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When Good Things Become Wrong Things; Matt 15:1-9

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Introduction - As believers in the authority of Scripture and followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, we don't wrestle much with whether or not something is right or wrong. We have a sense of sin. We know if our actions or thoughts or words are displeasing to God. The Spirit within convicts us. The Word instructs us. The church surrounds us. Now we still choose to sin at times, but not because we're confused as to if sin is actually sin; we know what is right and what is wrong.

Where we struggle is keeping a balanced, biblical perspective on good things. If something is good we tend to give it as much room as possible or wanted. After all, it's good; it's not sin. If it's a good thing, it can't be a bad thing. The problem, however, is when the good things in our lives grow out of proportion. A good thing can become a wrong thing if it begins to take the place of greater things. Blessings can become curses if we begin to treasure the gift above the Giver.

An example would be family. Family is a good thing, a blessing. The Bible says children are a heritage from the Lord. But what if family priority begins to encroach upon our spiritual priorities? What if we begin to compromise our biblical convictions because a family member has become entangled in sin? What if family commitments become stronger than our spiritual family commitment? It's a good thing to spend time together as a family, but is it a good thing to spend time together as a family to the neglect of your spiritual family? One is good; the other is greater. One is temporary; the other is eternal. One is meant to be nurtured by the other. One is meant to be primary and the seedbed for the other.

Good things can become wrong things. This is really the heart of the issue in our text today. The Pharisees and scribes, in their relentless quest to trap Jesus and discredit Him, constantly pose trick questions to Jesus. This particular question of traditions comes down to something good that Jesus seems to be ignoring. Jesus will show the Pharisees their good thing has become a wrong thing because it has taken a priority it was never meant to fill.

## I. The Question of Traditions (vv1-2)

- a. Would you believe that our text today is talking about washing your hands? What timing, right? Have we not heard much about washing our hands in this season of COVID 19?
  - b. That's not a bad thing. Washing your hands is a good thing. It's a healthy thing. It's a wise thing. It's a courteous thing. The elders here have a good tradition of washing your hands before you eat.
  - c. I grew up being taught that same tradition. I have raised my children with that same teaching. It's time to eat. Have you washed your hands?
  - d. Traditions, in and of themselves, are usually good things. We have holiday traditions and family traditions. Things or events that we keep every year that remind us of good things and build memories and help us keep things in perspective. Get together. Dinners. Reunions. Vacations. Special gifts. And on and on.
  - e. A tradition is not a bad thing unless your tradition gets out of place or out of perspective with greater things. That is essentially Jesus' answer to Pharisees' question. He's going to show them that they hold their traditions in much higher regard than they hold the commandments of God, and there is something fundamentally wrong with that! What God says is greater than what we say. God's commandments are to be held and kept in higher priority than our traditions.
  - f. A good thing is remains good if kept in its proper place. It's not a sin to not wash your hands before you eat. It's not wise. It's not healthy. But it's not a sin. It is a sin if you don't honor your father and mother because God had commanded us to honor our father and mother.
- II. How to Take a Good Thing and Make It Wrong (vv3-6)
- a. Here are three easy steps to take in order to make a good thing a wrong thing by having it replace a greater thing.
    - i. Come up with a good excuse. Rationalize and justify your actions. Make yourself feel good and look good by having a list of reasons why your good thing is better than the greater thing.
      - 1. We haven't done this in a long time. I want to do this for our children. Our sin needs this experience. This is a

once in a lifetime opportunity. This is something we need.

2. The Pharisees had come up with a pretty good excuse. I'm giving this provision or this money that could have taken care of my parents, I'm giving this to God. I'm offering it to God.
  - ii. Spiritualize your reason. Bring God into your excuse. Quote a Bible verse.
    1. Oh we do this all the time. We pluck a Bible verse, kicking and screaming out of its context, and we use it to justify behavior that other portions of Scripture clearly denounce. The Bible says, "Judge not, lest you be judged." The Bible says, "God is love."
  - iii. Do what you want to do rather than what God would have you do, even if it violates the clear teaching of Scripture. "God told me to..." "God wants me to be happy."
  - iv. Justify your behavior, spiritualize your behavior, and then act on it as if the rest of Scripture does not apply to you!
- b. That's the 3 easy steps to take in order to make a good thing a wrong thing by having it replace a greater thing.
- c. For the Pharisees, they took this action in order to bolster their pride and religious reputation. Look at me – I love God so much that I will give Him everything, even if it means neglecting my loved ones.
  - i. Now when Jesus says in Luke 14:26 If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple, when Jesus said those words, he was not talking about what the Pharisees were doing with their tradition of neglecting their parents.
  - ii. He was making the point that you've got to love the greater thing more than the lesser good things. Namely, you have to love Christ more! Hating father and mother for the sake of treasuring Christ above everything else does not include dishonoring your parents. In fact, it would increase honoring your parents. If you love Jesus more than your parents, you will honor your parents!
  - iii. For the Pharisees it was a matter of pride.

- d. For us it's usually a matter of believing that what we choose to do rather than obey God will bring us satisfaction, joy, and happiness. This is going to make me more happy than following Jesus, therefore, I have all these reasons and Bible verses why that is the case.
- e. Only to find time and time again, nothing satisfies, whether it be good or whether it be sin, nothing satisfies but Christ! He is the Fountain of Life!

### III. Misplaced Priorities from Misguided Hearts (vv7-9)

- a. It is possible to say all the right things and be totally in the wrong before God – v8. It is possible to do the right things and be totally in the wrong before God – v9.
- b. It all comes down to the heart. Their heart is far from me. They take their own wants and elevate them above the Word of God. A misguided heart is sure to misplace priorities and turn good things into wrong things by replacing greater things.
- c. John the Baptist said, "He must increase and I must decrease." The misguided heart says, "I must increase and He must decrease." The misguided heart says, "I do no wrong. Everything I do is right."
- d. So, listen carefully, the answer to the Pharisees issue of making good things wrong things is not to determine to stop doing that. The answer is not for them to say, "Ok, you're right Jesus. We shouldn't do that. So from now on we will make sure we take care of our parents." That's not the solution to their problem. Correcting one action is not the solution. That's just one example of their lifestyle of making good things wrong.
- e. The answer is in the heart. The answer is to repent. The answer is to believe in Christ and in God and in His Word. To trust in Him that He is greater and satisfying and glorious. The answer is to deny self, pick up our cross, and follow Christ!
- f. Then our lives change. Then our priorities line up correctly with Scripture. Then we keep good things as good things and hold the greater things in their rightful place.
- g. That's exactly what the Pharisees absolutely refused to do.
- h. What will we do? Will we surrender our lives to Christ and find true life in Him or will we keep holding tight to our wants and just keep making excuses?