

## Introduction

We left off last week with Jesus rebuking the seekers for seeking to fulfill only their temporal felt needs, and then driving them away by making the Gospel so intolerably offensive that not only was the crowd turned away, but many of Jesus' disciples turned away and no longer followed Him from that day forward (but the 12 stayed).

But there is another group Jesus hadn't offended in a while, but He will get the opportunity soon enough, because that group is on the way from Jerusalem right now – the Scribes and Pharisees.

If you are ever getting bored and want some real intense drama, just look up one of these confrontations between Jesus and the religious leaders.

This particular group is on a mission. This isn't some wild hair they decided to do over their lunch break. They have been traveling for days to come from Jerusalem up to Galilee.

You have to really want to get somewhere before you will travel for several days one-way.

The last time they came from Jerusalem, they accused Jesus of being satanic.

Keep in mind, these men have been plotting for a whole year with the Herodians about how they could kill Jesus (Mk.3:6).

These guys are the reason why Jesus left Judea and spent most of His ministry years in Galilee (Jn.4).

These men are killers, and they have a lot of power; they have a lot of authority; and they have a lot of hatred for Jesus.

## A Portrait of False Religion

**The Pharisees and some of the teachers of the law who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus and 2 saw some of his disciples eating food (lit "the breads" – The bread from their baskets?) with hands that were "unclean," that is, unwashed.**

This has nothing to do with hygiene (they didn't even know about germs back then). The point is they didn't follow the handwashing ritual.

The OT prescribed a handwashing ritual for priests, and it ended up being a rule that was imposed on all the people by the scribes.

Mark is written for Gentiles like us who are not familiar with Jewish customs. So he gives an explanation:

**3 (The Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they give their hands a ceremonial washing, holding to the tradition of the elders.**

When he refers to **the tradition of the elders**, he is referring to something very specific.

The Tradition of the Elders

One thing you have to understand about the ancient Jews is that they loved God's law – even unbelieving Jews.

They loved the fact that God revealed His will to them and only them.

They took great pride in the fact that they alone had the law of God. It made them feel superior to all the other nations.

And so they did a wonderful thing – they appointed a group of men to safeguard the Law. And here's what they told them: "We want you to build a fence around the Law. Protect it."

The safeguarding the Law was a wonderful idea. It's exactly what we should be doing.

1 Tim 6:20

**Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to your care**

2 Tim 1:13-14

**What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus. 14 Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you-guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit**

Their determination to guard the Law was wonderful – but something went terribly wrong.

You see, all true religion tends to degenerate into externalism.

True religion is religion of the heart. It is comprised completely of internal things – faith, love, repentance, etc. and external actions are there, and they are important, but they are only the results of those internal realities.

If the internal part is gone, the external actions become nothing but hypocrisy.

The problem is, addressing the heart is hard to do. It's so much easier to do external things.

It's so much easier for me to buy Tracy a bouquet of flowers than it is to address the selfishness and pride in my own heart.

It's so much easier to put money in the offering plate, to volunteer for a ministry, to read your Bible and show up at church, and to do all those religious actions...

- then it is to love God with all my heart, soul, mind and strength.

And so just like a beautiful garden, left to itself, will tend to degenerate into a field of weeds, so true religion constantly tends toward externalism and ritualism.

And that's exactly what happened with the rabbis. They started thinking of the Law is just a list of rules governing our actions.

So man's responsibility, instead of loving God, was reduced to just following all the religious rules.

God gave us the Law not as an end in itself but as a means to an end. The goal is to love God. And the purpose of the Law is to show us what it means to love God, and to give us away to express our love (through obedience).

This is not to say that there is something wrong with developing rules or guidelines in your efforts toward self-discipline.

If I struggle with temptation every time I drive by Dairy Queen, it's not legalistic for me to make a rule for myself that I'm not going to drive by there anymore.

That's not legalism; that's just wisdom. That's Proverbs 5-7 **Don't go near the door of her house.**

Nor is it legalism for me to develop a strict regimen and follow it tenaciously.

That's self-discipline.

Legalism is when I either force those rules upon you so that you are spiritually substandard if you don't follow my rules, or I elevate those rules so that they are the end instead of the means.

The rule becomes more important than God's Word.

And that's exactly what happened with the rabbis. They tended to look to the laws themselves as the final goal.

