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Dirty Hands and Dirty Hearts; Matt 15:10-20

GPBC

5.3.20

Introduction – Why is washing hands such a large issue in this text? It's significant enough at least in the minds of the Pharisees that they believe Jesus and His disciples are guilty of a substantial offense. It's significant enough in the minds of the people that Jesus continues to discuss it after He has corrected the Pharisees. So what makes hand washing of such importance that it touches the doctrine of salvation?

We know why hand washing has become so significant in our day. It's a health issue. The plague of COVID 19 has dreadfully reminded us of the importance of personal hygiene. We wash our hands in order to keep germs and viruses from entering our bodies.

That's not why the Pharisees were so insistent that Jesus' disciples wash their hands before they eat. The Levitical law required anyone who touched someone unclean by disease, death, or sin or if they touched an object that was deemed unclean because it had come into contact with an unclean individual or was corrupted in some way, among other things, that person had to wash in order to become ceremonially clean. The washing of the body symbolized a removal of anything related to sin. Having washed, that person could now re-enter the community and take part in worship. The point of all these laws was to show that sin and all that it corrupts is not allowed in the presence of God.

The Pharisees had developed some of their own rules from God's law. Essentially, anything you touch has the potential to be corrupted. So if you don't wash your hands before you eat, you are most likely to become unclean. Washing hands for the Pharisees was not a health issue or a hygiene issue, it was a holiness issue. It was a theological issue.

The problem was their theology had twisted and misapplied the purpose of God's law. God's law was simply showing that man is sinful and God is holy. Washing the body didn't make one holy and pure. It merely pointed to the fact that man needed to be made holy and pure to come before the Lord. But the Pharisees locked on to the external ceremony as the means to cleanse oneself internally.

That's what Pharisees in Jesus' day and in our day do. They lock on to the ceremony, they lock on to the externals, the activities as the means of their cleansing. Indeed that's what all false religions do. Do the exercises. Go through these disciplines. Take these steps. That is why Jesus continued teaching on washing. The meaning and purpose had been lost to these new teachings.

- I. Correcting the Idea of Cleanliness (vv10-11)
 - a. Jesus is correcting the truth of what it means to be clean before the Lord. If you don't understand what makes you defiled before the Lord, you won't understand what makes you clean.
 - b. No matter how many times you wash, you cannot cleanse yourself of sin's corruption. The external filth that we come into contact with on a daily basis is only meant to illustrate that we also come into contact with sin on a daily basis. Touching a dead carcass, coming into contact with germs, getting your hands dirty on the job are all merely external, physical realities. Soap and water are the solution for our physical filth but they are not the solution for our inner depravity. III. bat
 - c. The phrase "cleanliness is next to godliness" comes dangerously close, if not falls completely, into this error. III. Changing alternator
 - i. Pursuing godliness, pursuing holiness, pursuing Christ will have an impact on our view of cleanliness. We will want to honor God with our bodies. We will want to be good stewards of our bodies created by God for His glory. We will want to take care of these temples indwelt by the Spirit of God.
 - ii. However, it doesn't work the other way around. Pursuing cleanliness will not make one godly or holy or right with God. Washing the external doesn't cleanse the internal.
 - iii. That's why later in Matthew 23 Jesus will call the Pharisees whitewashed tombs. They pursue cleanliness on the outside but they are dead on the inside.
 - d. Cleanliness before God is not a matter of external dirtiness but rather a matter of internal dirtiness. The defilement within is a deeper, graver corruption and stain than any dirt or germ or decay without.

- II. The Fundamental Problem for the Pharisee (vv12-14)
 - a. Even the disciples were taken with the persona of the Pharisees. They so rigidly observed and practiced their religious traditions, they projected such a high level of adherence to Scripture, surely they of all people were right with God.
 - i. The influence of religious zeal filters down, whether that zeal be right or wrong. By the way, having a large following is not guaranteed indication that your doctrine is biblically correct. Crowds and popularity and reputation can be horribly misleading.
 - b. The issue again is the status of the heart, not the status of outward appearance.
 - i. They are not true believers. They have embraced a false teaching, a false doctrine, a false view of salvation. Their religion cannot save. Their religion is destined to fail.
 - ii. They promulgate their false teaching as false teachers. They set themselves up as guides when they themselves are blind.
 - iii. Those who come under their influence and embrace their doctrine will have the same outcome as they.
 - c. Let them alone. Get away from them. Have no concern or care with false gospels. Don't throw your pearls before the swine.
 - i. Jude 22-23 says "have mercy on those who doubt; save others by snatching them out of the fire; to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh.
 - ii. In other words, we are to do everything we can to reach those who are being influenced and swayed by false teaching to try and win them to the gospel.
 - iii. But to those who are determined to reject the truth, who only respond by screaming you down or beating you down, let them alone. God may bring them around.
 - iv. Our effort is to be spent on the blind followers, not the blind leaders.
 - d. Those convinced of their way will never change their way unless God changes their heart. So pray for them, but let them alone.

- III. Cleanliness is an Internal Issue
- a. We don't draw near to God with washed hands. We draw near to God with washed hearts. It's not a matter of dirty hands. It's a matter of dirty hearts.
 - b. God has created the body in such a way that it operates and functions to cleanse itself. The body disposes of waste. The body fights infection and sickness. Earthly dirtiness is not our greatest problem. The body itself has a solution for that.
 - c. It's the depravity and dirtiness of our hearts and souls that is our greatest problem.
 - i. That is what truly defiles.
 - ii. We have no suitable solution for it.
 - d. That depravity runs deep.
 - i. Sin is not a hiccup. Oh I don't know why I did that. That just came out of the blue. No, it came out of your heart.
 - ii. Sin is not a mistake. Oh, I'm not like that. I just made a mistake. No, you are just like. It came from within you.
 - iii. Sin is not a weakness. Oh I just don't have the strength to withstand the temptation. No, you just don't love God more than you love sin.
 - iv. Sin is not a sickness. I'm sick. I have an addiction. It's a sickness. No, it's a sin.
 - v. We have many reasons and excuses why our sin is not sin and why we are not accountable and responsible for the sins we commit. And Jesus blows all those excuses to pieces and brings us to the reality of our own utter despising despicable depravity.
 - vi. Sin is an issue of the heart and we have no means to cleanse it.
 - e. What can wash away my sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus. What can make me whole again? Nothing but the blood of Jesus. O precious is the flow that makes me white as snow. No other fount I know, nothing but the blood of Jesus.
 - f. Only God can remove the defilement of the heart. Only God can make a dead heart alive and a dirty heart clean. Only by grace and only through faith in Christ.

Conclusion