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## Luke 11:37-54

### The Certain Gospel: 6 Warning Signs of a Heart Problem

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My family has a history of heart-attacks. My uncle died of a massive heart-attack, and my dad had two heart attacks. So I personally am interested in not having a heart attack, but also being able to **identify** the **signs** of a heart attack. The *American Heart Association* lists Warning Signs of a Heart Attack:

1. **Pain or discomfort in chest**
2. **Lightheadedness, nausea, or vomiting**
3. **Jaw, neck or back pain**
4. **Discomfort or pain in arm or shoulder**
5. **Shortness of breath**

It's **no fun** to talk about the warning signs of a heart attack, but it's better to talk about them when you're fine, so that if **something happens** to you or the **one you love**, you can identify the problem and get help.

Today, in Luke, we're also talking about **6 warning signs of a heart problem**. The **state of our hearts** is what **separates** true religion from false religion, Godly faith from destructive beliefs, life from death. Jesus was having dinner with Pharisees and experts in the law when he **confronted** them about their hearts. But the author Luke doesn't record this story so that we can look back at those Pharisees and experts **in judgment**, but so that we can examine our **own hearts** and look for **disease**.

### **We may have a heart problem. (Luke 11:37-41)**

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

I don't know about you, but when I see someone walk out of the **restroom** without washing their hands, it **grosses** me out. But that's not what surprises the Pharisee here. Hand-washing was not about **personal hygiene**, it was about **ceremonial cleanliness**. The Gospel of Mark's parallel account explains this further.

**Mark 7:3-4** (The Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they give their hands a ceremonial washing, holding to the tradition of the elders. When they come from the marketplace they do not eat unless they wash. And they observe many other traditions, such as the washing of cups, pitchers and kettles.) (NIV®)

This Pharisee was surprised that Jesus didn't ceremonially cleanse himself before eating, but Jesus doesn't care for their **extra-Biblical tradition** (Talmud). He sees it for what it is, a **man-made ceremony** meant to make people feel like they are **acceptable to God**, but this is not what makes someone acceptable to God.

39 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. 40 You foolish people! Did not the one who made the

All Scriptures are quoted from the New International Version (NIV®) unless otherwise noted.

outside make the inside also? 41 But now as for what is inside you—be generous to the poor, and everything will be clean for you. (NIV®)

Jesus teaches us God cares about what goes on inside our hearts, not what we look like on the outside.<sup>1</sup> Something has gone wrong in their hearts. They're **full** of "greed and wickedness" (v39). And so he speaks **six "woes"** against them. These "woes" are **judgments** that **act** both as a **curse** and a **revelation**. They reveal both the **sin itself** and the **consequences** of their sin.

**First**, Jesus cries three woes at the **Pharisees**. When we think of Pharisees, we think of the religious elite. In many ways they were, but they were also **lay people**. In other words, they weren't priests or professionals, they were **normal men** who were passionate for **tradition** and **God's word**. So our **first three warning signs** (of a heart problem) are **for laity**, normal everyday people who are trying to obey God (not pastors; they're perfect...). These signs help us see if we have a heart problem. What's the first warning sign?

## 1. Love of religiosity over love of neighbor and love of God (Luke 11:42)

"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. (NIV®)

By "**religiosity**" I mean someone who loves being religious, who loves going through the motions, going to church, putting their offering in the plate, signing the songs, and listening to the sermon. But this same person who loves being religious might **yell and scream** at their coworker at work the very next day. They don't go to church because they love Jesus, but they **love tradition**. It makes them feel good.

The **Pharisees neglected justice**, neglected the poor, neglected God's law, and didn't really love God. Although they went through religious motions, they weren't living out the **great commandment**, love God and love your neighbor. They were so careful to look religious they gave a 10th of their garden herbs, which the law didn't say to do. Jesus says that's good, but what matters even more to God is what's in our hearts.

