

Hypocritical Pharisees
Matthew 14:34—15:14

As we work our way through Matthew we are continually confronted with proof that Jesus is the Messiah that Israel had waited for for many hundreds of years. Prophecy concerning the coming Messiah all point to this exact moment when the Second Person of the Trinity would manifest Himself as Jesus. The prophetic utterances by Mary (Luke 1:48—55) and Zacharias (Luke 1:68—79; Although spoken about John the Baptist it is also pointing to Jesus as the Savior of Israel.), The testimony of John the Baptist (John 1:29—34), the thousands of miracles, healings and casting out of demons were all pointing to Jesus as the Messiah. The Disciples believed in Jesus because of the signs (John 2:11), Nicodemus knew that the signs performed by Jesus pointed to Him as being sent from God (John 3:2) and many others came to believe because of the signs (John 2:23; 6:14; 7:31). When John was in prison and doubting that Jesus was the Messiah, Jesus never directly said He was the Messiah but instead demonstrated many miracles and told them to report this to John (Matthew 11:1—5). They believed because Old Testament prophecy foretold that their Messiah would give sight to the blind, cause the deaf to hear, make the lame walk and heal the deaf and mute, (Isaiah 29:18—19; 35:5—6; 42:7; 53:4). Other miracles such as calming the sea also proved Jesus was God (Job 9:8).

More healings (verses 34—36)

Jesus continued to heal as He went throughout the region to the north and west of the Sea of Galilee. All who came to Him and just touched the hem of His garment were healed. Notice that verse 36 says they were made perfectly whole (KJV also see Acts 3:16). In other words these people were completely rejuvenated. What good would it do to be healed of deafness and then die of cancer a few months later? These people were being prepared to go into the Millennial Kingdom. Of course, not all who were physically healed will gain entrance to the kingdom but those who are spiritually healed (by faith) will be physically healed as they are ushered into the Kingdom if Jesus had not already heal them during His earthly ministry.

There are many today who claim to be healing in the name of Jesus. Their claim of having divine power can be verified by their ability to heal everyone who comes to them and to heal them completely. Those who are not able to do this are actually false healers who are only claiming to be sent from God. Imagine how insulting it must be to God to have false healers blame a lack of faith on the part of those who need healing for their inability to heal them.

Tradition vs. Scripture (15:1—20; Mark 7:1—23)

We have here a confrontation between God's Law and man's law. In this case, the Elders have instituted an elaborate system of washings that supposedly must be followed before eating. These Elders were the leaders that predate Jesus by hundreds of years. These are ceremonial washings that have nothing to do with hygiene or cleanliness. It also had nothing to do with what foods could or could not be eaten. The Mosaic Law has already delineated which foods are clean (eatable) and which foods are unclean (inedible). The washings of the Elders could not make an unclean food clean.

We first see the Scribes and Pharisees accuse Jesus for not having His Disciples wash their hands before eating and then we are given Jesus' response (verses 1—9). Jesus then preaches to the crowd about what really causes a person to be defiled (verses 10—11). His Disciples then came to Jesus to ask if He knew that He had offended the Pharisees (verse 12) and Jesus answers them by telling them a parable (verses 13—14). Jesus then explains the parable to His Disciples (verses 15—20).

Washings of the Elders (verses 1—9)

The Scribes and Pharisees came all the way from Jerusalem to check out Jesus. They were apparently looking for any reason to condemn Him or His Disciples. They found a reason when they saw that the Disciples were ignoring the tradition of Elders by not washing their hands before eating. They also noticed that they did not wash cups, pots and other vessels (Mark 7:4). It's obvious that the Pharisees were spying on Jesus and the Disciples to catch them doing something wrong so they could accuse them of some impropriety. They were unable to find any fault in their obedience of Scripture but they could charge them with breaking their man-made law of cleanliness. They had elevated their man-made laws to the same status as Scripture. Orthodox Jews even today follow these same hand-washing traditions.

Many churches today hold church tradition equal with Scripture. The Roman Catholic Church believes that the entirety of Christ's revelation to us is contained in Scripture and sacred tradition (church tradition). Their authority for Mariology, for instance, comes loosely from Scripture while church tradition fills in the numerous holes. Many of these ideas now accepted as truth in the Roman Catholic Church were not defined until many years after Scripture was written. In contrast, Protestants, in general, hold to a belief that the Bible is the only source for doctrine. We also do not accept a number of the books that the Roman Catholic Church accepts as canon.

Jesus rebukes the Pharisees by pointing out that His Disciples may be breaking one of their traditions but that they are breaking one of God's laws. Jesus and His Disciples were not guilty before God but the Pharisees were. They had another tradition of declaring items to be Corban or a gift to God. They were using this little trick to shirking their responsibility to take care of their elderly parents by declaring their money as being dedicated to God. This would tie up their money so that they would not spend it on their parents. They would probably either be able to nullify their vow after their parents passed on or they could possibly use the money for themselves because they were "men of God" serving Him in the temple.

Jesus blasted them for using their own traditions to avoid keeping the precepts of the Mosaic Law. The Law states that they were responsible for taking care of family members but they used man-made loopholes to get out of their responsibility.

According to Isaiah 29:13 this type of hypocrisy was rampant 600 years before this. Outwardly they appeared to be holy men of God but inwardly they were only doing things by rote tradition. Even if their actions were right, their hearts were far from God. The whole chapter of Matthew 23 is devoted to pointing out the hypocrisy of the Pharisees.

Jesus teaches the crowd (verses 10—11)

Jesus now calls the crowd to Him and He begins to teach them that it is not what goes onto a man that defiles him but that which proceeds out of his mouth. Imagine what the Pharisees and Scribes were thinking as Jesus teaches the crowd contrary to what their tradition holds to. They must have been livid.

The Mosaic Law defined many things as being unclean or ways that you could become unclean. Anyone with an oozing sore would be unclean until the priest declared him clean. Houses that were growing mold were unclean until it was cleaned up and declared clean by a priest. Christ is now elevating the idea of clean by pointing to the heart. If the heart is not right then nothing that comes out of that man will be clean. Food that has been eaten with unwashed hands does not make the food nor the man unclean.

Jesus teaches the Disciples (Verses 12—14)

After teaching the crowds the Disciples came to Jesus amazed that He would talk to the Pharisees the way He did. They were wondering if He knew that He offended them. His answer was a little obscure saying that every plant that the Father did not plant will be uprooted. This reference goes back to the parable of the wheat and tares (Matthew 13:24—30). The Angels will uproot and burn all those who were planted by Satan (the tares). The only way an Israelite could bear fruit was by being planted by the Father and, after Jesus was sent, to abide in Christ (John 15:2; Isaiah 60:21; 61:3; Psalm 1; Jeremiah 17:7—8).

These Pharisees were blind (Matthew 23:16, 24) and anyone foolish enough to follow them is also blind.

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