

7 Questions to Diagnose our Spiritual Health

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Date: 07 July 2024

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[0 : 0 0] how healthy is your relationship to god how healthy is your relationship to god how healthy is your christian life the uk health industry is one of our biggest sectors people prioritize their physical health and they spend a large proportion of their incomes on gym memberships and sports equipment but what about our spiritual health as christian believers is that a priority for us how committed are we to pursuing a healthy relationship with jesus christ in luke chapter 11 from verse 27 37 to 54 which we'll read in a minute in his criticisms of the pharisees and the religious lawyers jesus asks us seven questions which will help us to diagnose our spiritual health these pharisees and religious lawyers were everything that was wrong with the religion of israel in jesus day but unfortunately we all have tendencies toward the kind of religious legalism and hypocrisy these groups promoted this passage which we're going to read calls each of us to examine ourselves repent of areas in which this religious legalism and hypocrisy is still operative in our lives and then recommit ourselves to pursuing the grace of jesus in his gospel let's read then in luke chapter 11 from verse 37 to 54 luke 11 37 through 54 page 870 luke 11 from verse 37 while jesus was speaking a pharisee asked him to dine with him so he went in and reclined at table the pharisee was astonished to see that he did not first wash before dinner the lord said to him now you pharisees cleanse the outside of the cup and of the dish but inside you're full of greed and wickedness you fools did not he who made the outside make the inside also but give us arms those things that are within and behold everything is clean for you but woe to you pharisees for you tithe mint and rue and every herb and neglect justice and the love of god these things you ought to have done without neglecting the others woe to you pharisees for you love the best seat in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces woe to you for you're like unmarked graves and people walk over them without knowing it one of the lawyers answered him teacher in saying these things you insult us also and he said woe to you lawyers also for you load people with burdens hard to bear and you yourselves do not touch the burdens with one of your fingers woe to you for you build the tombs of the prophets whom your fathers killed so you are witnesses and you consent to the deeds of your fathers for they killed them and you build their tombs therefore also the wisdom of god said i will send them prophets and apostles some of whom they will kill and persecute so that the blood of all the prophets shed from the foundation of the world may be charged against this generation from the blood of abel to the blood of zechariah who perished between the altar and the sanctuary yes i tell you it will be required of this generation woe to you lawyers for you have taken away the key of knowledge you did not enter yourselves and you hindered those who were entering and he went away

from there the scribes and the pharisees began to press him hard and to provoke him to speak about many things lying in wait for him to catch him in something he might say heavenly father we bow in your presence may your word be our rule your spirit our teacher and your greater glory our supreme concern through jesus christ our lord amen this passage is often called the woes of jesus jesus uses the word woe as an expression of grief we might say it's a crying shame it's a crying shame that the pharisees act like they do it grieves me greatly that the religious lawyers think the way they do in the same way it grieves our lord when our relationship to him is unhealthy and scarred by these forms of religious legalism it's a crying shame to his kingdom when as christians we act the hypocrite so by way of contrast with these pharisees and these religious lawyers we want to ask seven questions to help us diagnose our spiritual health having answered these questions for ourselves our commitment must be to purge ourselves of all these forms of religious legalism and to pursue genuine spiritual health in the grace of the gospel question number one from verse 39 to 41 is the outside more important than the inside is the outside more important than the inside our passage begins with jesus who having been invited to a pharisee's house did not wash

