



“The Key to Knowledge”
Luke 11:37-54

Idea: The key that unlocks knowledge is obedience to what you know is true.

Intro: This past Friday, Tim Keller, the founding pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City and co-founder of The Gospel Coalition, died after a three-year battle with pancreatic cancer. Keller was a tremendous gift to Christ’s church and the work of the gospel as a preacher, author, and mentor. His writing challenged the way we think about theology and apologetics, calling on Christians to hold high the Bible while intersecting it with the cultural struggles of our day. In his book *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism*, Keller wrote, “Religion says, ‘I obey; therefore, I am accepted.’ Christianity says, ‘I am accepted; therefore, I obey.’” In this statement, he highlighted one of, if not the greatest, struggle of humanity. The Bible makes it clear that man was created to worship the Lord (Col 1:16). In the first two chapters of Scripture, this purpose was easily and joyfully lived out. However, everything changed when Adam and Eve ate from the forbidden tree in Eden (Gen 3). We refer to their rebellion and its subsequent curse as the fall of mankind. This curse has been and will continue to be passed down through every generation, meaning everyone is born into this world in rebellion against God. Today, in a post-Eden world, the desire to worship or be religious still exists within each person because we have all been made by God and for God. The problem lies in the fact that while there is a desire to worship, there is an equal desire not to worship the God of Creation. This rebellion in many people is overt in its rejection of the God of the Bible. In others, it often veils itself in religious activity, which is Keller’s point.

Religion can be deceiving. Stephen Board commenting on the Apostle Paul’s teaching in Romans said, “From Romans 1-3 we learn that mankind knows something of the true God but turns instead to elaborate substitutes...Far from a quest for God, human religion is an evasion of Him.” In our passage today, we see this evasion of God on full display. The Lord Jesus after performing an exorcism and teaching in response to his critics was invited to lunch by a Pharisee. When Jesus did not follow the Pharisaical washing traditions, the host was “*astonished*.” In other words, he was offended by the Lord’s dismissal of their traditions, which led to a series of woes pronounced against this religious leader and others like him. Jesus denounced those who elevate customs over the commands of God.

Read Luke 11:37-54.

Inquiry: Pharisees were a class of Jewish religious leaders during the time of the New Testament. This group of leaders were not necessarily from the upper class like the Sadducees, but they came from the common people. They were committed to holy living. The very name “Pharisee” means “the separate ones.” They were thought to be holy men, the true community of Israel. They were the conservatives, and the Sadducees were the

liberals. When a man became a Pharisee, he first endured a probationary period up to a year in length, during which time he had to prove his ability to keep the rituals of the Law.

Many of the Pharisees were scribes, experts in the Law who so revered it that they hedged it in with extra protective laws. As the *Mishnah* says, “Tradition is a fence around the Law” (Aboth 3.14). They loved the Law, God’s Word. Full entrance into the Pharisaic community came, after that probationary period, when a man pledged to observe all the laws regarding purity and tithes. Therefore, these men were exemplary. Tragically, however, their spiritual eyes had become bad (11:34). They had become darkened by pride and greed, so that the very light within them had become an appalling darkness. So deep was the darkness that these meticulous religious idealists became Jesus’ bitterest enemies.

When we think about who the Pharisees were and the image they projected, it should surprise us that they were Jesus’ enemies. These men were deeply committed to observing and obeying God’s Word. They were teachers of the Word who worked to preserve its authority in their culture. They possessed knowledge of the Word, yet somehow, they missed its point. We might even say that they rejected its point. Their refusal to walk by faith did not just affect them; it became a stumbling block that hindered others belief and obedience to the Word (11:52). From these verses, I want us to see the key to knowledge. It is not simply found in the amount of information one knows. No, the key that unlocks knowledge is obedience to what you know is true. In the woes Jesus offered to the religious leaders we see two things that need to be recognized.

1. Deceptive Religion

If you recall, in the previous passage, Jesus had just warned the people against the danger of spiritual light becoming darkness within them, so the Pharisee’s invitation to Jesus was not accidental or hospitable. There was a hidden malevolence behind it. Jesus, knowing all things, recognized this, which is probably why He chose not to wash before lunch (ἄριστον). He incited this confrontation. We learn from this interaction with the Pharisee and lawyer that God is more concerned about your internal health than He is your external actions. Now, obviously, what a person does is important to Him, but it is so primarily because of how outward actions are fueled by internal beliefs. You see, your internal health often shows itself through external activity.

The Pharisees’ hearts were spiritually dark. The light of God’s Word had become darkness in them due to their failure to observe its objective, which is salvation by faith alone. All throughout Scripture, we read the point of God’s Word to His people. It was not to give humans a certain way to be religious. No, it was to show how they can and must believe on God, which leads to forgiveness of sin and transformed lives, families, and culture. Paul says of Abraham, the father of Israel, in Galatians 3:6 that he “*believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.*”

The Pharisees were deceived by their religious activity. This deception is apparent in four ways, which are still true today.

- Fixation on outward appearances (vs. 39).
Religion leads one to believe that looking Godly without being Godly is good enough. In other words, if you are gathering for worship, participating in small group, singing worship songs, reading your Bible, sharing the gospel with others, and staying away from big sins, then you are good in the eyes of God. Those of a different religious persuasion believe that sincerity to one’s belief is what is important. What really matters is what one does with his or her belief. This understanding, however, refuses to recognize that what a person does is driven by who a person is on the inside. This leads us to a second way we see this deception.
- Neglect of inward transformation (vs. 39-40).
Jesus shines His spotlight on the inner man because this is always the focus of His Word. He is not interested in treating the symptoms of sin, which are external. For this reason, the Bible is

not a therapeutic book full of self-help prescriptions. Instead, it is a surgical book that seeks to dissect the heart of the problem, which is the problem of the heart.

