

### I. Introduction

Good morning! Many people are very concerned about their health. And, it is good for us to eat right, exercise, and see the doctor for a checkup every year or two just to make sure everything is OK. But, our bodies last only a few decades, while, our spiritual life is forever. So we should be even more concerned about our spiritual health than our physical health. The Apostle Paul put it this way in **1 Timothy 4:8**, **“For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.”**



In today's passage, a Pharisee invites Jesus to come to his home and share a meal. And, like a good doctor, Jesus uses the opportunity to check on the spiritual health of the Pharisees. The diagnosis is not good, so, out of love and concern for them, Jesus strongly warns them that they need to change their spiritual lifestyle. Let's take a look at Luke 11:37-54.

### II. Scripture Luke 11:37-54 (NIV)

[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, noticing that Jesus did not first wash before the meal, was surprised. [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 outside make the inside also? [41] But give what is inside the dish to the poor, and everything will be clean for you. [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. [43] "Woe to you Pharisees, because you love the most important seats in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces. [44] "Woe to you, because you are like unmarked graves, which men walk over 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 forefathers who killed them. [48] So you testify that you approve of what your forefathers 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 left there, 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.

### III. Teaching

It may seem like Jesus is being very harsh with the Pharisees and the Teachers of the Law. But if we realize that Jesus loves them and that He is trying to save their souls, then we understand that Jesus is scolding them because only a severe scolding has a chance of causing them to change their ways. So, like a doctor urgently warning a cancer patient that he absolutely must stop smoking, Jesus warns the Pharisees that they must give up their legalism and self-centered thinking.

**Luke 11:38** tells us how the conversation began, **“But the Pharisee, noticing that Jesus did not first wash before the meal, was surprised.”** Most of us are careful to wash our hands before eating because we are



concerned about cleanliness. But that is not the Pharisee's concern. The Pharisee is surprised because for them hand washing was a ritual that had to be done in an exact way. Jesus was not eating with dirty hands. Rather, Jesus was rejecting the legalistic, ritual practice of the Pharisees. We are not told what the Pharisee said, but we are told Jesus' reply.

**Luke 11:39, "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."** The spiritual diagnosis is severe. Everything looks good on the outside, but things are terribly wrong in the heart. This is a major problem for many religious people. It can happen easily. A man or woman begins by trying to draw near to God, but then people around them begin to praise them for their holiness. This is a dangerous place to be, because from that point on it is easy to become more concerned about people's opinions than about God. The Pharisees probably started off well, but somewhere along the way many of them became more concerned about looking right than they were about doing right.

**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."** At that time, tithes and offerings were given publicly, where everyone could see. So the Pharisees were careful to give a tithe of every increase in their wealth, no matter how small. But justice and love are harder to see and almost impossible to measure. Jesus says it is good that they are careful to tithe. But it is terrible that they have neglected the invisible, but much more important issues of love and justice.

The conclusion is very sad. Jesus says, in **Luke 11:44, "Woe to you, because you are like unmarked graves, which men walk over without knowing it."** The Jews of that time believed that touching a grave, even by accident, would make them unclean. When people traveled to Jerusalem for the feasts they had to be careful not to accidentally stand or sit on an old grave that looked just like a pile of rocks. To prevent this problem, all of the graves were supposed to be whitewashed so that they could be seen easily. But these Pharisees were like unmarked graves. Their spiritual condition was so bad that it was like a contagious disease, anyone near them was in danger of being defiled.



Jesus pronounces a terrible conclusion. **Luke 11:50-51, "Therefore this generation will be held responsible for the blood of all the prophets that has been shed since the beginning of the world, 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."** Why would one generation be held responsible for the blood of all of the prophets? Well, all of the prophets had prophesied about Jesus, the Messiah who was to come. So, by Jesus' fulfillment of the many prophecies, the leaders of Israel should have recognized that Jesus was the Messiah. But they rejected Him, and for this they are held responsible.

This doesn't mean that other generations are released from responsibility; it just means that the leaders of the generation that was alive when Jesus came had a very important responsibility to recognize Him as the Messiah. But, please notice, there is no excuse here for anti-Jewish attitudes. Only the Jewish leaders of that time are rebuked in this verse, and they are rebuked by the One who has the right to do so, the Son of God. It is a terrible sin of the church that over history some churches have adopted anti-Jewish attitudes. Perhaps some of these churches, in times like the crusades, were not really being led by true Christians; or perhaps they were believers, but they had been deceived by the enemy into sin. God alone knows the full truth and He will judge the sins of every generation.

But our main concern should be our own generation, our own church, and our own spiritual condition. We also need a spiritual checkup from time to time. How is our spiritual condition? Here are some verses that may help us in checking on our own spiritual health.

