

Jesus and the Pharisees: (part six of a twelves part series)

In Matthew 15:1-14, we have the record of yet another trolling event perpetrated by the Pharisees. In this instance, it involves one of their man-made traditions: hand washing! This practice was one of many which had developed as a result of Jewish scribes interpreting and applying Old Testament Scriptures. The Pharisees of Jesus' day viewed these human interpretations and applications as equivalent in importance and authority to the Word of God itself; and came to be known as "the traditions of the elders." As far as the Pharisees were concerned, hand washing before a meal was deemed an important ceremony which carried with it spiritual significance. My personal view is that hand washing before a meal is important, but only because of its sanitary significance.

However, as far as Jesus was concerned, this observance carried with it no spiritual value whatsoever. He makes it clear that the traditions of the elders, more often than not, served the purpose of invalidating rather than enhancing the Word of God (15:6). The example which Jesus cites consists of a practice which enabled a son to avoid the responsibility of assisting his parents financially. He could declare his assets as dedicated to God, while reserving the right to use them for his own purposes (15:3-6). This was blatant hypocrisy which, in effect, nullified the fifth commandment of honoring one's father and mother. Jesus condemns these religious leaders for their dishonesty in Matthew 15:7-9, quoting from Isaiah 29:13.

In Matthew 15:11-14, the greater impact of this encounter occurs when Jesus clarifies what real defilement consists of and why His disciples did not need to pay attention to the sanctimonious noise emanating from the Pharisees –

“It is not what enters into the mouth that defiles the man, but what proceeds out of the mouth, this defiles the man.’ Then the disciples came and said to Him, ‘Do You know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this statement?’ But He answered and said, ‘Every plant which My heavenly Father did not plant shall be uprooted. Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind. And if a blind man guides a blind man, both will fall into a pit.’”

It is no different today. The Christian faith has become inundated with men and women who are more concerned about spouting their personal opinions in a manner which resembles the trash talk of the world; rather than speaking the truth in love, for the purpose of reaching the lost with the gospel. They too are blind guides of the blind: pied pipers promoting their propaganda; leading people away from God and His truth, into a pit of political activism and secular psychology.