

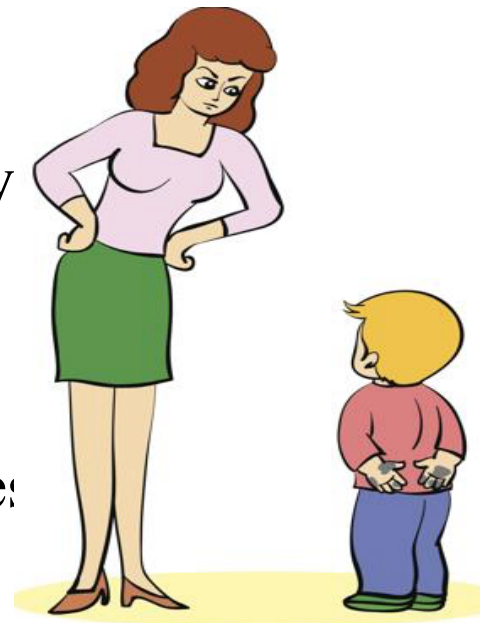
Gospel of Matthew

14:34-36 — 15:1-9

The Conflict with Tradition Clean Vs. Clean



I remember when my mother used to insist that I wash my hands before I ate! I just couldn't see why an extra trip to the sink before mealtime was actually necessary, but it was a huge deal to my mother and my sisters. You'd think the world was coming to an end just because my hands were dirty and I wanted to use them to eat with!! That is what these Pharisees and religious leaders remind me of! They were like religious nannies, like mothers out of some horrible nightmare. They nagged and scolded and shamed people when anyone did not dot an "i" or cross a "T" in regard to keeping all these little laws. But they also could and **would** ruin your life if you did not listen to them! In their defense, they thought that *if* they were able to create strict adherence to the law by the entire nation, well, this would please God and He would send His Messiah – but not until they, as a people, were clean, and righteous, and good enough! But they were wrong. It does not depend upon them!



It still amazes me, however, to read this story and to consider that an entourage of religious leaders from Jerusalem had made a special trip up from Jerusalem to confront Jesus. I mean, they didn't just jump in the car and use the highway to get from Jerusalem to Gennesaret! No, it was about a 70 mile trip – on foot – or on an animal. Either way, it was an arduous effort, miserably hot, dusty, and tiring. They would have even had to have gone through Samaria,

which would have made their skin crawl!
They hated Samaritans!

But here is the thing!
They made the unpleasant trip all the way up from








Jerusalem to ask Jesus why He sometimes did not wash His hands before he ate, and did not require that His disciples wash either!

Now, the reason Jesus was getting this unwanted attention is obvious! His fame was growing! Word was traveling by word of mouth that Jesus was a great miracle-working prophet and teacher! It was the old school way of “going viral”! He was one of the biggest stories in the land, and His popularity was growing as was His following! But the word was that He was also teaching some unorthodox things! This was certainly concerning to these men. They were men of influence and even power! They were used to telling people what they could and could not think! But this Jesus had just seemed to have popped up out of nowhere and had never even been vetted by them. They figured that authority to teach came out of Jerusalem and the leaders of the temple there, but this man seemed to have assumed authority all on His own! He was saying that GOD gave Him the authority!

Jesus was obviously irritated by their presence and by their mission which I'm sure He has discerned immediately. He detested their haughty and superior attitude. Some of them wore a false humility with a grave and downcast face that they thought made them look wise, and a practiced shuffle that they thought had the proper look of authenticity. But Jesus saw through the façade and did not even hesitate to call them out on it!

So they come all this way to ask Jesus why He and His disciples did not conform to the hand washing traditions that had been taught in the land for hundreds of years. They wanted to scold Him, humiliate Him, and discredit Him. They had no idea what they had unleashed! He does not even answer their big question! Instead He counters THEM with a question of His own. Like their question, it is not really a question. It is a statement of disapproval! If they were going to point out something that was obviously on the trivial side, He was going to up the ante and point out a huge inconsistency in their systematic breakdown of righteousness. As He said later in chapter 23 – they were straining gnats out of their soup for fear that gnats had cloven hooves but didn't chew the cud! No one could actually know for sure because their feet were too small to really see with the naked eye and magnifying glasses were unknown at the time.



But The Law of Moses forbade the eating of animals with the had cloven hooves but did not chew the cud or that chewed the cud without cloven hooves – and it was thought that maybe a  gnat in one's drink or soup fit into that category. So just in case, they were straining their liquids for the possible gnat that may have fallen in there. So  Jesus is pointing out that they major on the little stuff and miss the big stuff! In this case, they would never miss a hand washing – but  would find it perfectly righteous  to withhold support from their own parents in their time of need so that they could piously devote  that money to God! Some old rabbi had written this at some point and it seemed so impressive in its pious devotion to God that it had become a regular accepted appendage to the practice of the Law of Moses! But it was an ugly, cancerous appendage! The fact that they thought God would approve of this practice demonstrated just how far from Him they actually were!

Even more importantly, Jesus confronts them on their hearts! Their hearts were twisted and upside-down-wrong! This Old Testament scripture about is about lip-service to God issuing forth from a heart that is far from Him, and the image Jesus paints in words is devastating to these men! Jesus demonstrates that they were majoring on appearances rather than the truth! Of course, their egos were involved since the truth humiliated them publically, so they weren't listening to Jesus. They *should have* listened and have taken it to heart because it was the truth! Everyone should do that, but few ever do! The ego always gets in the way. So, instead of listening and taking it to heart, this is certainly the hour when their hatred of Jesus was whipped into flame, the heat of which would intensify all the way to when they hung Him on the cross!



Jesus quotes well-known scripture about how God wants His people to treat their parents, and Jesus says to them that because of their add-on tradition, they are legitimizing disobedience to God! How does it honor one's parents to let them starve, or to lose their house, or to not have their basic need when you, their child, could provide it!? In those days there was no social security. Children were the only social security there was in the land. But these men were setting a very bad example to Israel and Jesus was not shy about telling them off!



So how could this possibly apply to us! Well, I'm afraid it does! We tend to think that we are better than the Pharisees – somehow cut from a different cloth. But we are not! We may not operate exactly like them, but there are enough similarities to align us with their orbit!

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First of all, a great many Christians are all about appearances. We have to perform, we have to impress, we need to fit in. We do that with the right language/lingo with our friends at church, and we do that with decent behavior and the exercise of restraint, because we know we have to look the part and play the part. But who we are at home can be quite a different picture – like moody, angry, frustrated, impatient, unkind, unreliable, ungenerous, controlling! *Coming home can be like someone who has been sucking in their gut all day and then they get home, loosen the belt about 2 or 3 notches and let it all hang out for the rest of the evening – all restraint abandoned! So who is the real me – the one at church, the one at work, or the one at home?!



What Jesus wants His followers to be someone who has been recreated at the core level, so that we are one whole person – not someone who changes depending on the environment or the circumstances! We are the same at church as we are at work as we are at our children's sporting event, as we are at a restaurant, as we are at home!

So what if we sense that we actually are duplicitous?! We've given our heart to Jesus but are failing in our attitudes, anger issues, our frustration level, etc...



Stop beating yourself up over it! That doesn't help anything, except to fuel failure! 1) Commit yourself to praying about it every day and asking for the Spirit of God to soften, to “wisen you up”, to alert you and to empower! 2) Find scripture that addresses your issue – memorize, write it on a 3X5 card and put it on the bathroom mirror so you see it first thing in the morning. 3) Admit you have a problem in this area to someone you can trust and have them pray for/with you. Don't trust anyone? That's an issue to begin with!