¹²For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. ¹³And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account. – Heb 4:12-13

The writer of Hebrews then focuses the attention of his readers on Jesus as the great high priest who transforms sinners through His redeeming sacrifice on the cross.

¹⁴Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. ¹⁵For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. – Heb 4:14-16

There is a third way we see this deception.

- Dereliction of brotherly love (vs. 42).
Religion often leads to wrong priorities. These Pharisees were incredibly careful to tithe their mint and herbs that they grew around the house, but they refused to remember the weightier matters of love and justice. They majored on minors. They needed to place their religious activity within a proper perspective. The love of God and of neighbor summed up the entire Law (Matt 22:40), which highlights just how deceived they were by religion. This brings us to the fourth and final way we see deception.
- Rejection of God's Word (vs. 52).
While these religious leaders could recite whole sections of God's Word and had come to celebrate and memorialize the prophets of God (vs. 47), in actuality, they did not believe it. They burdened the people with laws to keep rather than pointing them to the only One who could fulfill the requirements of the Law on their behalf. They honored the martyred prophets who preached without recognizing the condemnation of their preaching in their own lives. And they refused to believe on the gospel themselves while blocking the path for others to believe it.

Religion is deceptive. It gives the appearance of godliness while denying its power (2 Tim 3:5). The Pharisees and lawyers believed themselves to be the closest people to God because of their acquaintance with the things of God and righteous lifestyle. Jesus, however, pointed out their glaring hypocrisy. Their outer lives might have looked the part of holiness, but inside they were rotten and full of dead men's bones (vs. 44). It is crucial that we recognize this deception because it is a matter of spiritual life and death.

There is a second thing Jesus calls us to recognize.

2. Honest Reverence

The focus of these verses is to offer a strong indictment against the religious leaders who were deceived by their spiritual activity. From them we can also deduct this adverse point. There are three aspects to it. Honest reverence:

- Focuses on the heart.

As mentioned earlier, the heart of the problem with man is the problem of the heart. Today, in our culture, just as in every culture, the focus on solving society's problems is on behavior modification. No matter what the issue may be, the prescribed solution is to alter one's behavior either through some sort of deterrent or new understanding. The Bible offers a vastly different prescription. The problem is not so much that one's behavior is wrong as it is that one's heart is wrong. In other words, mankind sins against God and engages in evil toward one another because the heart is sinful and full of evil. Therefore, honest reverence for God leads the believer to go where God goes, which is a focus on the transformation of the heart. This brings us to a second, connecting aspect.

- **Receives God's Word.**

The Bible is *"like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces"* (Jer 23:29). If the condition of man is that he is wicked to the core and in rebellion against the God who created him, then nothing will help his situation other than what God has said about it. For that reason, an honest and holy reverence for God receives God's Word as it is without prejudice. The reception brings about a third aspect.

- **Loves God and others.**

An authentic focus on the heart and the reception of God's Word results in genuine love for God and others. Loving God means we obey God (Luke 6:46), and obeying God always leads to loving others. This love compels believers to work for the welfare of others through the preaching of the gospel and social work. It means we care for the spiritual, physical, emotional, and mental health of people.

This focus on loving God and others happens because the heart has been and continues to be softened by the Lord's work and activity. It is simply walking in obedience to God's Word. Let me share with you some simple ways to walk this out.

5 Ways to Walk Out Your Obedience

- 1) **Pray for a soft heart.**

Spiritual drift is a constant threat. If ever you notice hardness in your heart, pray for a fresh softening.

- 2) **Meditate on God's Word daily.**

Read the Word slowly and chew on it. Never forget that it is by the Word our hearts are changed and made glad before God.

- 3) **Receive God's Word in faith.**

When you are reading do not receive the Word as cold and dead. No, the Word is alive and active, so take it into your heart as such. Believe it.

- 4) **Apply God's Word to daily life.**

When we read the Bible, God is speaking to us. When we apply it to how we live, God's voice becomes clearer and louder. Commitment makes the difference.

- 5) **Expect God's blessings in righteousness and growth.**

The main idea that we have held tightly throughout this passage is that the key that unlocks knowledge is obedience to what you know is true. When believers walk in obedience to what God has said, then we can and should expect to experience all that the Bible says. We should expect to be grow spiritually and look more and more like Jesus. The growth happens in the heart and is pressed out through the thoughts, words, and actions of one's life.

Conclusion: Every person, having been created in the image and likeness of God, knows something of the true God, but sinfulness leads them turn instead to elaborate substitutes. Far from a quest for God, human religion is an evasion of Him. This avoidance is not just true for those outside of Christianity. Unfortunately, there are many who identify as Christians who at this moment are walking more in step with the Pharisee in our text than they are the Lord Jesus. They are clinging to a religious experience, a set of religious activities, or a list of moral obligations. Perhaps on the outside, their lives give the appearance of life and faith. They seem to be clean and put together. On the inside, however, they are hollow, rotten, and longing for something more. Today, let's not allow ourselves to be satisfied with external religion devoid of inner transformation through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. We need more than spiritual motions and activities. We need a deep, abiding walk with the Lord. The key to knowledge is to obey what is true, so let's obey the gospel.