Do you love being religious more than you actually love your neighbor or God? Do you care more about how you **sound** when you sing at church or how you **speak** to your **spouse** and **children** when nobody else is around? Would you rather **volunteer** at church than volunteer at your local **soup kitchen**? I know I would. Do you care more about your **Bible knowledge** and being **orthodox** (having all your ducks in a row) than loving **The One** found in the **Word**? In v41 Jesus doesn't say "get your **doctrine right**, and everything will be clean to you" but "**be generous to the poor**, and everything will be clean for you." *The first warning sign of a heart problem is love of religiosity over love of neighbor and of God. What's second?*

## 2. Pride (Luke 11:43)

"Woe to you Pharisees, because you love the most important seats in the synagogues and respectful greetings in the marketplaces. (NIV®)

The most respected teachers and elders sat at the front of the synagogue facing the congregation. In fact, if you visit some old **congregational churches**, they may have **chairs** on the **platform** for the elders, pastor, and other leaders of the church to sit. But is sitting up front wrong? No, it's sitting up front **to be seen by others**. The issue is their **pride**. They loved receiving special honorary greetings in the marketplace too.

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<sup>1</sup> Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, 2d; Accordance electronic ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 211. [https://accordance.bible/link/read/IVP-NT\\_Commentary\\_2#2264](https://accordance.bible/link/read/IVP-NT_Commentary_2#2264)

Let's make the jump to **New England today**. I doubt many of us go to church or are Christians to get **words of affirmation** from our culture. But if we look into our hearts, and find a desire to be seen as **better-than-others** because we're Christians, then that's pride. I want to look good when I preach, and I bet members of our worship team want to look good when they sing. But is that why we do it? So that others might look at us and say, "Wow! They must really know God!"? Do you **raise your hands** (or not) so people will know you're spiritual? *These are all warning signs of a heart problem, of pride. What's the final warning signal?*

### 3. Infecting others (Luke 11:44)

"Woe to you, because you are like unmarked graves, which people walk over without knowing it." (NIV®)

In Israel **tombs** and **limestone ossuaries** (containers or rooms to store bones)<sup>2</sup> were made to look white (white-washed) so they looked like the white-monuments and mausoleums we can find at today's cemeteries. This prevented travelers from accidentally stepping on them and contracting ritual uncleanness. Numbers 19:16 says if you touched a **bone** or **grave** you were unclean for a **week** until you underwent a cleansing process. Jesus is saying that when people come in contact with the Pharisees, they get infected and unclean.

Did you know that in **1846** a **Hungarian** doctor named **Ignaz Semmelweis** tried to figure out why so many mothers and their newborn infants were getting sick and dying right after childbirth. He studied two wards, one full of **doctors** and **medical students**, and one full of **midwives**, and discovered that those in the care of the doctors and medical students were five-times more likely to die than those birthed by the midwives. Although he didn't know about **germs**, he discovered that when doctors and students washed their hands in **chlorine**, the mortality rate dropped dramatically. The doctors and students went from **studying corpses** to delivering babies, and would spread infection. They were **accidentally** killing the ones they wanted to save.

If we don't deal with what's going on in our hearts, we can spread the infection too. If you have a **lot of pride**, you need to deal with that. If you don't, you could leave behind a trail of sick and broken people hurt by your brand of Christianity. If you **love being religious**, you're not going to spread love of God or love of neighbor, but traditionalism and works-righteousness. *Three warning signs of a heart problem for normal everyday Christians are love of religiosity over love of neighbor and God, pride, and infection.*

We're all born with an infection, sin. This is why the Son of God **entered** into this world as a small baby boy, an **infant**. He is the infant that sacrificed his life by taking on **our infection** so that we could live. He came to cleanse us, to baptize us in his Holy Spirit, to make us new so that we don't spread infection but life. If you repent of your sin and put your faith in Jesus, he will cleanse you and make you new.

But then our passage turns to the **experts in the law**. The ESV says these were "**lawyers**." They were the professionals who earned a living from knowing and interpreting God's word. So these next three warnings are for church-leaders, for **Elders**, Deacons, Ministry Team leads, small group leaders, anyone interested in church leadership, teens or children who imagine themselves serving as a leader one day. We should all pay attention to **three warning signs** (of a heart problem) **for leadership**:

### 1. Loading others down with rules and regulations (Luke 11:45-46)

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

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<sup>2</sup> Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, 2d; Accordance electronic ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 105. [https://accordance.bible/link/read/IVP-NT\\_Commentary\\_2#1011](https://accordance.bible/link/read/IVP-NT_Commentary_2#1011)

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. (NIV®)

As one author explained, when you read the Old Testament law it doesn't cover everything. So you can either try to fill in the gray areas by making more **detailed lists** and spelling out what exactly people could and could not do in various situations, or you could give **general principles** for people to follow.<sup>3</sup> The lawyers gave details, and made life hard for people, but then figured out creative ways to get around their own rules. Jesus gave principles, and freed people.