When people do that they usually get frustrated with the Bible because the rules aren't specific or detailed enough to address every situation in life.

They aren't intended to be. Scripture is a book of principles, and the specifics function only as examples of the principles.

But people don't want to have to apply a principle – especially principles that govern the heart. They want an explicit rule for every situation.

And so the Scribes and rabbis began filling in the gaps between the commands in the Bible. They came up with a rule for every detail of life.

And that code of rules was handed down from generation to generation, and it was known as “the tradition of the elders” and was absolutely binding.

As always happens when you mix human tradition with Scripture, the line between God's Word and human wisdom is completely lost.

This is exactly what's wrong with the Roman Catholic Church. They elevate Church tradition to the same level as Scripture.

In fact, they raise it above Scripture, because whenever there is a conflict between church tradition and Scripture, Church tradition prevails

Ryle: “It is just as easy to destroy the authority of God's Word by addition as by subtraction, by burying it under human inventions as by denying its truth.”

In other words, the legalists are just as bad as the liberals.

You do just as much harm by saying, “Salvation is through Christ plus rituals,” as you do by denying Christ altogether.

So the Scribes made a rule for every circumstance in life.

And since there is no end to the circumstances of life, there was no end to the development of more and more rules.

So it just kept building until about A.D. 200, when Rabbi Jehudah (or Judah) ha-Nasi' decided to take that whole tradition of the elders and commit it all to writing. The result was the Mishnah.

The Mishnah was like a commentary on the Bible. But since it was elevated to the same level as Scripture, they started writing commentaries on the Mishnah. (You know human wisdom is lifted to too high a level when people start writing commentaries on it).

And that collection of commentaries on the Mishnah is called the Gemara.

The Jews compiled all of the Mishnah and the Gemara together in one giant work called the Talmud – which is a massive jumble of human wisdom mixed in with the Law of God (at least 20 volumes in Hebrew).

And so their goal of protecting and preserving the Law resulted in the exact opposite – God's Word became hopelessly obscured and overrun and drown in a sea of human wisdom.

People always want to help God's Word out. And whenever we do that, we ruin it.

As John MacArthur says – you don't have to defend a lion – just let it out of its cage.

But the rabbis wanted to help the Bible out by adding some helpful things. They were trying to make it relevant.

If you want to know where that leads, just listen to these quotes from the Talmud: “The words of the scribes are more lovely than the words of the Law.”

“it is a greater crime to transgress the words of the scroll of Rabbi Hillel than the words of Scripture.”

“My son, attend to the words of the scribes more than the words of the Law.”

That's always what happens when you add human tradition to God's Law. The human traditions end up seeming like a higher, more holy standard than God's Law.

It's good to build a fence around the Law if by that you mean preserving it by seeing to it that nothing is added or taken away, and that it's accurately transmitted, that's good.

But that's not what they were doing. They built a fence around the law by drawing a line outside the outer boundaries of God's Law.

“If God said this is forbidden, we will make a rule that is even more strict. That way, if people transgress our rule, they will still be a safe distance from transgressing the Law.”

If God says, “You can come up to this line, and we draw a line 20 ft. short of that line and forbid people to cross that, they will be safe.”

People do that today.

1 Tim.3 says an elder must be a one-woman man (faithful to his wife).

People see that and say, “We will lift that standard even higher” and forbid anyone from being in leadership if they were ever divorced – even if right now the guy is a one woman man.

But that never works. It focuses your attention on externals, and away from the heart, and you end up with men in leadership who are totally unqualified spiritually, but who have the right marital status and resume.

The reason that approach doesn't work is that the Law is not a list of behavior regulations.

As we already noted, God's Law is a list of principles (the behavioral parts are just illustrations), and there are no principles that are higher than the ones in God's Law.

You can be more strict than God, but you can't be more holy than God.

You can make more restrictions, but that is never a move higher – always lower.

God's Law is not a small rectangle around which we can build a fence – it is the whole page – so any fence on the page will be a violation of it.

Let me show you God's intention with the cleansing and purity laws, and then you will see how their fence was a much lower standard.

## True Religion

One thing that's clear even to the legalists is that God wants His people to be pure and undefiled.

Isa.52:11

**Depart, depart, go out from there! Touch no unclean thing! Come out from it and be pure, you who carry the vessels of the LORD.**

God wanted His people to be pure. And it was so important to Him that He set up a system that would remind His people throughout the day every day of His desire for purity.

