matthew 5 [I think it's verse 22] said not to call anybody a fool. Well not unless they are. This is the truth rather than some coarse epithet--fools, simpletons. It's a word used to describe those who are destitute of reason, destitute of thought, destitute of truth--who think shallowly and superficially. It's used in Ephesians 5:17, "Do not be foolish, in contrast understand what the will of the Lord is." If you don't understand the truth, you're a fool. You're a fool. It's a familiar word, even to Peter. He uses it in 1 Peter 2:15, "The will of God is that by doing right we may silence the ignorance of fools...fools." And the Jews fell into this category, sad to say--the Pharisees and the scribes. They fall into this category. Listen to Romans 2: you bear the name Jew; you rely upon the Law; you boast in God; you know His will; you approve the things that are essential; you're instructed out of the Law; you're confident to yourself that you're a guide to the blind--you're a light to those who are in darkness, and you are a corrector of the foolish, a teacher of the immature, having in the Law the embodiment of knowledge and truth. You therefore who teach another, do you not teach yourself? Who are you kidding? You boast in the Law and you break the Law. The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.

And then He comes down to verse 29 and says this, "He is a Jew who is one inwardly...inwardly," not outwardly. "And circumcision is that which is of the heart." You're the fools. And fools are simplistic. As I said, they can't think very deeply about anything. Don't confuse me with anything reasonable. And notice how Jesus nails that issue. Back to verse 40. "You fools, did not He who made the outside make the inside also?" I mean, is that basic, or what? Do you think that God is only concerned about your outside and not your inside? You who exalt God as holy, do you think that God's concern about holiness is limited to your physicality? Do you think God is holy? Because you say you do and if He is

holy, He is as concerned about holiness on the inside as He would be on the outside. There can't be any limit to His concerns or He's not really holy. He's saying, you know, what you're like on the inside, how could you ever, ever come to the conclusion that you have satisfied God with this external show when the God who made the outside made the inside also? This is no leap of superior intelligence. This is like basic, to understand that if the Creator is concerned about the outside, He has to be concerned about the inside, since He made both. It's axiomatic. If you're going to say God is holy and He wants you holy, you know that means outside and inside, and you know the inside is corrupt because you know your own hearts. First Corinthians 2:11, "Who knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of a man?" You know what's in your heart. You know what you are. How sophomoric can you be? How simplistic can you be? You're supposed to be teachers of the Law, teachers of the depth of divine truth. You say God is holy and God is interested in holiness, and your life is supposed to be an illustration of that. But the only holiness you're concerned about is superficial, and you know the rottenness and corruption of your own heart, and you satisfy yourself with that kind of compartmentalized thinking? God wants your heart. The Old Testament is filled with that.

So in verse 41 he says, "Give that which is within as charity and then all things are clean for you." Give your heart. You do your charity. You do your alms. You give this over here. You give that over there. You parade your stuff in the temple--you go in, you blow a trumpet, make an announcement, as Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, and then you dump your money in while everybody is watching, 'cause some guy blew a trumpet to call attention to your giving. You do all your alms, you do your fasting, you do your public prayers, you go through all the externals. Give your heart to the poor; let your heart go.

Admittedly verse 41 is a challenge to interpret, but the way I expressed it to you seems to me to be the best interpretation of a difficult construction. All your symbolic alms giving, all your symbolic prayers, all your symbolic fasts are hypocritical as long as you keep plundering people, pillaging people, raping people, both body and soul. Give that which is within. Give your heart. Give your life and then all things are clean for you. Very much like Jesus' conversation with the rich young ruler, isn't it? It may cost you everything; it's got to come from the heart. You can pour an ocean of water on your hands, my friend; you can go through all kinds of histrionics and all kinds of symbols and all kinds of motions and all kinds of rituals and ceremonies--all the external facade of devotion and all you've done is manifest how simplistically you think. Simplistic is a different word than simple. Sometimes people use them as synonyms; they're not. Simple may be a good word; simplistic is not. Simplistic means unreasonably oversimplified.

