

As long as Jesus was here on earth He was accessible, receptive and responsive to all who came to Him, even when dead tired. Many came and were, without hesitation, healed. Those hearing and heeding His words were blessed with more than only temporal healing of their bodies or release from unclean spirits. They all needed spiritual healing as well. As spiritual healing grew, the enemy of our souls could not let it continue without opposition. His unwitting servants came forward to criticize the disciples conduct in neglecting to wash their hands before eating. This was religious opposition from those entrusted with God's word given centuries before. It was calculated to be the most effective way to discredit the Lord's teaching. If He could be shown to be careless about keeping the Law why would anyone have any inclination to heed Him. They were apparently honestly upset because the traditional ceremonial washing of hands they held dear, as being honoring to God, was being ignored by these uneducated country bumpkins and fishermen from Galilee. But they probably would not have made an issue of it had these not been **Jesus' disciples**. But the Lord exposes them and their erroneous teaching for what it was. They openly cite the tradition of the elders as their authority to challenge the conduct of Jesus' disciples and thereby Him. As He had answered Satan in the wilderness He answers them with scripture (Isaiah 29:13). So ought we to answer those around us who take up with religious traditions of men. And especially those who elevate a mere tradition above His word. And these are many. Jesus' words ring all too true today. For Christendom is overrun with similarly unfounded teaching and practices based solely upon traditions that have grown up around the Word of God, almost completely obscuring it and the One who gave it.

Mark elaborates and describes examples of required washing of various vessels prior to use. None of this is found in the Old Testament scriptures. It had been added, perhaps initially simply as interpretation of the scriptures. It later took a life of its own, eventually superceding the very scriptures they were intended to interpret. Of course we need to be wary of giving traditions or valued writings of various gifted commentators more weight than the scriptures. Spiritual men **point us to the scriptures**.

One striking historical example is Martin Luther. He realized the traditions of the Roman Church, to which he belonged, had lost the truth of salvation by grace. It was totally absorbed in requiring works and "contributions" from parishioners to obtain and assure salvation. When he attempted to reform the church he was rejected by the establishment and eventually ejected. Sadly to this day customs and traditions trump scripture in the Roman Catholic teaching. Worse, the very Protestant bodies that resulted from that attempted reformation have slipped into a similar pattern of creeds and traditions superceding

scripture, teaching salvation by works. Almost all systematically quench the Holy Spirit by clinging to a hierarchy and prearranged worship, prayer, and prophesying in the church. He is there ready to lead if only allowed. Traditions are not evil in themselves. Used rightly they promote order in the house of God. But they cannot be allowed to rule in the face of clear scripture. Hold Fast! But distinguish tradition from scripture.

The Lord used the occasion to teach the disciples the very basic truth of the incurable wickedness of man's heart. Outward washing of hands availed naught in cleansing the heart. He is not saying that we needn't routinely wash our hands after using the restroom or before eating. That is necessary to prevent the spread of disease. The Pharisees were not washing for hygienic reasons. They were practicing a ritualistic act of symbolic cleansing, which only incidentally had anything to do with good hygiene.

The Pharisees not only imposed empty ritual upon themselves and others but had allowed traditions to be twisted as they evolved over the years. They had departed so far from the Jehovah they claimed to honor they were using a tradition to excuse them from obeying one of the very basic commands of the Law, "thou shalt honor thy father and thy mother," Exodus 20:12. This command is so basic it should not need to have been written at all. Respect and care of parents and ancestors is observed by many pagan cultures. It is, at the root, a recognition of our Creator. If we cannot honor our human source of life, upbringing and well-being how can we honor our Creator God Himself? Yet members of this most religiously scrupulous sect had adopted a tradition allowing them to deny their parents needed support and care. They instead ostensibly could devote to God that which might have been used for that purpose. Huh? Look what Paul says:

*1Timothy 5:8 But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel. {house: or, kindred}*

What greater salute is there to God our Father and Creator than to sacrificially provide needed care for our own family and aging parents?

As stated above the Lord is not advocating unclean habits and poor hygiene. He emphatically points out that the filthy things that proceed from our hearts are far more exceeding horrid and loathsome than dirty hands or even our bowel movements (which He said normally simply cleanse one's body of impurities that have entered it).

On other occasions the Lord openly referred to a command of Moses' Law and then stated "but I say unto you . . ." He has authority from God, and as God, to say that. In contrast here He has to point out the Law to them and note "but ye say . . ." They had no such authority from God. Neither do we!

By Ron Canner. January 31, 2007.