

Clean the Inside of the Dish First

Special Sunday Topical Lesson for the Woburn Church

I. Background for This Lesson

- a. For some perspective in advance of what we are about to discuss, please read **Isaiah 55:6-11**
 - i. God calls us to seek Him and says, “My ways are not your ways.”
 - ii. God’s word, like rain or snow, will go out in the world and accomplish its purpose.
- b. I was not planning (or even desiring) to record this lesson today. I gave most of this lesson at a midweek gathering of our house church. Several people in our group asked me to give the lesson again, on a Sunday, and to record it.
- c. Some background on why I gave this lesson the first time:
 - i. In July of this year (2018) our house church had a retreat in Pennsylvania where we invited along many fellow-travelers (Christians who share many of the same convictions regarding kingdom teaching), and some of them brought along their friends and family members.
 - ii. It was a diverse group including people from Restoration Movement, conservative Anabaptist and other backgrounds.
 - iii. Outward appearances varied quite a bit, as you might expect, especially among the women.
 1. Some women grew in churches where all the women wore head coverings and dressed very conservatively (for example, handmade long dresses, no make-up, no jewelry).
 2. Other women had spent many years in churches where the style of dress was not too much different from most of the world around them.
 3. Some women, over time, had started off in one place and ended up in another, based on being influenced by new teaching, seeing new things in Scripture, learning from the early Christians, etc.

- iv. However, I noticed something in our group that I found rather disturbing. There was a tendency for some in our group, seeing a few women who did not look like most of the rest of us outwardly, to want to start off with fixing the outside of those women.
 - 1. I certainly can relate to this tendency and am not looking down on others. I can relate. When I look at a drawer full of forks all lined up one way and one is different, I have a deep desire to want to immediately “straighten out” the one that does not match the others, too.
 - 2. The exterior of a person is almost always the first thing we notice; so it is natural to want to address that first.
- d. After thinking about it and reflecting on what Jesus said in the Scriptures, I put together a short lesson, on “Cleaning the Inside of the Dish First.” which I taught at our first Wednesday night fellowship time after we returned to Boston.
 - i. Our midweek lessons are generally more informal than our Sunday lessons, generally are not recorded, and we are often able to have a more extended discussion with those lessons.
 - ii. I received quite a bit of feedback on that lesson; clearly it had an impact on many in our group. People asked me for the notes (which I had just jotted down on an index card, so I had to type them up afterward). A few people strongly encouraged me to record it.
 - iii. Last Sunday, after our communion service and fellowship, five people cornered me and said that they wanted me to re-teach that lesson this Sunday, and have it recorded.
 - 1. My initial reaction was to try to talk them out of this idea.
 - a. I told them that what I teach generally alienates about 95% of the “Christians” out there. Teaching this lesson would likely alienate most of the remaining 5%, some of the only friends I have left in the Christian world.
 - b. I told them that this lesson would be misunderstood by many who heard it.
 - c. I protested further, saying that many in the group had already heard this lesson when I gave it on a Wednesday night almost two months ago, and I did not want to bore them by having them hear it a second time.

2. However, they were undeterred and all of them insisted that I teach this lesson once again, and have it recorded. They said that even if I lost a lot of friends in the process, the five of them would still be on my side. And wasn't that enough? Another brother told me that this is the kind of lesson that Jesus would teach. So, against my own personal preference, I was persuaded to reteach this lesson.
- e. For those listening remotely, who are not in the room, please bear a few things in mind.
 - i. This was a lesson taught first to our own group, unrecorded, to address a problem I was starting to see. This is not about going after other groups who are out there.
 - ii. Tertullian said it is easier to kill the cub than the full-grown lion (talking about sin). Amen to that.
 - iii. My hope is that all of us will look inward and reflect on our own tendencies. Strengthen your own convictions. Get the plank out of your own eye, first.
 1. Resist the temptation to think about some other person or group down the street or a few states away who you think *"really needs to hear this."*
 - f. When the US military goes after an important target, such as a terrorist leader, they may send in a drone to drop a bomb on the house where that person is known to be. When the special forces dig through the rubble of the building afterward to confirm that the "bad guy" was killed, they often find other bodies of his friends there, as well. The others who were killed are referred to as "collateral damage."
 - i. In this lesson, be assured that the primary target is our own group. However, for those listening remotely, there may well be some "collateral damage" here, as well.
 - g. As in all things, please have the attitude of the Bereans that is held up in Scripture. They went back and examined the Scriptures daily to see if what they were being told was in fact true.
 - i. If you gain a conviction on this, don't say "well, *Chuck Pike says/ thinks such-and-such.*" What I personally think is beside the point. Any new convictions you share with others should be based on what Jesus, Peter and Paul say; it should be on the solid foundation of what the Scriptures teach.