his hands before dinner now the pharisees were astonished that jesus did not observe this rabbinic rule concerning ceremonial purity because for them washing one's hands before dinner was a matter of religious purity the word luke uses for astonished in verse 38 is the same word he translates we translate back in verse 14 as marveled jesus miracle astonished the people jesus non-observance of a man-made religious ritual astonishes the pharisees well talk of purity gives jesus the perfect opportunity to contrast what we are on the outside with who we are on the inside he says you pharisees you cleanse the the outside of the cup and of the dish but but inside you're full of greed and wickedness from the outside the pharisees were models of religious devotion they wore the right clothes they did the right things they always said the right words but on the inside they were full of greed and full of wickedness even the way in which they gave charitably their their arms was motivated by how it appeared to others everything about their religion was about external appearance as long as the outside of the cup was clean it didn't matter how filthy the inside was and this is the first mark of the religious legalist we call it hypocrisy wearing a mask to conceal who we really are on the inside if we want to pursue genuine spiritual health we will want to pay more attention to who we are on the inside where only god can see us rather than what we do on the outside we'll be more concerned with who we are before god than what we appear to be before men or appearance will matter to us but what will be of primary importance is god's work of grace in our hearts many so-called christians put on their sunday best to come to church but it's all the time hiding the ugliness of an unrepentant heart in olden days like when i was young so that's old most houses had a good room into which you could invite visitors it would be immaculate with only the best ornaments on display and the best china and cleaned to within an inch of its life the rest of the house could be a tip but as long as the good room was clean didn't really matter after all it was the only room of the house visitors could see what about us do we put on our good room appearance for sunday well who we really are on the inside is a tip and furthermore on what criteria do we judge newcomers to our church their appearance in terms of what they're wearing and how they're acting or do we suspend judgment until we get to know who they really are here's the first question then to diagnose our spiritual health whether we're pharisees or true christians is the outside our external appearance and activities more important than the inside who we really are before god second diagnostic question from verse 42 do we major on the minors do we major on the minors jesus continues his argument 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 the pharisees were fastidious about their obedience to every tittle of the laws of the rabbis even when that law was not required by the bible the pharisees were ultra conservative when it came to culture and to their traditions but when they saw a man beaten up and left on the road the good samaritan they walked by on the other side for them justice was for the rich not for the poor they majored on the minors of the traditions of the rabbis and neglected the meaning of the law of god which is to love justice to love justice and to show mercy and that's what always happens when people major on the minors of the faith they inevitably end up minoring on the majors of the faith the christian gospel ceases to be about the power of god and the cross of christ but the minors of how to live as a christian so for the pharisee tithing this herb rue whatever that was became more important than loving justice and showing mercy to the needy what version of the bible is more important than whether we're reading the bible at all what our ministers wear becomes more important than whether they are genuine gospel servants the people in the pews beside us the world around us are crying out for the church to show them the justice and love of god how should we be after all that the some of the minor issues which are important to us are biblical at all or whether they're merely cultural the pharisees the pharisees the pharisees were fastidious in their observance of man-made religious laws while neglecting god's primary motive in giving the law namely the expression of love and righteousness

are there issues upon which we minor which are in reality major and are there issues upon which we major which are in reality very minor i'm not suggesting that we should not be that we should not be exact in our obedience to christ but after all he says these you ought to have done without neglecting the others but in majoring on the minor things are we in danger of minoring on the major things the glory of the love of god and the cross of christ and the free offer of the gospel to every person in the world so jesus gives us his second diagnostic tool to judge our spiritual health do we major on the minors third verse 43 how important is our reputation to us how important is our reputation the pharisees were religious snobs not only did they look down on those who weren't like them they loved the limelight that's why jesus says to them woe to you pharisees you love the best

seat in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces one of the books on my shelf is uh been recommended to me by kirk it's a wonderful book called the art of pastoring the author a minister himself um refers to what he calls as ladder ladder climbers ladder climbers ladder climbers now these are men who go into the ministry not to serve but to climb the ecclesiastical ladder and to attain to high positions in the church the author calls ladder climbers loveless men who in their ambition leave behind them a trail of broken people the pharisees the pharisees were the ultimate ladder climbers how they appeared to others was important because they wanted to be thought of highly they wanted the best seats in the synagogue because they wanted to be thought of as being important in the local church of scotland in my village there's there's a special box with velvet all over it reserved for the nobility the duke of sutherland and his family the pharisees wanted their own box in the synagogue also they wanted to be greeted in the marketplaces i was someone not a nobody don't you know how important i am how different from the jesus of whom we read that in order to save us he made himself of no reputation though jesus was by very nature god he became a slave submitting himself to the ignominy of the death of the cross the path to reputation in the world travels in the opposite direction from the path of christlikeness for whereas jesus pathway downward when all jerusalem cried out crucify him the path to ladder climbing ends with high prominence where everyone speaks well of us how important is our reputation to us for the apostle paul who was perhaps the greatest intellect the western world has ever known it meant nothing nothing nothing at all he says of himself and his missionary companions in first corinthians 4 verse 10 he says to the says themselves we're fools for the sake of christ fools literally morons for the sake of christ don't we realize that if we're christians it's because god has chosen the moronic foolish things of the world to shame the wise