First, are we eating right? We need spiritual nourishment, just as we need nourishment for our bodies. In **Matthew 4:4, "Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"** Are you reading the Word of God regularly and carefully? When we eat, we take time to savor the flavor and to chew carefully so that we can digest our food. Our Bible reading should also be a regular habit of reading, tasting, and carefully thinking about what we have read.

Are we willing to adjust our beliefs to match what the Bible teaches? Paul warned Timothy in **2 Timothy 4:3**, “**For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.**” We need to be sure that we are ready to hear whatever God says to us and not just what we want to hear.

Are we careful with our actions and our words? In **Ephesians 4:29**, it is written, “**Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.**”

Do we confess our sins to God always and to one another when it is appropriate? Confession of sin is essential for our spiritual health. We need to take in good spiritual nourishment, but we also need to let what is bad out and get rid of it. **1 John 1:9**, “**If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.**”

Are we spending time with our brothers and sisters? Fellowship is very important to our spiritual health; It strengthens us, and we need that. **Hebrews 10:25**, “**Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching.**”

Do we pray? How do we pray? There are many verses which speak about prayer, but today I want to share a question Corrie Ten Boon asked. She challenges us, “*Is prayer your steering wheel or your spare tire?*” A spare tire is something you keep around for emergencies and take out after things have gone wrong and you are stranded. But a steering wheel is something you grasp firmly before you begin to move.



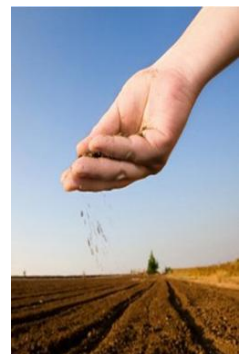
**Galatians 5:22-23**, offers us a good checklist for our spiritual life. “**But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.**” If all of the fruits of the spirit are growing in your life, then you are probably pretty healthy. But if some of the fruits are missing in your life, then you need to ask the Lord for help.

Take a look at this painting by Dieric Bouts the Elder. It is called, “*The Meeting of Abraham and Melchizedek.*” Way back in Genesis 14, Abraham gave a tenth of everything to Melchizedek, the priest. This story shows us that tithes and offerings were an established practice of worship long before the Law of Moses was given. As Christians, we are not under the Law, but the principle of generous giving remains. Many Christians in the modern church think of the tithe as a goal to reach toward when they have financial success in their lives. But the Bible always speaks of the giving of the tithe as a minimum that God’s people should not sink below. Biblically, the tithe is not a ceiling for God’s people to reach toward; it is a floor for God’s people to stand on.



God doesn’t need the money. But we need to give generously in order to free our hearts from the love of money. And the Bible teaches us that, as a general principle, God blesses those who give generously.

**Malachi 3:10**, “**Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,**” says the LORD Almighty, “**and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it.**” This verse was specifically a promise for the people of Israel at that time, but it also teaches us about God’s ways.



The same principle can be seen in the New Testament as well. Paul; wrote to the Corinthian church and said, in **2 Corinthians 9:6-7**, “**Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.**”

Farmers probably find this easier to understand, but what Paul is saying is this. It is not the seed in the barn that brings an increase; it is the seed that you plant in the ground that grows. In a similar way, in God's Kingdom, the work of God is not accomplished by money sitting in the bank. The work of God is accomplished when we take the money out of the bank and use it in the field of the world for God's glory. Of course, a farmer cannot plant all of the seed in his barn, because the seed, which is wheat, corn, and rice, is also his food. But a wise man or woman will manage their money well so that they can give generously and also have a prudent amount of savings.

But we also have to do it with the right attitude. In some times and places churches have placed a lot of pressure on people to give. That usually leads to legalism and backfires in the long run, so I definitely do not want to pressure anyone. I am not talking about the church's financial needs; I am talking about your spiritual health. The church is actually well ahead of its budget for the year, thanks to the many of you are generous with your tithes and offerings. But some of us need to hear the message that generous and cheerful giving is essential for our spiritual health.

Martin Luther, is reported to have said, *"A man has to be converted three times; first his head, then his heart, and then his pocketbook."* This might be overstating the case a little bit, but we can understand what Luther meant. We need to believe in Jesus with our head, trust Him and love Him with our heart, and demonstrate our faith in our daily life. And few things demonstrate our faith as clearly as generous giving. Those who trust God are able to give cheerfully, but those who trust only in their bank account cannot give, or do so only with resentment.



#### IV. Conclusion

As the New Year begins, let's continue to check our spiritual health in all areas. But I am closing with the issue of generous and cheerful giving, because in our modern world this is such a clear indicator of our true spiritual condition. The spiritually healthy Christian gives generously because they know it all belongs to God anyway. Returning a portion of what God has given into our hands is an acknowledgement that it all comes from Him and belongs to Him. Let's close with **1 Corinthians 4:7**, **"For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?"** Let's pray.

#### V. Closing Prayer