II. The Foundation

a. Read **Deuteronomy 6:1-9**.

- i. This passage from Moses is very well-known. Jesus said it contains the greatest command (**Mark 12:28-34** and **Matthew 22:34-40**): to love the Lord our God with our whole heart, soul and strength.
- ii. Yet, this passage from Moses contains several commands, not just “the greatest commandment.” Additional commands here include:
 1. “You shall teach [these commandments] to your sons, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.”
 2. “You shall bind [these commandments] as a sign on your hand and it shall be immovable before your eyes.”
 3. “You shall write [these commandments] on the doorposts of your houses and on your gates.”
- iii. Moses reinforced the importance of these commands by repeating them in **Deuteronomy 11:13-28**. The Jews were told that great blessings would follow if they embraced these commands, but great curses would come upon them if they did not.
- iv. Religious Jews have taken *at least one part* of these commands very seriously: the part about putting the word of God on doorposts of their houses and wearing it on phylacteries on their arms and foreheads.
 1. Growing up near New York City, with large Jewish population, I recall seeing something that looked (to me) like a harmonica nailed to the exterior doorframe of an apartment, and visible from the hallway. I was told it was a “*mezuzah*,” a small metal box that held part of the Scriptures in it.
 2. Obviously, the occupant of that apartment was taking *at least a part* of **Deuteronomy 6** seriously: the part that was easiest to see and measure: the external part.
 3. In Jesus’ day, the religious Jews were doing the same thing. He said of the Pharisees:
 - a. “But all their works they do to be seen by men. They make their phylacteries broad and enlarge the borders of their garments.” (**Matthew 23:5**, NKJV)

- b. They were following part of **Deuteronomy 6**, but missing the whole point! The *main point* was to have a heart and mind that loved God and was focused on knowing and following His commands. The phylacteries and mezuzahs were *intended to be* constant reminders and outward expressions of that love, devotion and veneration for God and His Word.
- b. Read **1 Samuel 16:1-7** (or **1 Kingdoms 16:1-7** in the LXX)
 - i. Israel's first king, Saul, was an outwardly impressive man. He stood head and shoulders above the other Israelites; he *looked like* a king (**1 Samuel 9:1-2**). However, he had a disobedient heart and ended up being rejected by God, to be replaced by a better man (**1 Samuel 15:22-28**).
 - ii. When the Lord hand-picked Saul's successor to be king, even a spiritual man like Samuel was surprised.
 - iii. Read **1 Samuel 16:1-13**.
 - 1. Jesse's first son, Eliab, looked like a king. However, God told Samuel that he was not the one. In rejecting Eliab, the Lord revealed a very important spiritual truth to Samuel.
 - 2. "But the LORD said to Samuel, 'Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him. For the LORD does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.'" (**1 Samuel 16:7**, NKJV)
 - 3. In the LXX it reads, "but man looks into the face (outward façade), but the Lord *sees into the heart*".

III. What Jesus Taught on This

- a. Read **Mark 7:1-8**
 - i. The problem: religious Jews were focused on external observances to the point that they even went beyond the Scriptural requirements, adding their own man-made traditions.
 - ii. Jesus rebukes them with the words of Isaiah, "These people honor me with their lips, but *their heart is far from Me*. And in vain they worship me." (**Mark 7:6**, NKJV; quoting from **Isaiah 29:13**)
 - iii. The real problem: *their hearts*, which are far from God.