It was the system of laws about unclean foods.

God picked some foods that He designated ceremonially clean, and others that He designated unclean.

It wasn't an issue of health or anything else related to the actual, physical food. It was a picture – an illustration of spiritual principles.

God wanted His people to maintain spiritual purity and to avoid spiritual contamination, and to remind them of that every single day, He set up the system of clean and unclean foods.

God taught humanity the same way you teach your children – He started with a picture book.

That's what the Old Testament is, a picture book.

You don't give your one-year-old Encyclopaedia Britannica and say, "Here, get yourself ready for kindergarten."

You start with a picture book, and you point to the pictures, and explain what they are.

Then when they learn words they understand the words by associating them with what they saw.

That's how God introduced spiritual truths to humanity.

He started with pictures. "When you touch something that's messy, or dirty, or bloody, you can't come like that into my presence."

It's not that God has anything against dirt. It was a picture to illustrate the fact that we can't worship Him with a dirty heart.

And the reason for ceremonial cleansings wasn't that the ceremony itself actually did anything – its that God wanted people to have a picture that illustrated to them that you can't clean yourself – only God can make you acceptable.

So he gave those physical pictures to illustrate spiritual realities.

The legalist is like a high school student who still hasn't learned any words – he just spends all his time examining the ink and the paper in the picture books.

If you sit around and try to figure out the health advantages of the kosher laws, you are examining the ink and missing the purpose of the picture.

(Of course there are going to be health benefits – God isn't going to make all His people sick.)

But that's not the point. The point is that the ritual illustrated the importance of purity before God.

The rabbis were very aware that maintaining purity was of crucial importance.

But if you are going to remain pure, you have to know what it is that defiles you, and what it is that cleanses you. And that's where the rabbis got off track.

They thought it was physical things, like unclean foods that contaminate you. And they thought it was the physical cleansing ritual that cleansed you.

So they just went crazy in the tradition of the elders in prescribing cleansing rituals

The whole Mishnah is divided into six books (Sedarim). One entire book - by far the largest and most elaborate, is the treating of 'purifications.' (Seder Tohoroth)

That book consists of 12 tractates (Massikhtoth), which are each divided into chapters and sections.<sup>1</sup>

One entire tractate is devoted to handwashing.

The first tractate is all about the purification of vessels (Kelim) – it goes on and on for 30 chapters.

Those traditions were part of the tradition of the elders way back at the time of Jesus. That's what Mark is talking about in v.4.

**When they come from the marketplace they do not eat unless they wash. And they observe many other traditions, such as the washing of cups, pitchers and kettles.)**

If you're wondering why it would take 30 chapters to regulate cups, pitchers and kettles, let me give you an example:

A flat plate without a rim could not become unclean at all; but a plate with a rim could. If vessels made with leather, bone or glass were flat they could not contract uncleanness at all; if they were hollow they could become unclean outside and inside.

If they were unclean they must be broken; and the break must be a hole at least big enough for a medium-sized pomegranate to pass through.

Wood used in metal utensils could become unclean; but metal used in wood utensils could not. Thus a wooden key with metal teeth could become unclean; but a metal key with wooden teeth could not.<sup>2</sup>

The 11<sup>th</sup> tractate is all about cleansing hands ('Yadayim'), (4 chapters).

They believed that it was essential to do the handwashing ritual before eating any food, because if you had happened to touch something that a gentile had touched, you needed to be decontaminated.

They also believed there was a demon by the name of Shibtah who dwelt on your hands while you slept. And if you ate without doing the ritual cleansing, that demon would get on the food and go into your body.

And here's the procedure:

Before you could even begin you had to wash any dirt off your hands, so they are clean to start with.

The water for washing had to be kept in special large stone jars, so that it itself was ceremonially clean (kind of like the Catholics' holy water).

They put it in those jars so they could be sure that it had been used for no other purpose, and that nothing had fallen into it or had been mixed with it.

The minimum amount of water to be used was a quarter of a log, which is defined as enough to fill one and a half egg-shells. The water was first poured on both hands, held with the fingers pointed upwards, and must run up the arm as far as the wrist. It must drop off from the wrist, for the water was now itself unclean, having touched the unclean hands, and, if it ran down the fingers again, it would again render them unclean.