God wants you inside. That's why the prophet Amos said, "Stop your songs"...speaking for God... "I don't want any more of your songs. Stop your sacrifices." Why? "Your hearts aren't right. When you get your heart right, you can sing again, then everything becomes clean." You know, I mean, I ask that question; I watch the Roman Catholic Church and the horrific scandal that's going on; it's just absolutely beyond imagination. And notice how the system manages to perpetuate itself over against

these scandalous, outrageous, horrific cases of pedophilia going on all over the place--not just in America but other parts of the world--and having gone on for centuries. And the question I ask in my mind is, How does a priest go do all of his little symbolic deals and then go molest children and somehow compartmentalize his life without going mad? It's because the whole thing is a game. The whole thing is a sham. And then they become very adept at it. It is the nature of that religion. It is the nature of every false religion to play that game. They love symbols; they love sin; and they love "simplism." They don't want to think deeply about the implications of the inside.

There's a fourth element in false religion: they love the secondary...they love the secondary. In verse 42 Jesus launches into three woes here. And now this direct confrontation has turned into a pronouncement of judgment. "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. But woe to you, Pharisees." "Woe" is an interesting word...Why?...He says, almost an explanation. Some people have thought that this is some kind of statement of sorrow, some kind of sentimental musing on Jesus' part where He is saying, "O my, you poor Pharisees." I don't think so, not in the light of the fact that He just called them fools in verse 40. This is a pronouncement of judgment. This is not a sentiment of sorrow, although certainly there's sorrow in it. This is a declaration of judgment, especially in light of the language of Matthew 23 where He repeats the woes seven times. And they are all directed at those who are sons of hell, called hypocrites repeatedly, filled with lawlessness, objects of greater condemnation, and who will not escape the sentence of hell. This is judgment. Jesus goes to lunch with a Pharisee and pronounces divine judgment on him if he doesn't change. He uses familiar Old Testament language. Read Isaiah 5, where there's a series of woes, pronouncing divine judgment on this devoutly religious man. As I said earlier, hell is hottest for the religious who have defected from the truth, for what we've been seeing in the book of Jude, haven't we?

What is it that elicits this woe? It's their love for the secondary. You pay tithe of mint and rue and every kind of garden herb and disregard justice and the love of God. I mean, how can you be that trivial? But that's what false religion has to do. It can't be involved with justice and the love of God, because the inside is corrupt. So what are we left to do to proliferate the external? To multiply the symbolic to cover the sin? To get swept up in the minutia?

What were they supposed to do? Love the Lord their God with all their heart, soul, mind and strength and their neighbor as themselves, right? That was the first and great commandment. That's what they ought to have done. That's what God wanted from them. They didn't do that. They didn't love the Lord their God with all their heart, soul, mind and strength, nor the neighbor as themselves. And so they were left to proliferate their minutia. You pay tithe of mint, just the little mint plant, rue. Mint and rue were condiments, I guess you'd call them--every kind of garden herb, just general. The Old Testament required a tenth of the wine, the grain, the oil, and the flock to be given to the Lord for the Levities; another tenth to be given for the national festivals, and every third year another tenth to be

given to the poor and the widow and the orphan. But there was never a command to tithe these tiny, little minutia--never at this extreme level; silly this is, a silly thing to look holy. It really is a mockery of God; it's a mockery of God's desire. The Mishnah, which is some kind of codification of Jewish law from ancient times, says the rue is exempt from any tithe. They weren't even paying attention to their own tradition. They were so careful with their little minutia on the outside and oblivious to justice and love. How can you disregard, pass by, neglect, disobey. That's what they do. That's what religious leaders we were talking about, those Roman Catholic priests--that's what they do. They fuss with the secondary, and they don't give people what is just and right, and they do not love God.

