

**“You might be a legalist...”**

**Matt 14:34-15:20**

**Scripture Ref: Luke 12:1; Rom 10:9-11; Matt 22:37-38; Ex 35:21-23; 2 Cor 9:7; Ex 36:2; Eph 5:18-21; 1 Sam 13:13-14; Jer 17:9-10; Ps 26:2; Ps 51:10; Ps 37:30-31; Ps 40:8; Ps 119:11**

34 When they had crossed over, they came to the land of Gennesaret. 35 And when the men of that place recognized Him, they sent out into all that surrounding region, brought to Him all who were sick, 36 and begged Him that they might only touch the hem of His garment. And as many as touched it were made perfectly well.

15:1 Then the scribes and Pharisees who were from Jerusalem came to Jesus,

- 1. With all of the healing and feeding going on, and the multitudes of people that were flocking to Jesus, sooner or later the religious leaders in Jerusalem would hear about Him.**
  - a. So they send a delegation of scribes and Pharisees to find Him and check things out.**
  - b. Great, right? Maybe they could take out the scriptures, look up the prophecies concerning the Messiah, look at His life and works, look at the miracles, and see for themselves – “Is this the promised Messiah?”**
  - c. But interestingly that is NOT what they intend to do, instead they ask Him a question... a strange question:**

...saying, 2 "Why do Your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread."

- 2. That’s really nice, the leaders are worried about the hygiene of the disciples, and they want to make sure they wash their hands before they eat!**
  - a. Or not - Actually there is a bit of background to this question...**
- 3. See Moses gave the law to Israel on Mt Sinai, and for generations that was sufficient.**
  - a. But as with all things – man cannot leave well enough alone, and the Rabbi’s began to feel that the law itself wasn’t enough, so they started adding things to it, perhaps to “help the law along”**
  - b. At some point the doctrine developed into what the Rabbi’s called the “oral law”, and they claimed that Moses had passed down this additional law to Aaron, and it was then passed down orally from generation to generation**
  - c. These oral laws, or traditions, were eventually written down and became the Mishnah.**

- d. And the Mishnah eventually became more important and authoritative than the original law of Moses.
  - i. *(did you get that? More authoritative than the scriptures themselves – this is not a good sign for the spiritual health of the Jewish nation!*
  - ii. *Sort of like what is happening in our judicial branch, where judges feel that our constitution needs a little help!*
- 4. The tradition they were talking about was not just washing your hands before you eat... no that is just good hygiene
  - a. See the Rabbi's taught that at night, the demon Shibna would often come and sit on a man's hands as he slept.
  - b. And of course if anyone ate with hands that were sat on by a demon, that demon could enter into that man through the food and take control of him *(I mean, everyone knows that, right?!)*
  - c. Therefore, the Rabbi's determined that before a man could eat, he had to wash his hands in the following manner:
    - i. Take 1 ½ eggshells of water and pour it over your hands as they were pressed together (this apparently took two people – a wash buddy!) – and let the water drip only to the wrists, and no further.
    - ii. Then you would flip your hands and point the down while another 1 ½ eggshells of water was poured over them.
    - iii. Finally, you rub your right fist with your left palm, then rub your left fist with your right palm
    - iv. Snap – clean hands!
  - d. So the Pharisees came up, “Guys, we are not seeing the hand washing, you are all going to get demon possessed – if you're not already!”
- 5. But again we want to look at this from a Kingdom perspective – not just about personal hygiene.
  - a. What is in play here? What is at stake?
  - b. What is in play is the inevitable clash between Christ and the Pharisees – the doctrine of legalism vs the doctrine of grace
  - c. What is at stake is the very foundation of Christianity, the reason Jesus came
    - i. To bring salvation to mankind
    - ii. To release people from the bondage of sin – and the bondage of works-based religion – legalism!
    - iii. Jesus also called it “the leaven of the Pharisees”
- 6. What is legalism? How can you know if you are a legalist? Well, you might be a legalist if...

- You place reliance on your own performance to a set of rules or standards in order to merit favor before God – you might be a legalist.
  - If you try to relate to God on the basis of works rather than on the basis of faith – you might be a legalist.
  - If you confuse your own personal convictions or opinions with Biblical mandates, and give equal authority to both categories – you might be a legalist.
  - If you attempt place extra-Biblical moral standards on other Christians in order to be accepted as “Christian” in your eyes – you might be a legalist.
7. Now don't get me wrong – I am not saying that we disregard the law, what I am saying is that we should be careful not to add to the law, and then consider that position to be equal with the law.
- a. Note Jesus' response to the Pharisees:

3 He answered and said to them, "Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition? 4 For God commanded, saying, 'Honor your father and your mother'; and, 'He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.' 5 But you say, 'Whoever says to his father or mother, "Whatever profit you might have received from me is a gift to God" -- 6 then he need not honor his father or mother.' Thus you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition.