The process was repeated with the hands held in the opposite direction, with the fingers pointing down; and then finally each hand was cleansed by being rubbed with the fist of the other.

A strict Jew would do all this, not only before a meal, but also between each of the courses.

To give you an idea of how important this was to them, one Rabbi said, "Whosoever has his abode in the land of Israel and

<sup>1</sup> 126 chapters (Peraqim), and 1001 separate sections (Mishnayoth)

<sup>2</sup> Berkeley Mk.7:1-4

eats his common food with rinsed hands may rest assured that he shall obtain *eternal life*.”

Another rabbi taught that ‘it would be better to walk four miles out of the way to get water than to eat with unwashed hands.’”<sup>3</sup>

They said that eating bread with unclean hands was no different than eating excrement.<sup>4</sup>

And the story is told of the very famous Rabbi who was imprisoned and given a reduction in his water ration. Instead of drinking it, he used it to wash his hands before eating, claiming he would rather die than transgress the tradition of the elders.”

In the morning prayer each day the devout Jew would pray “Blessed be Thou O Lord, King of the Universe, who sanctified us by thy laws and commanded us to wash the hands.”<sup>5</sup>

Members of the Sanhedrin were said to be so skilled with these rules that they could actually clean a creeping thing, which the Bible declares unclean. (That’s like saying they could make a ham sandwich kosher)

So the purpose of the Law was forgotten, and all of their religion was nothing more than the keeping of rituals and following rules.

#### The Accusation

So you can see why they would be so upset at Jesus, who flagrantly ignored the tradition of the elders.

He kept God’s Law, but He completely ignored their traditions.

And if there’s one thing a legalist can’t stand is people who don’t go along with his rules.

Some of the most brutal persecution believers have ever faced in Church history has been at the hands of legalists.

There were rabbis who taught that God became unclean sometimes and had to be cleansed.

One rabbi taught that God studied the law all day and the Mishnah every night.

They had God right there in the system with them. And so to say something against that system is to strike a blow at God Himself in their eyes.

And if all there is to your religion is the ceremonies and traditions, and Jesus and His disciples ignore those, you can see why they would get upset.

**5 So the Pharisees and teachers of the law asked Jesus, "Why don't your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders instead of eating their food with `unclean' hands?"**

This is a pretty big deal. Powerful men come all the way up from Jerusalem and accuse Jesus of disregarding God and true religion.

Jesus had already made a mockery of this ritual way back at His first miracle, when He turned the ceremonial handwashing water into beverages for a party.

We have plenty of historical records of people being excommunicated for a failure to observe handwashing.

How is Jesus going to defend Himself and appease these men?

## The Rebuke

Mark doesn’t record it, but Matthew tells us the first part of His answer:

**Jesus replied, "And why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition? (Mt.15:3)**

He is immediately on the offensive.

**6 He replied, "Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you...**

Isaiah was talking about the people of his day, but here Jesus says Isaiah’s words were tailor made for them.

The Jews of Jesus’ day thought of themselves as preserving ancient traditions; but Jesus said that what they were actually preserving was the spirit of those whom Isaiah condemned long before

**"Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites**

This is the first recorded instance of Jesus’ calling the Pharisees and teachers of the law hypocrites

Have you ever called someone a hypocrite to his face? If you don’t like socially awkward moments, you wouldn’t have liked this.

They just walk up and ask a question, and Jesus blasts them – “Boy did Isaiah hit the nail on the head when he condemned you hypocrites!”

**as it is written: " `These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. 7 They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.'**

Preferring human wisdom over God’s Law

Isn’t it astonishing that we would do that? That anyone would prefer the rules of men to the wisdom of God?

God’s Words are so precious. They are life-giving, nourishing, edifying, sustaining...

They bring us to God, and transform us.

They are the most profound and wonderful thoughts possible for a human being.

They are lovely and perfect and beautiful and true.

Isn’t it just amazing that anyone would prefer empty, human wisdom to that?

James Ryle reminds us that these *Jews*, who had sunk to this level – they were the most highly favored nation in the world.

These are God’s chosen.

“To (Israel) was given the Law on Mount Sinai, the service of God, the priesthood, the covenants and promises. Moses, Samuel, David and the prophets lived and died among its people. No nation on earth ever had so many spiritual privileges. No nation ever misused its privileges so fearfully, and so thoroughly deserted its own mercies. Never did fine gold becomes so dim! From the religion of the books of Deuteronomy and Psalms, to the religion of washing hands cups and pitchers, how great was the fall!”<sup>6</sup>

One of the most inexplicable mysteries of the universe is our attraction to our own folly over what God offers.