You know, back in the tenth chapter of Deuteronomy, God told them what He wanted in one of the great Old Testament texts, as the people were ready to go into the land. He said, "What does the Lord your God require from you but to fear the Lord your God to walk in all His ways and love Him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, to keep the Lord's commandments and statutes which I'm commanding you today for your good." Verse 16, "Circumcise your heart." And then He goes on to say, "God executes justice for the orphan, the widow, shows His love for the alien by giving him food and clothing, so show your love for the alien for you were aliens in the land of Egypt. You shall fear the Lord your God, serve Him, cling to Him, swear by His name. He is your praise, He is your God who has done great and awesome things. You therefore shall love the Lord your God, always keep His commands, statutes, ordinances and charge." That's what God wanted; they knew that from way back then.

Well, they ought to have tithed. Jesus says, "You ought to have done that, the reasonable tithe, the required tithe, you ought to have done that." Even Jesus paid His taxes. You ought to have done what is commanded to be done; but you ought not to have disregarded justice; you ought not to have disregarded love toward God. But that's what hypocrites do. All the external rules, multiplied; but no transformation of the heart--no humility, no repentance, no faith in God's grace and power to forgive, no love for God.

Now Isaiah indicted the people for this, Isaiah chapter 1; chapter 58, wish I had time to read it. Micah indicted the people for this, as I mentioned earlier, indicted the people for this. So they had history. They knew this is unacceptable to God. But that's how it is with false religion, that's all you can do. Love for the symbol, love for sin, love for the simplistic, love for the secondary, and behind everything else, one more thing, and this is the biggie: love for status, love for status. Watch the religious leaders, all the funny thrones they sit in, all the wacky hats they wear, all the crazy garb, all the junk hanging all over everywhere, always wanting titles--the right honorable, holy, reverend, blah-blah, on and on. Listen to verse 43, "Woe to you, Pharisees, for you love the front seats in the synagogues." Now, lest some of you sitting down in rows one through four feel bad, these are not the front seats facing here; these are the front seats here facing there. They were the seats facing the congregation. They wanted to be up front on the platform. This is one of the reasons I don't ever sit up here. Verse 43, "You love the front seats in the synagogues and the respectful greetings in the marketplaces."

They loved status. O do religious leaders love to be somebody--hypocritical, self-righteous, proud, loveless, without justice or mercy, pillaging and raping the possessions and souls of people, covering their wretched sin. What do they want? They want to be loved and admired and accorded reverence and have elevated position and be venerated and be admired and have all kinds of titles and to be distinguished from everybody else by all the stuff they wear, so that somehow you think they're holy. "Woe to you for wanting to be up in front where everybody can see you. Woe to you for all your elaborate titles, terms of exaltation." And again, Matthew 23, Jesus confronts this--words that are familiar, I think, to most of us--but listen to what he said: "They do their deeds to be noticed by men, they love the place of honor at the banquet, the chief seats in the synagogues. They love respectful greetings in the marketplace. They love to be called rabbi." Jesus says, "Don't be called rabbi. Don't be called rabbi. For only one is your true teacher ['rabbi' meaning 'teacher'] and you're all brothers. Don't call anyone on earth your father, don't call somebody father." And yet the whole priesthood is father; everybody's father. I even get called "Father MacArthur" from people who don't understand. It's true. I'm father with a small *f*, but that's not the same thing. People often ask me, "What shall we call you?" And I say, "Well, John would work." If Paul only needed Paul, and Jesus only needed Jesus, who am I to ask for holy, reverend, bishop, or whatever?

So He says, Don't be called rabbi; don't be called teacher; don't be called father; don't be called leader. You have one Leader; you have one Father; you have one Teacher. They sought all that. But that's how it is with those in phony religions. They elevate themselves. Jesus even says over in the fourteenth chapter of Luke, "When you're invited to a wedding feast, don't take the place of honor. When you go there, go to the last place, go recline in the last place." Verse 10 says, "So that when the one who has invited you comes, he may say to you, 'Friend, move up higher.' Then you'll have honor." If someone forces you to go there, go there. Don't seek that. Desire for self-promotion is inherent in false religion. You can't elevate yourself and Christ at the same time.

