

“The Commandments of Men”

Matthew 15:1-20

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Jesus is basically **showing His disciples where two of the spiritual land mines are located** in the Christian life, saying, “Avoid these problems!”

Problem #1: Jesus says there is great spiritual danger **WHEN HUMAN RULES REPLACE SCRIPTURAL TRUTH.**

Then Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem and said, ²“Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat.”³He answered them, “And why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? ⁴For God commanded, ‘Honor your father and your mother,’ and, ‘Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.’⁵But you say, ‘If anyone tells his father or his mother, “What you would have gained from me is given to God,”⁶he need not honor his father.’ So for the sake of your tradition you have made void the word of God. ⁷You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said: ⁸“This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; ⁹in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.”
Matthew 15:1-9 (English Standard Version)

Ritual purity = a physical means of helping remember that God is near, that God is holy, and that I belong to Him

“Qorban” = to take a binding vow to give to the Temple what would ordinarily be reserved for parents

The Historical Confessions of the Reformation

- First, the Bible is God’s Word.
- Second, the Scriptures are our highest and final authority for faith and the practice of faith.
- And third, God’s Word is a means of God’s grace in our lives.

“What then must be said of the mass of our churches today? For at no time, perhaps, since the Reformation have Protestant Christians as a body been so unsure, tentative and confused as to what they should believe and do . . . Unlike the first Christians who in three centuries won the Roman world, and those later Christians who pioneered the Reformation, and the Puritan awakening, and the Evangelical revival, and the great missionary movement of the last century, we lack certainty.”

(From “God Has Spoken”, by J.I. Packer)

Application Tip:

- Consistently engage your mind and heart with the Scriptures this coming year.
- Read the New Testament through, passage by passage, 5 to 15 verses at a time, asking the Holy Spirit to give you an open mind, godly insight and a willingness to be obedient to His Word.
- Use N.T. Wright's "New Testament for Everyone" to help you understand and apply each passage.

Problem #2: Jesus says there is great spiritual danger **WHEN HAND-WASHING REPLACES HEART-WASHING.**

And he called the people to him and said to them, "Hear and understand: ¹¹ it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but what comes out of the mouth; this defiles a person."¹² Then the disciples came and said to him, "Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this saying?"¹³ He answered, "Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be rooted up. ¹⁴ Let them alone; they are blind guides. And if the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit."¹⁵ But Peter said to him, "Explain the parable to us."¹⁶ And he said, "Are you also still without understanding? ¹⁷ Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth passes into the stomach and is expelled? ¹⁸ But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. ¹⁹ For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. ²⁰ These are what defile a person. But to eat with unwashed hands does not defile anyone." Matthew 15:10-20 (ESV)

Practical righteousness = progressive submission of a heart to God

"As our personality becomes progressively more reorganized around God . . . self-denial move beyond more or less frequent acts to settled disposition and character. At the first we must self-consciously deny ourselves . . . But there will come a time in the experience of the apprentice of Jesus where it is appropriate to speak of our being dead to self. Being dead to self is the condition where the mere fact that I do not get what I want does not surprise or offend me and has no control over me."

(from "The Renovation of the Heart" by Dallas Willard)

Application Tip:

- If you haven't already done this, decide to rely on Jesus and live life in the Kingdom, within the range of God's will.
- Then, because you intend to do this, in each week of your life in the coming year, choose one way to trust Jesus enough to obey His example or teaching, or the broader teaching of God's Word.