and the weak things to shame the strong we are weak and we are foolish it's only christ who gives our life significance and meaning and so again we ask how important is our reputation to us how willing are we to be christ's nobodies for the sake of others not to be served by them but to serve them that's jesus third diagnostic question for our spiritual health fourth from verse 44 does what people try to think of an easier way to put this question but it's only one i kind of think of does what people don't know about us matter does what people don't know about us matter for jewish people any contact with dead people rendered them unclean that may be why the the priest and the levite passed by on the other side when they saw that man beaten up on the road to jericho they thought he was dead religious jews they didn't go anywhere near graveyards because even walking over the grave of a dead person rendered them ceremonially unclean jesus says to them woe to you you're like unmarked graves and people walk over them without knowing it the pharisees you see were ultra concerned about not doing things that might make them unclean on the outside but what jesus says here is that they the pharisees they're the ones who are unclean on the inside the average person doesn't see it but jesus sees inside their hearts and when what he sees there is uncleanness others can't see it but the pharisees they're like unmarked graves you can't see the deadness within them the point jesus is making is that what really matters to these pharisees is what people know about them about how they appear to be to others what people don't know about them and what they can't see doesn't matter to them the opposite is true for us as christians what people don't know about us matters to us because we're most interested in what god sees what we're watching on the internet when we're all alone matters to us because we know that god can see our screens what we're like at work when no one from the church can see us is important to us because we know that god can hear our gossip and god is watching our passive aggressive bullying behavior it's what god sees that matters to us not what others sees and god sees what we're like on the inside and what we're doing and saying when no one else is watching our heavenly father sees what's done in secret so what matters to us isn't what other people know about us but what god knows about us we're not interested in winning popularity contests we're only interested in the smile of our heavenly father that's jesus fourth diagnostic tool for our spiritual health does what people don't know about us matter fifth verse 46 are we harder on others than we are on ourselves are we harder on others than we are on ourselves are we harder on others than we are on ourselves religious lawyers were experts at interpreting and applying the traditions and laws of israel the pharisees forced these interpretations and applications but it was the religious lawyers who came up with them jesus says to one offended lawyer in verse 46 woe to you lawyers also for you load people with burdens hard to bear and you yourselves don't touch

[20 : 18] the burdens with even one of your fingers so these lawyers interpreted the traditions and laws of israel in such a way that it made it very difficult for ordinary people listen to this one

concerning the sabbath this is a good one you may not carry a burden in your right hand or in your left on your chest or in your back but you may carry a burden on the back of your hand or your foot with your mouth or with your elbow in your ear in your hair in your wallet between the wallet and your shirt or on the hem of your shirt or in your shoe multiply this by a thousand different interpretations in other areas of life you get the idea of how difficult it was for ordinary people but the thing is these lawyers were always making it harder for others while they themselves weren't doing anything to make it easier for them the question then becomes are we harder on others than we are on ourselves are we forever judging others rather than judging ourselves we criticize others for not being as active in the church as we are and yet we don't know what difficult circumstances they face at home so we make the christian life difficult for them while ourselves we have easy home lives we don't walk in their shoes we just criticize them for the kind of shoes they're wearing are we harder on others than we are on ourselves we make extra biblical judgments upon them perhaps we judge them for what they wear to church on a sunday i've heard this one and i really didn't like it when i heard it maybe kind of angry actually parents being criticized for not keeping their children quiet in church by people who themselves have never had children extroverts judge introverts for being too quiet in the church introverts judge extroverts for being too loud in the church rather than spending our criticisms on others let's save them for ourselves that's jesus fifth diagnostic tool for our spiritual health are we harder on others than we are on ourselves next we're getting there verses 47 through 51 do we value dead saints over living christians do we value dead saints over living christians religious jews were fascinated by the history of their people they're forever going back to the glory days of the patriarchs and the prophets they love to tell the stories about moses the wilderness journeys they love to speak about elijah and isaiah and jeremiah they memorized the psalms of david but all the time they'd forgotten that it was the forefathers of the pharisees and the religious lawyers who had made the lives of these old saints a misery jesus speaks about abel the first prophet he was murdered by his brother cain the same cain who made up his own religion suit himself and then jesus speaks of zechariah the last prophet you can read about him in second chronicles 24 he was murdered because the message he brought from the lord displeased the king and the leaders of judah whenever any of these prophets of the old testament spoke from the lord the religious leaders of israel persecuted them and murdered them but now the pharisees according to jesus in verses 47 through 51 are building tombs to celebrate the godliness of the very prophets their fathers had murdered

