

Luke 11: 37-54
What makes something clean?

Study Summary and Learning Objectives

This study will be focusing on the Luke 11:37-54 account, which features a dispute over ceremonial washing before meals. Jesus' point in this section relates to the preceding discussion of light and darkness and is intended to highlight the importance of the inner life over outer pretenses.

For this study we would like for you and your small group to:

- Discuss cleanliness and how Jesus makes us pure
- Think critically about the rituals and rules in which modern Christians participate that might burden others and distance us from God.

Steps to Prepare for Leaders

- Read through the questions for discussion and accountability at the end of the study and be prepared to share first, and with some degree of openness or vulnerability, so as to lead by example and encourage the rest of the group to feel comfortable following suit.
- This Timothy Keller podcast will encourage you to think more about common virtue, of the Pharisees, vs. true virtue, that comes from a love for God. Common Virtue vs. True Virtue starts at around 10:10 and continues through 18:11. However, the whole sermon is good if you have time to listen.

http://sermons2.redeemer.com/sites/sermons2.redeemer.com/files/sermons/5-01_A_Promise_of_Hope.mp3

? What's the dirtiest you've ever been?

or

Watch the following *Friends* clip: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DowJfUmlzeI> (shorten the clip as desired). Please be mindful about your group dynamics, as there is some language that may be offensive to some in the video. If there is any hesitation for your group, please refrain from showing the video. Briefly discuss the difference between pure and ulterior motives. Try to keep this discussion short (2-3 minutes). This is designed to get the group thinking about the general concepts of true vs. common virtue and inside vs. outside cleanliness.

An Awkward Dinner

Read Out Loud: Luke 11:37-54

³⁷ While Jesus was speaking, a Pharisee asked him to dine with him, so he went in and reclined at table. ³⁸ The Pharisee was astonished to see that he did not first wash before dinner. ³⁹ And the Lord said to him, “Now you Pharisees cleanse the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness. ⁴⁰ You fools! Did not he who made the outside make the inside also? ⁴¹ But give as alms those things that are within, and behold, everything is clean for you.

Why Tithe Mint?

In verse 42, Jesus points out the Pharisee's hypocrisy regarding tithing. Pharisees were so exacting that they would tithe a tenth of their mint and other plants from their gardens. However, mint itself is a weed that grows like wildfire if left unchecked. Jesus points out that the Pharisees were trying to please God by taking extra steps to ensure that they tithed a tenth of something that grew with ready abundance while overlooking the needs and welfare of many others in their society.

⁴² “But woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and every herb, and neglect justice and the love of God. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others. ⁴³ Woe to you Pharisees! For you love the best seat in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces. ⁴⁴ Woe to you! For you are like unmarked graves, and people walk over them without knowing it.”

⁴⁵ One of the experts in the law answered him, “Teacher, when you say these things, you insult us also.”

⁴⁶ Jesus replied, “And you experts in the law, woe to you, because you load people down with burdens they can hardly carry, and you yourselves will not lift one finger to help them.

⁴⁷ “Woe to you, because you build tombs for the prophets, and it was your ancestors

who killed them. ⁴⁸ So you testify that you approve of what your ancestors did; they killed the prophets, and you build their tombs. ⁴⁹ Because of this, God in his wisdom said, ‘I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and others they will persecute.’ ⁵⁰ Therefore this generation will be held responsible for the blood of all the prophets that has been shed since the beginning of the world, ⁵¹ from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who was killed between the altar and the sanctuary. Yes, I tell you, this generation will be held responsible for it all.

⁵² “Woe to you experts in the law, because you have taken away the key to knowledge. You yourselves have not entered, and you have hindered those who were entering.”

⁵³ When Jesus went outside, the Pharisees and the teachers of the law began to oppose him fiercely and to besiege him with questions, ⁵⁴ waiting to catch him in something he might say.

? One of Jesus' points is that the Pharisees don't understand how they were dirty. How can a person be dirty on the inside as well as on the outside?