How could anyone who has seen the religion of Deuteronomy and Psalms prefer the religion of washing hands, cups and pitchers?

<sup>3</sup> The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, Matthew 8-15, 453

<sup>4</sup> Barclay Mk.7:1-4

<sup>5</sup> William L. Lnae, Mark (NICNT) p.245

<sup>6</sup> Ryle Mark 7:1-13 p.98

And lest we wear out our hands pointing too much at the Jews or the Catholics or other ritual based religions, we need to consider that the same thing goes on in Evangelicalism.

For the Catholics it's formal and institutional, and for us it isn't. It doesn't show up in our doctrinal statements, but it shows up in our practice.

Whenever someone writes a book dominated by human wisdom, we make it a best seller.

Books like Wild at Heart, and Prayer of Jabez quote Bible verses, but all the main points are just the author's own ideas.

Those kinds of books sell by the millions, while expository studies can't even get published, because the publishers know they won't sell.

I had the depressing experience this week of reading the material on Ed Smith's website (He is the originator of what he calls Theophostic Counseling).

His writing is a perfect example of what I'm talking about.

It's saturated with Scripture, but none of the points he makes are drawn from Scripture. They come instead from psychology.

He quoted the passage where Peter claimed he would never deny Christ, and his conclusion was that Peter's repressed fear was being activated, and that's what motivated him to say that.

There isn't a word anywhere in that text about fear. That idea originated in the head of Ed Smith, and he forced it into the text.

That's called isogenesis (rather than exegesis).

Books that do that sell in Evangelical bookstores by the truckload.

So the Jews accepted the tradition of the elders, the Catholics accept the traditions of the Magisterium, and Evangelicals are starting to accept the traditions of whoever the most creative, funny, clever, "relevant" writer or speaker is.

I dare say our fall is even greater than that of the ancient Jews.

For them it was the fall from the religion of Deuteronomy and Psalms to the religion of washing hands, cups and pitchers...

But for us it's the fall from the religion of Ephesians and Matthew and Romans to the religion of warmed over, half baked regurgitations of Freud.

What is it about empty, human wisdom that is more attractive to us than God's Word?

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**8 You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men."**

Jesus doesn't defend Himself. He doesn't offer an explanation. He doesn't respond to or even acknowledge their question in any way.

In Matthew's account, when Jesus says, "Why do you also break the command of God for the sake of your tradition?" – that little word **also** (or **and**) is significant.

He's admitting the charge is true.

"Yes, we ignore the tradition of the elders – so what?"

He completely brushes it aside, and, as usual, the prosecutors become the defendants and the accusers stand accused.

If they thought they were going to intimidate Jesus, they were greatly mistaken.

They showed up for a battle of the wits unarmed, and Jesus immediately seizes control of the conversation and indicts them as being objects of Isaiah's condemnation.

This is no time for civility.

It's one thing for garden to naturally degenerate and for weeds to pop up – that's bad enough. But when you run into someone who is going around sowing weeds seeds, that calls for decisive action.

**9 And he said to them: "You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions!"**

Instead of saying "traditions of the elders" Jesus says **your traditions**. He lumps the Pharisees and Scribes in with the elders of the past, and distances Himself from all of them.

Any other rabbi would do anything to be thought of in the same league as the great rabbis of the past, but Jesus wants nothing to do with them, because their traditions set aside God's Law.

That is always the end product of legalism. It starts with an effort to help out God's Law by throwing in a rule or two to help you obey, but it always ends with a focus on those rules even to the point of violating God's Law.

If I want my kids to be kind to each other and to respect each other, I might make a rule that says you have to knock before opening someone's bedroom door.

If my children were legalists, they would start adding all kinds of details to that law.

You have to not a certain number of times at a certain volume on a certain spot on the door...

And by the time they got done with all those rules, my original intent would be forgotten.

So maybe one of the kids has a huge armload of stuff that she's about to drop, and wants to get in her room...

So she says, "Open my door for me!" and one of her siblings says, "first I have to follow all the knocking rules," and she ends up dropping everything because she can't get into her room in time – that would be an act of unkindness.

