

The Gospel of Luke

Rebuking the Wickedness of Religious Traditions

Luke 11:37-44

1. **Religious Tradition Developed from Custom** (v.38)

The Old Testament includes several descriptions of customary washings (Gen 18:4; 19:2) as well as many prescriptions for religious ceremonial washings (Ex 19:14; Lev 11:25). Washing before meals for ceremonial cleanliness was an extra-biblical tradition that was a public display of devotion to God and of personal righteousness (Mark 7:1-4).

2. **Religious Tradition Developed from the Law** (v.42)

The Old Testament does include descriptions of voluntary tithing (Gen 14:20), legislated tithing within Israel (Lev 27:30-33), and condemnation for Israel not tithing (Mal 3:8), but it does not specify the tithing of garden herbs.

3. **Religious Traditions Are Wicked If They...**

A. **Focus on External Righteousness** (vs.39-41)

A problem of false religious traditions is not the presence of external righteousness, but the primacy of external righteousness (Matt 6:1-6; 23:25-26; cf. 1 Sam 16:7). True religion is marked by righteousness that is inaugurated internally, permeates comprehensively, and percolates externally (2 Cor 5:21; Eph 2:8-10; James 1:27).

B. **Make Light of the Primary Things** (v.42)

Faithful believers ought to be intentional about applying God's commands to all areas of life. False religious traditions elevate the unimportant, unessential or secondary things so that they eclipse and replace the fundamental (cf. Matt 23:23-24; 2 Tim 2:16ff; Titus 3:9).

C. **Intend to Gain the Approval of Men** (v.43)

The aim of false religious traditions is to elevate the practitioner in the eyes of men rather than in the eyes of God (cf. Matt 23:6-7, 27:18; Gal 1:10; Eph 6:6).

D. **Lead Men to Death** (v.44)

False religious traditions are most wicked because they promise life but deliver death (cf. Matt 23:13, 15, 27-28).

4. **The Graciousness of Rebuking Wicked Traditions**

It is gracious for God to confront false religious traditions and practices, because only then will people be able to believe the truth. God has done this through various judges, prophets, and finally through His Son and His apostles (Heb 1:1-2); today He does this through the faithful proclamation of His Word (1 Thess 1:9).