b. Read **Matthew 23:1-28**

- i. Pharisees, religious Jews, were focused on the external things, rather than the heart.
- ii. External, observable, measurable signs of their religion:
 1. They tithed even their garden herbs.
 2. They made long public prayers.
 3. They had broad phylacteries (get your tape measure out!).
 4. They were even evangelistic, going great distances to make new converts even more radical than they themselves were.
 5. All external, all for people to see and inspect.
- iii. The problem: their hearts. Their hearts were full of greed, selfishness, corruption. They did not love God nor other people. Jesus condemned them with these words:
 1. “Even so you also *outwardly appear* righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.” (**Matthew 23:28**, NKJV)
- iv. Jesus described the condition of the Pharisees by comparing them to two common things: dirty dishes and tombs!
 1. While my wife was out of town on a trip recently, I spent more time than usual washing the dishes. I was reminded first hand, especially by coffee cups where the sediment had dried into the bottom, that it takes a lot more work to clean out the inside of the cup or dish!
 - a. Once you expend enough energy to clean out the gunk on the inside, cleaning the outside is very easy, actually. Lots of times by then, there is not so much left to clean on the outside.
 2. Tombs may look beautiful on the outside (whether the burial below ground type, with flowers and marker stones at the surface, or cave-type tombs or monuments that may be whitewashed to look clean and impressive on the outside.
 - a. But while they may look good on the outside, they are actually full of death, decay and dead men’s bones, on the inside!
- v. Jesus prescribed the solution for the Pharisees:

1. Clean the inside of the dish first, then the outside will be clean (**Matthew 23:25-26**).
 - a. Focus on the internal, the heart. Get that right, and the rest will follow.
2. Focus on the most important things, yet don't neglect the lesser commands either. (**Matthew 23:23-24**)
3. Notice that Jesus does NOT say, "just take care of the inside, and forget about the outside."
 - a. He does NOT tell the Jews, still under the Law of Moses, "forget about the phylacteries (a command in **Deuteronomy 6**) and don't worry about tithing small crops of herbs." He tells them to focus on the greater commands, *without neglecting the lesser ones!*

IV. How Might this Apply to Us, Today?

- a. Good thing we don't struggle with tendencies like those Pharisees, right? Well, let's try to take a good honest look at that.
 - i. Keep in mind that Satan is trying to destroy all of us. If he can't get us with moral laxity, he will try the same thing he did so effectively with the Pharisees: just get these radical Christians to focus on the outward things!
 - ii. Recall that the Pharisees were a strict group of believers who wanted to get back to following the Bible and to stop conforming to the world around them. Are there any parallels to serious Christians today?
- b. Let's consider one example: the subject of women's dress. That is the first thing many people notice about us (including those who were visiting at our summer retreat). The head covering and modest dress for women can become a significant focus and distinguishing mark in many "kingdom Christian" circles. By the term "kingdom Christian" I include those who seek to obey all the teachings of Jesus, including those that go strongly against the prevailing culture around us.
 - i. Is this supposed to be part of our *identity*, as Christians?
 1. Note that the command to wear a head covering in **1 Corinthians 11:1-16** refers only to when women pray and prophesy.
 2. While it is wonderful if women choose to wear a head covering most or all of the time, so that they are ready to pray at all times, it is not a Scriptural requirement.

3. Consider: If women are supposed to wear head coverings all the time, does that mean men can NEVER wear hats?
4. In reaction to the “Christian” world around us that has cast off the head covering and is rejecting the Biblical women’s roles, are we making something more out of the head covering than what was intended originally?
5. An aside: very recently I was studying through **Genesis** with a group of men and women in the Middle East who were Christians, mostly recent converts from Islam.
 - a. When we went through **Genesis 2**, I pointed out references in the New Testament to that chapter. Since Paul bases his teaching on head covering/ uncovering in **1 Corinthians 11** to **Genesis 2**, we studied that as well.
 - b. The reaction of one of the women in the study: “Oh, no! Isn’t this like what the Muslims teach?” I explained that the Christian teaching on head covering is different.
 - i. First, the Christian teaching predates Islam by about 600 years.
 - ii. Second, Paul does NOT say “cover your heads whenever you are in public.” That is what the Muslims are required to do; in some countries this is even enforced by the police!
 1. This is not intended to be our outward sign to the world that we are Christians.
 2. Paul says it is for when women pray or prophesy, and it is *for the angels*, not the world.
 3. From **1 Corinthians 11:3**, this is rooted in Christian teaching on submission and headship (God the Father being head of Christ, Christ being head of man, and man being head of women).
 4. In **1 Corinthians 11:8-9** Paul points back to **Genesis 2:18-20** (woman being created as helper to man) and to **Genesis 2:21-23** (woman being made from man).

