

Officials from Jerusalem – another crisis of rejection

We are in a section of the gospel where Jesus is still ministering in Galilee. Since His rejection at Nazareth He has sent out the Twelve^{□1} but has been treated with suspicion by Herod^{□2}. He has fed the five thousand^{□3} and has walked on the water^{□4}. Crowds still follow Him^{□5}. Now there comes another crisis of rejection like the planning of His murder^{□6} and the rejection at Nazareth^{□7}. This time the crisis comes because of His rejection of Jewish legalism.

Jesus is at this time very well-known to the religious leaders in Jerusalem. They come all the way from Jerusalem especially to attack Jesus. Ever since the time mentioned in Mark 3:6 they have wanted to kill Him. Now they send some officials and theologians from Jerusalem to deal with Jesus and His teaching. ^{□1}

1. Religiosity & True Faith – a big difference

1. There is a big difference between religiosity and true faith. The visiting Pharisees notice that Jesus and His disciples do not bother with the religious custom of the Pharisees in which they made a special ceremony about washing one's hands before a meal. ^{□1} Of course there is nothing wrong about washing one's hands before a meal and it is a custom in many parts of the world, but the Pharisees made a religious ceremony out of it and regarded people who did not conform to their custom as bad people.

Mark explains that the Pharisees had many traditions like this^{□1}. These extra religious rules did not come from the Old Testament. They were not in the Mosaic law. God had never asked for them to be done.

But this is one of the great characteristics of 'religiosity'. Most religions have their customs and regulations. Religious people regard others who do not keep their rules as bad people. The true knowledge of God can go the same way. The Old Testament was the Word of God but the Pharisees had added many regulations that were not in the Old Testament at all. Some modern 'dead Christianity' does the same thing. Where faith in Jesus is changed into a dead religion – and it can happen – you have the same kind of thing. People will invent all sorts of religious customs and will get quite upset with you if you do not keep them. People can be quite strict about keeping Lent or making a sign of the cross or wearing religious clothing – and then they somehow think you have sinned if you do not submit to their extra regulations! '*Why don't you live according to the tradition?*' they ask^{□1}. But faith in Jesus is not a matter of ritual!

2. Human regulations

2. Jesus analyses this kind of religion as nothing but following human regulations. Such 'religious' people, says Jesus, talk a lot about God, but their hearts are far from Him. Their religion is largely a matter of regulations and religious ceremonies and telling other people what do^{□1}! Their religion is largely a matter of

Missing the principles of justice, mercy & obedience to God

tradition. Little ceremonies, which might have been quite good at, first become rigid laws. Eventually people bother more about the rigid ceremonies of religion than they do about the large sweeping principles of justice and mercy and obedience to God.

□1 6:6b–13
 □2 6:14–29
 □3 6:30–44
 □4 6:45–52
 □5 6:53–56
 □6 3:6
 □7 6:1–6a

□1 7:1

□1 7:2

□1 7:3-4

□1 see 7:5

□1 see 7:6-8

3. Religiosity can be very insincere

• Religious trickery

• Neglecting the needy

4. True faith is a matter of the heart

• External behaviour is not the most important thing to God

• Sin & righteousness are heart matters

• Jesus purifies the heart – religiosity cannot

3. **Such religiosity can be very insincere.** Jesus gives an example¹. The Mosaic law was very stern about the matter of honouring parents. The death penalty was required for anyone who disregarded the fifth commandment of Exodus 20:12². But the Pharisees had a little religious trick that helped them to get round the fifth commandment. It was possible to pronounce the word ‘Corban’ over some of their property³. The word is a Hebrew or Aramaic word meaning ‘Gift’. It meant that the property was now specially dedicated to God. Yet it was not necessary ever to actually have it given to God! The declaration stopped one’s parents from using the property (or whatever the item was) to meet their own needs⁴. But it could be used by its original owner.

It was a clever way of being very ‘religious’ but neglecting needy parents and disregarding the fifth commandment. There were other pieces of religious trickery in the Pharisees religion¹ – as in all religions.

4. **True faith is a matter of the heart.** Ignoring the Pharisees, Jesus appealed to the people and gave them a parable to think about¹. Later He explains it to the disciples². Religious rules and regulations generally deal with external conduct, but actually external behaviour is not the most important thing to God. Certainly little religious customs like ritual hand-washing mean nothing to God. And rules about food are equally unimportant. Nothing from outside the personality is really very important³. Even clean and unclean food (which were the subject of regulation in the law of Moses) is not really an important matter. It affects the stomach but does not touch the human personality. Mark notes in passing that this principle really brings to an end the Mosaic law about clean and unclean foods⁴.

What really matters is the heart. Sin does not consist of religious ceremony or lack of religious ceremony. Sin and righteousness consist of what is taking place in the heart. The trouble with men and women is that we are born with sin in the ‘heart’ – the central core of the human personality. Out of the heart come all the inclinations to sin and malice and impurity¹. These arise within man’s life. It is not failure to wash the hands that ‘defiles’ man. It is failure to control the wickedness of the heart.

The Pharisees have come all the way from Jerusalem and are looking for faults in Jesus. They think they can criticize Him because of His freedom from ritual. But what about their own hearts? Are they not full of malice against Jesus? Are they not jealous and bitter about His success? What is the good of clean hands at a meal if there is wickedness in the heart?

Sin is not a matter of ritual or tradition. Sin comes from our inward nature. And Jesus’ salvation consists of being given a new heart! Jesus can purify the heart. Religiosity cannot.

1 7:9-10

2 see Exodus 21:17

3 7:11

4 7:12-13

1 7:13b

1 7:14-16

2 7:17-18a

3 7:18b-19

4 7:19b

1 7:20-22



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