

Week 43: Jesus Confronts the Pharisees - Truth Over Tradition

A Sabbath Family Bible Study

Introduction

Throughout His ministry, Jesus showed compassion to sinners, patience with seekers, and mercy to the broken. Yet toward one group He spoke with striking severity - the Pharisees.

The Pharisees were not pagans. They were religious leaders of their time, they knew the Law, they taught Scriptures, and they maintained traditions. Outwardly, they appeared righteous. Yet Jesus exposed a devastating truth: religious appearance without humble obedience is hypocrisy. When tradition is elevated above God's Word his Word becomes corrupt.

This week's lesson teaches families that true righteousness flows from the heart.. God is not impressed by reputation, titles, or public displays of holiness. He examines motives, speech, integrity, and humility. Truth must always stand above tradition, and Scripture must always judge us, not the other way around.

To explore this fully, we will look at two major confrontations.

I: The Heart of the Matter

Scripture Reading

(Matthew 15:1–20)

Matthew 15:1–9

1 Then came to Jesus scribes and Pharisees, which were of Jerusalem, saying,

2 Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? for they wash not their hands when they eat bread.

3 But he answered and said unto them, Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?

4 For God commanded, saying, Honour thy father and mother: and, He that curseth father or mother, let him die the death.

5 But ye say, Whosoever shall say to his father or his mother, It is a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me;

6 And honour not his father or his mother, he shall be free. Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition.

7 Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying,

8 This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me.

9 But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.

Commentary

The Pharisees accuse the disciples of violating tradition and Jesus responds by exposing something far more serious: they have nullified God's command through man-made rules. Their tradition allowed a person to dedicate resources to the temple in a way that excused neglecting aging parents. They appeared religious while abandoning obedience.

Jesus quotes Isaiah: lips near, hearts far. Families must understand that outward actions cannot replace inward faithfulness. Religious language cannot compensate for rebellion and disobedience. A home may speak Christian words and still harbor pride, rebellion, or neglect. Tradition is not evil in itself, but when tradition overrides Scripture, it becomes dangerous.

Matthew 15:10–20

10 And he called the multitude, and said unto them, Hear, and understand:

11 Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man.

12 Then came his disciples, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the Pharisees were offended, after they heard this saying?

13 But he answered and said, Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up.

14 Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch.

15 Then answered Peter and said unto him, Declare unto us this parable.

16 And Jesus said, Are ye also yet without understanding?

17 Do not ye yet understand, that whatsoever entereth in at the mouth goeth into the belly, and is cast out into the draught?

18 But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man.

19 For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies:

20 These are the things which defile a man: but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man.

Commentary

Jesus shifts the focus from ritual cleanliness to the corruption of the heart. The Pharisees feared external contamination while ignoring the internal pollution the Jesus identified.

Our speech reveals our heart, and what flows from within exposes true character. Evil does not originate in circumstance, it originates in the human heart. Families must train children to guard the heart, not merely behavior. Because a clean appearance without internal discipline produces hypocrisy. True transformation begins inward and expresses outward. Truth must be clear, uncompromised, and rooted in God's Word.

II: The Seven Woes - A Warning to Religious Hypocrisy

Scripture Reading

(Matthew 15:1–20)

Matthew 23:1–28

1 Then spake Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples,

2 Saying The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat:

3 All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not.

4 For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers.

5 But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments,

6 And love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues,

7 And greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi.

8 But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren.

9 And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven.

10 Neither be ye called masters: for one is your Master, even Christ.

11 But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant.

12 And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted.

Matthew 23:23–28

23 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.

24 Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel.

25 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess.

26 Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also.

27 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness.

28 Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.

Commentary

Jesus' rebukes are precise, they preach but do not practice, they burden others but avoid responsibility, they love status and recognition, they obsess over minor details while neglecting justice, mercy, and faith, and they polish appearance while ignoring the corruption within.

The image of whitewashed tombs is reflective, beautiful outside, death inside. This is not ancient history, religious hypocrisy remains a danger in every generation. We all must examine ourselves honestly:

Do we emphasize image over integrity? Do we correct minor infractions while ignoring pride? Do we demand obedience from children while failing in humility ourselves? Christ's words are not meant to create fear, but repentance.

Discussion Questions for All Ages

Young Children

- Why did Jesus say the Pharisees were wrong?
- What comes out of our mouths?
- Does God see our hearts?

Older Children & Teens

- Why is it dangerous to care more about appearance than character?
- What does it mean to be a “blind leader”?
- How can you check your motives when serving God?

Adults

- Are there traditions in your life that overshadow Scripture?
 - Do you correct external behavior while neglecting internal formation?
 - Is humility visible in your leadership at home?
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Psalm Reading: Psalm 51:6–10 (KJV)

6 Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom.

7 Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

8 Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice.

9 Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities.

10 Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.

Commentary

God desires truth in the inward parts. This psalm contrasts sharply with Pharisaical religion. David does not defend himself, but pleads for inner cleansing. Families must cultivate repentance, not performance. Confession, not concealment. Humility, not image.

Hymn: “Rock of Ages”

By Augustus Toplady (1776)

1.

Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee;
Let the water and the blood,
From Thy wounded side which flowed,
Be of sin the double cure;
Save from wrath and make me pure.

2.

Not the labor of my hands
Can fulfill Thy law's demands;
Could my zeal no respite know,
Could my tears forever flow,
All for sin could not atone;
Thou must save, and Thou alone.

3.

Nothing in my hand I bring,
Simply to Thy cross I cling;
Naked, come to Thee for dress;
Helpless, look to Thee for grace;
Foul, I to the fountain fly;
Wash me, Saviour, or I die.

4.

While I draw this fleeting breath,
When mine eyes shall close in death,
When I soar to worlds unknown,
See Thee on Thy judgment throne,
Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee.



Family Application Points

1. Place Scripture Above Tradition

Evaluate customs in your home by the Word of God.

2. **Guard the Heart**

Focus on inward transformation, not surface compliance.

3. **Practice What You Teach**

Authority in the home must be matched by integrity.

4. **Cultivate Humility**

Status, recognition, and pride destroy spiritual credibility.

5. **Embrace Repentance**

Regular confession and correction keep hypocrisy from taking root.

 **A Sabbath Feast Prayer**

Father, we thank You that You see the heart. As we sit at this table, bless this food before us and bless the loving hands that prepared it. Guard our home from hypocrisy and pride. Teach us to love truth in the inward parts and to walk in humility before You. Cleanse what is hidden and strengthen what is weak. May our worship be sincere and our obedience genuine. In Jesus' name, Amen.

 **Closing Prayer**

Lord, You are holy and You cannot be deceived. Search our hearts and expose anything false within us. Remove the desire for appearance without substance. Teach us to lead with integrity, to serve with humility, and to walk in repentance daily. Let our home be marked not by performance, but by truth. Create in us clean hearts, O God, and renew right spirits within us. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.