at great expense they erected tombs and monuments and statutes to the prophets their fathers had killed while at the very same time the poor in israel were becoming poorer one of the very sins the prophets had condemned it was hypocrisy but the question for us is this do we value dead saints over living christians very searching question we may wax lyrical about the mission achievements of hudson taylor in 19th century china but ourselves have never shared the gospel with a non-christian that's hypocrisy george moeller was the director of an orphanage in bristol in the 19th century he had a heart for the practical outworking of the gospel i've heard addresses on moeller delivered by academically minded lecturers who themselves aren't involved in any social causes that's hypocrisy we admire those christian heroes who were persecuted before because they wouldn't renounce their faith in jesus but we're challenged when we're challenged in our workplaces about being christians we become very fearful that's hypocrisy we talk highly about jim elliot who gave up everything to become a missionary in south america and lost his life but our own discipleship in christ is in reality costing us nothing and that's hypocrisy do we value dead saints over living christians we may have the biographies of dead saints on our bookshelves but what about those living christians who really need our help i'm not saying that we shouldn't learn the history of these remarkable men and women of faith but if we're faithful to them we must follow in their footsteps and do the works they did there's the sixth diagnostic tool jesus gives us to judge our spiritual health the last one verse 52 do we overcomplicate the gospel do we overcomplicate the gospel jesus last woe is reserved for these people he says woe to you lawyers you've taken away the key of knowledge you did not enter yourselves you've hindered those who were entering we've already seen how these lawyers these religious lawyers not state lawyers if there's any lawyers here don't take offense they added a thousand different interpretations and applications of the law to the people whether sabbath regulations dress code food laws you had to obey them if you wanted to please god and earn eternal life you had to obey and at the same time they neglected the true simplicity of old testament religion spoken of both the beginning and the end of the old testament at

the beginning of abraham it is written abraham believed god and it was credited to him as righteousness and at the very end of the old testament the book of habakkuk it is written the righteous shall live by faith it was always god's intention in the old testament i knew that salvation is by faith in him not by obedience to a set of man-made rules and regulations so these religious lawyers they complicate this simple message of justification by faith described by abraham the father of their nation and habakkuk prophet to their nation how are the ordinary people of israel to know what salvation is if it's hidden behind ten thousand meaningless laws i sometimes wonder whether one of the dangers we face as christians especially as we age especially as we age is that we complicate the message of the gospel you know at base that message is really so simple jesus died on the cross to take away my sins so that by faith in him i may be saved jesus died on the cross to take away my sins so that by faith in him i might be saved it's so simple but we make it about so much more don't we the minor issues of the faith or matters which are purely cultural jesus is pushed to the side and it becomes about man-made laws and standards fragile christians think to themselves well i can't possibly be a true christian because i don't wear the right clothes and i like culture and i like music and i like dancing and i like art how complicated we make something which in reality is so very simple jesus died on the cross to take away my sins so that by faith in him i might be saved damages us makes our gospel witness totally ineffective let me challenge us all of us here elders young people adherents whoever we are if you had to put the message of salvation into one sentence what would that sentence be this afternoon task for us all challenge for every one of us how would i share the simple message of christianity with someone who is not yet a christian if i had only one sentence how would i share the simple simple message of christianity with someone who is not yet a christian have we over complicated the gospel that's jesus final diagnostic tool for the state of our spiritual health well as we close let's notice where our passage ends not with the pharisees and the lawyers listening to jesus and repenting of their sin rather than realizing how spiritually unhealthy they were they compounded their guilt by pressing jesus hard and trying to trip him up in something he said ultimately they crucified him because the light of christ showed up the darkness of their hearts we all have a question to ask ourselves today from jasper's age to the most old person here's age one question just one when it comes to jesus diagnostic tools in this passage how spiritually healthy am i am i you and am i