Listen to this, John 5:44, our Lord asks the Jews this question: "How can you believe when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that is from or belongs to the one and only true God?" Did you get that? How can you believe or be a believer when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that is from or belongs to the one and only God?

Well, there you have it, folks. There's the picture, back to Luke 11, of a false religious leader. They claimed to love God. They claim to love people. They are a sham. They are a deception. They are blaspheming God. They are abusive. They are the recipients of the most pronounced and divined severity of judgment that ever fell from the lips of Jesus. They really only love their symbols, their sin, their simplistic notions of spiritual reality. They love what is secondary and they love status. And this applies not only to Pharisees but all across the board, even into the modern time to all religious hypocrites. And that means all religious people apart from the true gospel of Jesus Christ.

One final, critical matter and we're done. Verse 44, we move from their nature to their influence, and Jesus sums it up by saying this: "Woe to you, not only are you going to be judged for your own hypocrisy, but you are like concealed tombs and the people who walk over them are unaware of it." And here He's talking about their influence. The false religionists are going to be judged not only for their own iniquity but for the corruption and defilement of all those who followed them. That's why James said, "Stop being so many teachers, they have a greater condemnation." And of all the judgments, those *anapostates* who reject the truth are the severest, and those *anapostates* (false teachers) are the severest of those. "Woe to you, woe to you, not for your own evil, but for the evil you transmit to others for impacting your nation the way you have, for all the people who have been defiled for your hypocrisy, who have bought into your false religion." And, boy, the world today is filled with millions upon millions upon millions of them. Jesus says you're like concealed tombs. The Old Testament had laws about touching a dead body. Leviticus 21, you couldn't touch a dead body. You were considered ceremonially defiled. If you did touch a dead body, the ninth chapter of Numbers says you couldn't observe the Passover without going through a seven-day purification. That seven-day purification is described in the nineteenth chapter of Numbers.

So God kept people away from corpses, certainly for protection from illnesses. But there was symbolic cleansing to remind people of what they needed to do in their hearts. The Jews, of course, understood that they could not touch a dead body. They extended it even beyond a dead body and decided you couldn't touch a grave 'cause if you touched a grave you'd be ceremonially defiled, you'd have to be disassociated from the people, you'd have to go through a very elaborate, costly, time-consuming, seven-day purification ceremony. So every grave in Israel was marked so the people didn't touch them inadvertently or step on them. Jesus just uses this familiar thing and says, "You know, you're liked unmarked graves. People have no idea that they're walking all over you and being defiled all the time. People come in contact with you and they don't know it, but you're not making them holy--you're making them unholy. You're defiling them." What a terrible description of someone, but that's how it is with those in false religions--they are unmarked graves. And you touch them and you're defiled. And your defilement is not just ceremonial, it is spiritual. And it's not just your body; it's your soul. And it's not just a ritual defilement, it's a real defilement. And they were making twice the sons of hell as they themselves.

Love for symbols, love for sin, love for the simplistic, love for secondary things, love for status-- and Jesus exposed this man and his friends because there's no other way to get to the heart. He didn't have a good reaction, as I pointed out in verses 53 and 54.

As I close, what should characterize those who truly know God? Not the outside, but the inside--love for righteousness, love for God, love for Christ, love for Scripture, love for the truth, love for others, love for sound theology, love for lowliness and humility. And when you bump up against those people, you're exposed to eternal life, not defilement.

Father, as we close the service this morning, it is with great gratitude that we have had this opportunity to worship You, and especially to sit at the feet of Jesus at lunch and eavesdrop on an incredible conversation. Protect these dear people here, Lord, from the defilement of false religion. Rescue, snatch brands from the burning, and bring them to Christ, we pray. Amen.

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