8. One of the problems with legalism is you cannot live up to it – no one can, not even the Pharisees.
- a. So the most effective way to disable a legalist is to simply look at their lives, because you will find sin!
  - b. Jesus is challenging them here regarding a tradition that the Jews had developed (again, part of the Mishnah) about material possessions.
  - c. Back then there were no Swiss banks or offshore accounts – it was hard to hide wealth
  - d. So if you had some money, or a valuable possession, and you didn't want to squander it on something like, say taking care of your elderly parents, you could 'declare' it to be 'dedicated to the Lord'.
  - e. Now of course you didn't have to do anything so radical as actually *give* it to the temple treasury, you could keep it and enjoy it, but it 'belonged to God' so you couldn't use it for something like – taking care of your elderly parents.
  - f. *(I like the idea personally - I don't believe Social Security will be taking care of us – so I have a plan - I am thinking that after all the money and time and sacrifice we have made for our kids –*

*they owe me! I want payback for all those diapers I changed, all those toys, all that food. I figure each of my kids owes me... \$340, 522.21 – give or take! Multiplied times four kids – I think that will suffice!)*

9. Now Jesus is point this particular situation out for a reason, I believe. Probably one, or several, of these men were not honoring their parents through this little loophole.
- a. And Jesus was calling them out on it!
  - b. There are two problems with legalism – #1 it makes you – a hypocrite!

7 Hypocrites!

- c. How? Because as a legalist, the very nature of your doctrine requires you to behave in a righteous manner – but the proble is **YOU CANT!**
- d. So – you end up pretending that you are, so everyone else thinks that you are, so that your doctrine of legalism will have merit.

*Luke 12:1 "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.*

- 10.#2 – it causes you to get off track and completely miss the foundation of our faith – **which is that our faith is about relationship with God!**
- a. Listen to Jesus' reference:

Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying:

*8 "These people draw near to Me with their mouth, And honor Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me. 9 And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men."*

11. "Here is the problem," Jesus tells them, "you guys think you are Godly because you do certain things, don't do other things, sing to me, pray to me, but your heart is far from me."
- a. God is not as interested in whats happening on the *outside*, as much as what is happening on the *inside*.
  - b. Listen to how He explains it:

10 When He had called the multitude to Himself, He said to them, "Hear and understand: 11 Not what goes into the mouth defiles a man; but what comes out of the mouth, this defiles a man." 12 Then His disciples came and said to Him, "Do You know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this saying?" 13 But He answered and said, "Every plant which My heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted. 14 Let them alone. They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch."

15 Then Peter answered and said to Him, "Explain this parable to us." 16 So Jesus said, "Are you also still without understanding? 17 Do you not yet understand that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and is eliminated?"

**12. Jesus is explaining that the Pharisees had it backwards – don't focus on what goes into your mouth, take a look at what is coming out of your mouth!**

18 But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man. 19 For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. 20 These are the things which defile a man, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man."

**13. What comes out of your mouth is an indicator of where your heart is**

- a. **The heart is the center of our personhood – the place where our mind, will, and spirit meet.**
- b. **The heart is where we set our course – where we make our decisions – it is where our sin is born**
- c. **It is the one thing that God wants to get hold of in order to change your life!**

**14. Think about it:**

- a. **It is with the heart that we believe:**

**Rom 10:9-11**

*9 that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.*

- b. **It is with the heart that we obey:**

**Matt 22:37-38**

*"You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind." 38 This is the first and great commandment.*

- c. **With the heart we give:**

**Ex 35:21-23**

*21 Then everyone came whose heart was stirred, and everyone whose spirit was willing, and they brought the LORD's offering for the work of the tabernacle of meeting, for all its service, and for the holy garments. 22 They came, both men and women, as many as had a willing heart, and*

*brought earrings and nose rings, rings and necklaces, all jewelry of gold, that is, every man who made an offering of gold to the LORD.*

**2 Cor 9:7** *So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.*

**d. It is with the heart that we serve:**

**Ex 36:2** *Then Moses called Bezalel and Aholiab, and every gifted artisan in whose heart the LORD had put wisdom, everyone whose heart was stirred, to come and do the work.*

**e. It is with the heart that we worship:**

**Eph 5:18-21**

*18 And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, 19 speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, 20 giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, 21 submitting to one another in the fear of God.*

**15. God is not looking for people would will “do stuff for Him,” He seeks those who have a heart for Him**

**1 Sam 13:13-14**

*13 And Samuel said to Saul, "You have done foolishly. You have not kept the commandment of the LORD your God, which He commanded you. For now the LORD would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. 14 But now your kingdom shall not continue. The LORD has sought for Himself a man after His own heart, and the LORD has commanded him to be commander over His people, because you have not kept what the LORD commanded you."*

**16. The problem is – our heart is wicked –**

**Jer 17:9-10**

*9 "The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it? 10 I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, Even to give every man according to his ways, According to the fruit of his doings.*

**a. How can we do anything about our heart?**

**Ps 26:2** *Examine me, O LORD, and prove me; Try my mind and my heart.*

**Ps 51:10** *Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me.*

**Ps 37:30-31** *The mouth of the righteous speaks wisdom, And his tongue talks of justice. The law of his God is in his heart; None of his steps shall slide.*

**Ps 40:8** *I delight to do Your will, O my God, And Your law is within my heart."*

**Ps 119:11** *Your word I have hidden in my heart, That I might not sin against You.*

**Matt 5:8** *Blessed are the pure in heart, For they shall see God.*

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