As leaders, details are **important**, are they not? This is why we have by-laws and a playbook and **policies** and **procedures** because details can help clarify and help us do ministry. But **organizational details** are different than **religious details**. What if we the Elders created a playbook for Christianity that outlined what you could say and do, movies you couldn't see, music you couldn't listen to, restaurants you couldn't go to? But then you find out we don't go to those restaurants, we just **order takeout**? Do we look around at others and **judge them** for their choices, but **give ourselves grace** when we make the same choices? *The first sign of a heart problem for leaders is loading others down with rules and regulations.* What's the second sign?

## 2. Resisting God's message and messengers (Luke 11:47-51)

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. (NIV®)

This paragraph's **logic** is a little **challenging** to follow, but what I think Jesus is saying here is that the lawyer's **ancestors** killed the prophets. And of course, these lawyers believe that if they had been there they would not have done so, so they built **monument** tombs for them to try and show their **innocence**. But even as they do this for the prophets, they reject an even greater prophet, the **Messiah**, Jesus Christ. The lawyers, like their **forefathers**, resisted God's message and God's messenger, **Jesus Christ** and what he **taught**.

As leaders we need to make sure we have **teachable hearts** (1 Peter 5:5). This means that when others come to us, trying to speak truth through the Holy Spirit and based on God's Word, we need to have **listening ears**. This may not mean we do what others want or agree with them, as **we have to compare** the message and the messengers to the **Bible** as well. If you struggle with a teachable heart, **ask** your Heavenly Father to give you one. He will. *We don't want to resist God's message and messengers.* Third?

## 3. Hindering others from understanding God's word (Luke 11:52-54)

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. (NIV®)

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<sup>3</sup> Garland, David E.; Clinton E. Arnold. *Luke* (Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on The New Testament series Book 3) (Kindle Locations 13016-13018). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

These lawyers didn't help people learn God's Word. They actually made it **harder** for others to understand. As leaders in the church, we need to **examine our teaching** to make sure we are helping people understand God's Word **clearly** and **easily** as God intends it to be understood. We do this through our actual **teaching**, but also through our **actions**. We teach not just with **our words**, but with **how we live**.

As we look at these warning signs, maybe you see them in your own heart, maybe you've identified a heart problem. Now what should we do? Turn to the great physician!

## **Bring your heart-problem to Jesus.**

Last year my my dad's doctor said he was concerned about my dad's left ventricle wall thickening in his heart, so he gave him an **EKG test**. The results came back good, but my dad still complained about **shortness of breath**, lack of stamina, and tiredness, so the doctor gave him a treadmill stress test, which showed there might be blockage in his heart (he called it a "**widow maker**"). So the doctor wanted him to get a heart **catheterization** done as soon as possible.

So my dad asked his elders to **pray** for him and **anoint** him, and then he spent extra time in personal prayer the week before the procedure. He said when he was praying he felt his **Heavenly Father's presence** in a special way, like he came into the room. When the doctor went in with the catheter, the arteries were clear and he said my dad had the **heart of a 20-year old**. My dad thinks God healed his heart.

If you have a heart problem, God can heal you. If as we went through these signs today, you were convicted or concerned that you might have these symptoms, call out to your Heavenly Father to heal you. Confess your sin and ask Jesus to **remove the blockage**. The Gospel is the good news that through Jesus Christ's death and resurrection, the Holy Spirit gives all believers new hearts that love God, love neighbor, and want to seek him. *Bring your heart-problem to Jesus.*

*Pastor [Jonathan Romig](#) wrote and preached this message for the people of Cornerstone Congregational Church. [Click here to listen to more sermons](#) or [click here to read our story](#).*