In following their rules, they would be violating my intent for that rule in the first place.

That's how legalism always works.

The reason we all tend to gravitate down to legalism is because following external rules is so much easier than addressing the heart.

So we follow the rules, ignore the heart, and out from the heart come the very sins the Law was intended to prohibit.

Jesus gives His own example:

**10 For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother,' and, 'Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.' 11 But you say that if a man says to his father or mother: 'Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is Corban' (that is, a gift devoted to God), 12 then you no longer let him do anything for his father or mother.**

They had our rule that said, when you say "corban" over something, it's devoted to God. And so you can't give it to your parents or anyone else.

You can keep it. In fact, you can even use it for yourself. But you can't give it to your parents.

If a son did that – if he declared all he had to be Corban in relationship to his parents, but then later regretted doing that, the law was that he couldn't take it back.

It would be illegal for him not only to help his parents financially, but to help them in any way.<sup>7</sup>

That sounds outrageous to us, because we didn't follow the trail of legalistic rules that led to that final outcome. But Jesus just skips right to the final outcome and contrasts that with the original intent of God's Law.

**13 Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that."**

It wasn't an isolated example. That was typical of their entire religious system.

This is the third time Jesus has said this.

**8 You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men."**

**9 "You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions!"**

And now here:

**13 you nullify the word of God by your tradition**

Jesus leaves no chance for anyone to miss the point.

There is no record of any reaction from the Pharisees and Scribes. Jesus' words were devastating.

I love Matthew's account. He tells us that when they got into the house, **the disciples asked, "Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this?"**

Jesus was a PR nightmare.

**13 He replied, "Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be pulled up by the roots. 14 Leave them;**

Those leaders who are in positions of spiritual leadership, but who have not been called there by God will be ripped out by the roots – so you better get away from them.

The implication is the closer you are to them, the more of God's judgment against them will land on you.

Don't stand too close to a condemned man.

**they are blind guides. If a blind man leads a blind man, both will fall into a pit."** (Mt. 15:12,13)

Get away from them lest they drag you right into hell with them.

Jesus' refusal to do this ceremony created conflict wherever He went, and it always went the same way – they would try to confront Him, and He would harshly rebuke them.

TT Lk.11

Luke 11:37-54

**When Jesus had finished speaking, a Pharisee invited him to eat with him; so he went in and reclined at the table. 38 But the Pharisee, noticing that Jesus did not first wash before the meal, was surprised.**

**Surprised** is an awfully mild way of translating this word – *thaumazo*. It means to be astonished or to marvel.

This just was not done.

But look at Jesus' approach. He doesn't say, "Oh I'm sorry, I didn't mean to offend..."

**39 Then the Lord said to him, "Now then, you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness.**

The guy didn't even say anything. He's just surprised, and Jesus launches into this.

**40 You foolish people! Did not the one who made the outside make the inside also? 41 But give what is inside [the dish] to the poor, and everything will be clean for you.**

**42 "Woe to you Pharisees, because you give God a tenth of your mint, rue and all other kinds of garden herbs, but you neglect justice and the love of God. You should have practiced the latter without leaving the former undone.**

By this time the guy is against the wall. "This is the last time I invite this guy to dinner."

But Jesus isn't done.

**43 "Woe to you Pharisees, because you love the most important seats in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces.**

**44 "Woe to you, because you are like unmarked graves, which men walk over without knowing it."**

**45 One of the experts in the law answered him, "Teacher, when you say these things, you insult us also."**

"I didn't mean to imply that you are cursed too. I didn't mean to imply it – here, let Me say it explicitly."

**46 Jesus replied, "And you experts in the law, woe to you, because you load people down with burdens they can hardly carry, and you yourselves will not lift one finger to help them.**

**47 "Woe to you, because you build tombs for the prophets, and it was your forefathers who killed them. 48 So you testify that you approve of what your forefathers did; they killed the prophets, and you build their tombs. 49 Because of this, God in his wisdom said, 'I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and others they will persecute.' 50 Therefore this generation will be held responsible for the blood of all the prophets that has been shed since the beginning of the world, 51 from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who was killed between the altar and the sanctuary. Yes, I tell you, this generation will be held responsible for it all.**

**52 "Woe to you experts in the law, because you have taken away the key to knowledge. You yourselves have not entered, and you have hindered those who were entering."**

**53 When Jesus left there, the Pharisees and the teachers of the law began to oppose him fiercely**

Jesus always took a direct blast at hypocritical religion.