6. **Question:** Which is *more important*, that a woman wears a sign of authority (head covering) on her head, or that she is actually submissive to her husband?
 - a. By focusing on the secondary things, we can end up just like the Pharisees with their public displays of religious observances and their phylacteries.
 - b. I am NOT dismissing the importance of following what Paul says to women regarding head covering. Just saying
 - i. The *more important command* is to be submissive to her husband. The less important command is the outward practice of head covering (and of course we need to do both).
 - ii. We need to keep our focus on the heart, the unseen things. Easy to get off track and get a false sense that we are ok (or better than others) if we focus on the externals.
7. Let us also consider what Peter said in **1 Peter 3:1-6** regarding women.
 - a. This also came up in the study with former Muslims in the Middle East. When we came to **Genesis 3:16** in our **Genesis** study (curse upon the woman including pain in childbirth, and that her husband would rule over her), a woman asked, "This applied to the Jews, but what about for the Christians?"
 - b. We turned to **Ephesians 5** and **1 Peter 3** to answer that question from Scripture.
 - c. **1 Peter 3:1-6** calls women to seek to become beautiful inwardly, having a quiet and gentle spirit, and being submissive, like Sarah was to Abraham.
 - d. It also says that women should not adorn themselves outwardly (fancy hair, gold, expensive clothing, other outward adornments).
 - i. Note that the word "merely" often inserted in **1 Peter 3:3** is italicized, since it is not in the actual text, but has been added by translators)

8. **Question:** With **1 Peter 3** in view, which do you think is *more important*:
- For a woman to have a quite and gentle spirit, being submissive to her husband? OR
 - For a woman to be dressed plainly (rejecting jewelry, makeup, dyed hair, expensive clothing, etc.)?
9. **Question:** What would God think of a woman who was completely plain, who got rid of all outward adornment, but who was loud, prideful and unsubmitive to her husband?
- I think we all know the answer: same as Jesus thought of a Pharisee who faithfully wore his phylactery and wrote Scriptures on his door and gate of his home, *yet who did not love God in his heart!*
- ii. Let us never forget that our identity as Christians should not be from a head covering or clothing style. The identifying marks of a true Christian are primarily internal, matters of the heart.
- “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:34–35, NKJV)
 - “I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.” (John 17:20–23, NKJV)
 - These are the two distinguishing marks of Jesus’ followers, according to Jesus: our love for one another and our unity with one another.
 - And both embrace *all the other followers of Jesus*, not just members of our own small group or denomination!
 - This is *much harder* than putting on the right clothing, wearing broad-enough phylacteries, or focusing on other measurable, external religious signs.

- c. However, this has always been what God is after: first and foremost, our hearts.
- c. Let me be abundantly clear. I am NOT saying (as many do today) that “As long as we have a ‘good heart’ on the inside, we don’t have to obey all the hard/ unpopular teachings of Jesus.”
 - i. “By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.”
(1 John 5:2-3, NKJV)
 - 1. If we love God, we will keep His commandments. All of them: the large and the small.
 - 2. His commandments are *not* burdensome. They are for our own good!
- d. Let us first clean out the inside of the cup or dish (our hearts). If we truly do that, *then the outside will follow*. Keep our priorities straight!
 - i. Don’t be fooled by exterior appearances. The Pharisees and Saul looked great on the outside.
 - ii. I respect all those who have been willing to put into practice the counter-cultural teachings of Jesus, and to be scorned by the world as a result. However, although we may not be lax like so many in the “Christian world” around us, that does not mean Satan is going to give up on us.
 - 1. He has one more way to pull us off the path to life.
 - 2. Don’t let Satan defeat you with the same tactics he used so effectively against another group that was striving to be distinct from the pagan world around them: the Pharisees. Focus first on the inside. Clean the inside of the dish first, then the outside. Let’s work together to focus on the greatest teachings of Jesus, regarding cleaning out our hearts.