Possible Answer: Just like dirt and grime makes people ill, a sinful, “dirty” heart is a kind of illness on the inside. God is more concerned with our internal, spiritual cleanliness than He is our outer layer.

Deuteronomy 14:22-23

²² Be sure to set aside a tenth of all that your fields produce each year. ²³ Eat the tithe of your grain, new wine and olive oil, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks in the presence of the LORD your God at the place he will choose as a dwelling for his Name, so that you may learn to revere the LORD your God always.

? The Old Testament asked the Israelites to tithe

(Deuteronomy 14:22-23) as a way of remembering God's provision and as a means of providing for others. The Pharisees thought that adhering to these laws made them clean. How do you think they missed the point?

Possible Answer: There were Pharisees who thought that they had to participate in their own righteousness. They thought that by obeying the letter of God's law that they would be holy, but they missed the purpose of the law, which was to be an outward expression of the cleanliness they received from God. They focused solely upon the do's and don'ts of the law rather than on the heart behind it.

? Some translations of verse 41 say, "be generous to the poor, and everything will be clean for you" but this may be better translated as, "give mercy from within and everything will be clean for you." Jesus wasn't talking about generosity as

much as he was talking about the state of human hearts and their willingness to live sacrificially. How might having a more merciful heart lead us towards cleanliness?

Possible Answer: As Jesus often does (Matt. 19:21), he speaks directly to the Pharisees' heart condition here. If the Pharisees attempted to obey this command of generosity they would need to stop exploiting their power over the people, conserving their wealth by oppressing those in need, and upholding their own self-righteousness - true obedience to this command would require them to repent of these sins and lead to heart change. It would knock down their idols.

A Grave Situation

When the Old Testament referred to something as "unclean" it meant that it was unfit for use in worship to God. Being "clean" or "unclean" was a ceremonial designation governing the rituals of worship. For example, there were certain animals, like pigs, that were considered unclean and therefore not usable in sacrifices (Leviticus 5:2).

In verse 44, Jesus compares the religious elite to unmarked graves, which may sound like a strange insult, but this had some profound cultural significance in the day. Jewish law specified that anyone who came in contact with a dead body would be unclean and would have to go make atonements at the temple or risk being exiled from Israel. An unmarked grave was a dangerous place because a person could walk over it and become unclean without knowing it. In Luke, Jesus says that not only were the Pharisees unfit to worship God, but like an unmarked grave they were unwittingly driving people away from God's true purpose.

? Read verse 46 in light of how it might apply to us.

Do you feel like Christians sometimes load others down with burdens they can't carry? (i.e. looking down on people for not obeying Christian norms, expecting them to follow Christian habits.)

Possible Answer: Sometimes people feel like they have to be clean before they can even come to church. Sometimes we contribute to their unease by not accepting them where they're at and loving them like Jesus even if they don't read their bible, go to church, or have ample Bible knowledge.

? How can we "lift a finger" to help ease the burden that people feel the "church" has placed on them?

Possible Answer: Don't expect repentant behavior from non-repentant people. Humble yourselves realizing Psalm 16:2 - that your only righteousness because of God

and no other reason. You have no superiority to non-believers but do have a truth to share. You can “ease burdens” for others by teaching them first of Christ’s love and sacrifice for them and then of the counter culture example that he’s given to us in behavior. We’d do well to remind our fellow Christians of this as well.

? In verse 52, Jesus comments how the Pharisees and religious leaders’ dirty spiritual lives, blinding others from seeing God’s truth and actually preventing them from having a deeper relationship with the Lord. How do you think our spiritual lives can affect our relationships without us knowing it?

For Discussion and Accountability

? What steps can I take to better focus on “justice and love for God” (verse 42) rather than feeling obligated to holding to a specific morality?

? Where do I feel burdened by Christian obligation? What rituals or practices are getting in the way of me resting in Jesus’ purity? How were these practices originally designed to bring me closer to my Lord?