The crowd at this point was probably standing off at a respectful distance as these religious heavyweights confronted Jesus, but now Jesus motions them to come closer.

## Jesus Cancels the Dietary Restrictions

**14 Again Jesus called the crowd to him and said, "Listen to me, everyone, and understand this.**

That is a very solemn charge. Jesus is using the language of a prophet.

He's signaling that He's about to give revelation from God.

What he says in v.15 is big – probably the most shocking thing to the Jewish ears that ever came out of Jesus' mouth.

**15 Nothing outside a man can make him 'unclean' by going into him.**

**Rather, it is what comes out of a man that makes him 'unclean.' "**

**17 After he had left the crowd and entered the house, his disciples asked him about this parable. 18 "Are you so dull?"**

<sup>7</sup> Lane p.251

he asked. "Don't you see that nothing that enters a man from the outside can make him `unclean'? 19 For it doesn't go into his heart but into his stomach, and then out of his body (lit. into the latrine)."

(In saying this, Jesus declared all foods "clean.")

That may very well be the most revolutionary statement in the entire New Testament.

It may not seem like a big deal to you, but to the ancient Jew to say that there was no food that would defile you was an extreme statement.

Antiochus Epiphanes tried to force the Jews to eat pork, and they died by the hundreds rather than do so.<sup>8</sup>

Fourth Maccabees (chapter 7) tells the story of a widow and her seven sons. It was demanded that they should eat pig's flesh. They refused.

The first had his tongue cut out, the ends of his limbs cut off; and he was then roasted alive in a pan; the second had his hair and the skin of his skull torn off; one by one they were tortured to death while their aged mother looked on and cheered them on.

The kosher laws were not just a cultural preference. They were the essence of religion to these people.

And with one sweeping pronouncement Jesus declared the whole thing irrelevant and that uncleanness has nothing to do with what a man takes into his body but everything to do with what comes out of his heart.

What kind of authority does it take to just decide to move all of humanity to the next dispensation?

"I've required this kosher deal for hundreds of years, but from now on that's off."

This is as radical a claim to deity as there is.

Some of the changes Jesus made were easier to take than others.

For example, the Sabbath was a big deal to the Jews, and yet, in the book of Acts, the Church doesn't seem to have any problem changing their day of corporate worship from the Sabbath to the first day of the week.

We don't read of a lot of controversy over the setting aside of Sabbath day observance.

This, on the other hand, was much harder for the Jewish Church to take.

TT Acts 10

Jesus declared all foods clean at this event, but that didn't seem to sink in.

In Acts 10, God is going to send Peter to preach the gospel to a gentile.

This is going to entail some things that were very, very difficult for a committed Jew.

Peter was going to have to go inside this gentile's house.

And beyond that – eat with him!

And God knew Peter wouldn't be able to handle it. And since God never calls us to do something beyond what we can handle, He spends the first half of chapter 10 preparing Peter.

He showed Peter a bunch of unclean animals in a dream and tells Peter, "**Kill and eat.**" (v.13)

Peter is horrified, and refuses to do it.

**14 "Surely not, Lord!" Peter replied**

That is not a mild refusal. Literally it means, "made that never come to pass under any circumstances."

**"I have never eaten anything impure or unclean."**

Isn't that amazing?

This is Acts 10. All foods have been clean now for ten years, and not once has he eaten any of the foods that used to be unclean.

**15 The voice spoke to him a second time, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean."**

God rebukes Peter for calling those animals unclean. He made them clean back in Mark 7, and so now there is no such thing as an unclean animal.

When you are looking for adequate evidence to persuade you of a particular doctrine, for most people, a voice from heaven – direct, audible communication from God would be adequate evidence.

But not for Peter. He still can't accept it.

So basically Peter is saying, "I can't listen to you God – it would be against my religion."

**16 This happened three times, and immediately the sheet was taken back to heaven.**

God had to keep repeating this before Peter could finally get it.

He finally did get it, and went on ahead to Cornelius' house.

And look what he says when he gets there:

**28 He said to them: "You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with a Gentile or visit him. But God has shown me that I should not call any *man* impure or unclean.**

It's more than just food – the whole system of physical symbols of uncleanness has been canceled.

So Peter goes in his house and even eats with him.

