

*Traditional religion*

• *Man-made rules with which Jesus was not bothered*

A Pharisee asked Jesus to dine with him<sup>☞1</sup> and is astonished to notice that Jesus did not keep the Pharisees 'oral tradition' concerning hand-washing before meals<sup>☞2</sup>. Jesus did not bother about man-made additions to the law of Moses. Hand-washing before meals was not simply a matter of hygiene; it was a religious ritual. Ritualistic regulations had become so traditional that 'religious' people in Jesus' day kept them. There were rules about how much water should be used, and how it should be done.

☞1 11:37

☞2 11:38

Jesus was not a very 'religious' person. He loved God, but He was not concerned to keep a multiplicity of regulations about how to eat food!

*1. Worries more about externalities than the state of the heart*

• *An inner heart – clean and loving is needed*

**1. Traditional religion worries more about externalities than the state of the heart.** It is **inner** cleanliness that is needed<sup>☞1</sup>. One can be religious on the outside and yet have a lot of greed and malice and insincerity within one's heart. God is the creator and Lord of every aspect of life<sup>☞2</sup>. The heart means more to Him than external religiousness. What is needed is love towards people<sup>☞3</sup>. The Pharisees were actually a very greedy people; it is surprising how often religious people want plenty of money! If the Pharisees will overcome their greed for money and start being generous to the needy, then their inner heart will be clean<sup>☞4</sup>. The whole of life will be 'clean' for them. They will enjoy all of God's creation and partake of food with gladness and generosity. Ritual washing will be unimportant, a matter of hygiene perhaps but nothing more.

☞1 11:39

☞2 11:40

☞3 11:41

☞4 11:41

*2. Is often worried about burdensome legislation but neglects bigger matters*

• *Hypocritical Pharisaic religion defiles*

**2. Traditional religion is often worried about burdensome legislation but neglects bigger matters<sup>☞1</sup>.** The Pharisees would be extraordinarily strict about tithing! They were very fussy about counting out every bit of green mint to give one tenth to God. They were very diligent about 'tithing' the garden herb called 'rue', and every other kind of edible herb but they neglected the bigger demands of life. The Pharisees were very happy about **this** aspect of religion. It is surprising today how many preachers love to preach about tithing but rarely preach about justice or love! Walk into the average church or put on a typical 'Christian video-tape' and you are likely to be getting a sermon about tithing, but you are not very likely to be hearing a message about justice!

☞1 11:42

The Pharisees loved praise from other people<sup>☞1</sup> but were like concealed tombs<sup>☞2</sup>, a grave dug in the ground filled with the bones of the dead. Such a grave might be unmarked. A Pharisees might walk over one by mistake and get 'defiled' by contact with the dead. Jesus says that it is the Pharisee who is the source of defilement. If others come into contact with a Pharisee they are likely to get defiled by the hypocrisy of this kind of religion.

☞1 11:43

☞2 11:44

• *Legalists do not always live up to their own demands*

One of the experts in the law protests at what Jesus says<sup>☞1</sup>, but Jesus insists on the truth of what He says. The Pharisees require others to accept heavy regulations, but it was noticeable (as it is still) that legalistic preachers do not always live up to the demands they press on others<sup>☞2</sup>.

☞1 11:45

☞2 11:46

*3. Admires the past but is unwilling for God do anything today*

**3. Traditional religion admires the past but is not willing for God do anything today.** The Pharisees claim to admire yesterday's spiritual heroes but there is no one that they recognise as having a word from God for today! For **today's** preachers and ministers they only have criticism. Pharisaism is still with us! There are plenty of traditional Christians who admire yesterday's heroes but persecute today's champions of faith<sup>☞1</sup>.

☞1 11:48

#### 4. Always persecutes true faith

From the time of Abel to the coming future

4. **Traditional religion always persecutes true faith**<sup>□1</sup>. Jesus speaks of 'the Wisdom of God'<sup>□2</sup>. It is a way of indirectly referring to Himself (as is suggested by Matthew 23:34). He (as God's Wisdom in the flesh) will send prophets and apostles to His Church. They will be persecuted, but not very far ahead will come God's judgement upon the city of Jerusalem<sup>□3</sup>. The long tradition of resistance to God has been tolerated for a long time. The first person in the Bible to die for real faith was Abel. He was killed by his brother Cain, but it should be noticed that Cain was a 'religious' man who brought an offering to God<sup>□4</sup>. Zechariah was also killed by religious people who did not want to have God speak to them<sup>□5</sup>. Yet a time is coming, says Jesus, when all such religion will fall under God's judgement. He is indirectly predicting the fall of Jerusalem.

□1 11:49-51  
□2 11:49  
□3 11:50-51  
□4 Genesis 4:5  
□5 2Chronicles 24:22

#### 5. Always resistant to God

• Applies to much modern biblical scholarship

5. **Traditional religion is always resistant to God**<sup>□1</sup>. The men that Jesus was speaking to were experts in the law of Moses. Matthew 11:52 is a verse that could be applied to much modern biblical scholarship. Since the nineteenth century biblical scholars have, with some exceptions, been hindering men and women rather than helping them. The very scholars who are supposed to help people understand the Scripture actually lock people out of salvation. How often that has happened in the last two hundred years of biblical scholarship!

□1 11:52

#### A turning point in Jesus' ministry



• Half way through Luke's gospel

• A time to ask ourselves about our own faith

This time of Jesus' ministry was a turning-point. The religious leaders began doing everything they could to get Him to say something which they could use to have Him executed<sup>□1</sup>. So they were proving that what Jesus had said was true. They had religion but their hearts were full of hate.

□1 11:53-54

We are half-way through Luke's Gospel and we would do well to ask ourselves a few questions. What sort of religion or Christian faith do we have? There is a religiosity that does no good for anyone at all. It is burdensome, legalistic, full of boring meetings and heavy regulations. Jesus the Son of God comes bringing forgiveness and joy, and lifts us into the joy and love of God. This does not come through 'religion'; it comes through faith in Jesus.

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