This was seen by the Church as a major scandal.

Peter has to spend most of Chapter 11 explaining himself to the Jews.

The issue comes up again at the Jerusalem Council in chapter 15.

The setting aside of unclean foods was a massive stumbling block for the Jews.

TT Gal.2

You would think that whole experience in chapter 10 would have changed Peter forever. But even after that he struggled.

Gal 2:11-14

**When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong. 12 Before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. 13 The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray.**

**14 When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter in front of them all, "You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?"**

There are some Christians who struggle with this even to this very day.

<sup>8</sup> 1Macc.1:62-63

Many of you are familiar with the messianic movement. That movement is an effort to reach Jewish people with the gospel by presenting it in a very Jewish context.

So a messianic congregation will meet on Saturday, they will have Jewish music styles, and shofars...

And they use Hebrew pronunciations for a lot of things.

And the point is to become all things to all men in order to reach some.

That's a good thing to do (1 Co.9:22). It's an act of love to present the gospel to someone in the way that makes it easier for him to accept it – as long as you don't alter the message or the format of the message.

If it's going to help a Russian guy to listen if I will pronounce Jesus' name in Russian, fine.

If wearing a ponytail made it easier for the Chinese to listen to the preaching of Hudson Taylor, it's an act of love for him to wear a ponytail.

So it's a good thing in principle. However, a large segment of the messianic movement has gone way too far.

That movement has become one of the most fertile grounds for false doctrine that there is.

John Hagee has gone so far as to say that Gentiles are saved by grace, and Jews are saved by the works of the law (which makes John Hagee a false teacher).

Other errors are more subtle. Some people in that movement become so enamored with Jewish traditions that they want to reinstate Sabbath laws and dietary laws.

Those are serious errors – even if you don't make them requirements for salvation.

If you call something unclean that God has made clean, you are misrepresenting God.

Ro.14:14

**no food is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for him it is unclean.**

Anytime you violate your conscience you have sinned – but it's a violation of the conscience, not the food that is the sin.

Titus 1:14-15

**pay no attention to Jewish myths or to the commands of those who reject the truth. 15 To the pure, all things are pure, but to those who are corrupted and do not believe, nothing is pure. In fact, both their minds and consciences are corrupted.**

If you are a believer, all food is clean.

1 Ti.4:1-5

**The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. 2 Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron. 3 They forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and who know the truth. 4 For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, 5 because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer.**

Be careful about telling people what they should and shouldn't eat. That's what the demon-inspired false teachers do.

What we see in Mt.15, as clear as anywhere in Scripture, is Jesus smashing to pieces the dividing wall of hostility that separates Jew and Gentiles.

Eph 2:14-15 **For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, 15 by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, Sin comes from the heart**

**20 He went on: "What comes out of a man is what makes him `unclean.' 21 For from within, out of men's hearts, come...**

Then He lists thirteen things. The beginning point of all of them is **evil thoughts**.

From evil thoughts spring the 12 other things.

In the Greek, the first six are plural, and the last six are singular.

**sexual immoralities, thefts, murders, adulteries, 22 greeds, malices,**

Those plurals indicate deeds – individual instances of those sins.

The next six are singular, indicating general moral defects:

**deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly.**

The list spans every kind of evil – from motives to actions – whatever kind of evil there is.

**23 All these evils come from inside and make a man `unclean.' "**

The people Jesus is speaking to would be mortified before they would touch a pig. Many of them would probably die first.

And Jesus is essentially telling them, "Your heart is made out of pig flesh."

You are not contaminated by another source – you are the contaminating influence."

This is an important principle to understand if you are a parent.

The world thinks children are born with righteous, good hearts. And if you can just protect them from bad influences, they will turn out fine.

But what Jesus is saying is that we have within us the beginning of every sin under heaven.

We don't need any bad influence. All we need is for that evil in our hearts to be unrestrained, and we will carry out every evil.

The point is, true religion must deal with the nature of man and not just with actions.

Any religion that can't transform your evil heart is worthless.

If you have been spending your religious energy trying to become acceptable to God by cleaning yourself up, and avoiding contaminating influences, you need to face the brutal reality of v.23 – nothing short of the re-creation of your entire being by God will make you clean.

**24 Jesus left that place and went to the vicinity of Tyre... (uncleanville)**



Benediction:

Mt.11:28-30 **"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."**