



“We have to tell the difference between the differences that make a difference, and the differences that don’t make a difference.” (NT Wright)

Vv1-13 HONCHOS (Religious Authorities)

1. V1 “Pharisees and...teachers of the law” (or ‘Scribes’) – an investigating party again surveils Jesus (cf 3:22 ‘beelzebul’ accusation) but got more than they bargained for!
 - a. Beauty of the Law (Ps 119). If our thinking is right it’ll lead to inclusiveness, wonder and a hunger for holiness; if our thinking is wrong it’ll lead to exclusion, hidden sin and abuses of power.
 - b. Application – we come to investigate Jesus, but He sees straight thru us, all the way to the dregs of our heart.
2. V2 “disciples...defiled...unwashed”. Followers of Jesus who have a different set of metrics – “the great unwashed!”, without money, power, or social status.
3. V3 “give their hands a ceremonial washing” (lit ‘washed with the fist’) – here about ritual, not hygiene. Power to look down on others. A tacitly agreed social hierarchy.
4. V4 “observe many other traditions”, some manuscripts even add “dining couches”!
 - a. For over a millennia from Moses (13th century BC) there was such esteem for Torah that Jews only handed on oral traditions (Halakhah), until *Talmud*, comprising written extrapolations (*Mishnah*, from 3rd century AD) and later, commentary (*Gemara*, from 5th century AD), lest people be tempted to hold this as important as God’s law. Re Torah, Jewish tradition identifies 613 mitzvoh (Tractate *Makkot*, 23b)
 - b. Enumerated in *Mishneh Torah: The Guide for the Perplexed*, Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon, aka Maimonides or Rambam, (written in 1190), ‘Introductions’. See: https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/5614849/jewish/The-613-Mitzvot.htm
 - c. Here disciples not breaking Mosaic law but Jewish traditions (‘oral Torah’). Implication – Jesus’ disciples are not bound by traditions. Or even (more controversially) some aspects of the OT law.
 - d. Theologians distinguish between *Ceremonial*, *Civil* and *Moral* OT laws, with just the last enduring for the NT people of God. That is, “laws that are rooted and grounded in God’s own character. For God to abrogate these laws would be to do violence to His own person” (‘Which Laws Apply?’ , RC Sproul, <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/which-laws-apply>)
5. V5 “tradition of the elders” – akin to us saying ‘it’s just what we’ve always done’.
 - a. Q is why? Anarchists throw out all traditions, traditionalists keep any tradition – and both are wrong. ‘If it ain’t broke don’t fix it’ is a *non sequitur!*
 - b. “Good traditions shine a spotlight on God’s Word, move us to obedient service, & help our hearts sing. Celebrate your traditions with the prayer that Christ would be exalted. Change your traditions if they become more important than God’s Word.” (*Mark*, Guelich, Guthrie, Osborne, NLTSB, 1634).
6. V6 ‘hypocrites’
 - a. *Hypokritōn* – actor often masked, a dissembler, a fraud, a phony. Ouch!
 - b. “Hypocrisy is the art of affecting qualities for the purpose of pretending to an undeserved virtue.” (*France in 1938*, Martin, 2005)
 - c. “Their worship was not motivated by love but by a desire to attain profit, to appear holy, & to increase their status. We become hypocrites when we (1) pay more attention to reputation than to character, (2) carefully follow certain religious practices while allowing our hearts to remain distant from God, & (3) emphasize our virtues but others’ sins.” (*Mark*, Op. Cit., 1633).
 - d. Cancer of dualism amongst church leaders. Beware idolatry of interpretations and opinions. Bibliolatry v the power of Unity Eph 4:2-3, Jn 17:22-23.

7. Vv6-7 “These people honor me with their lips...” quoting from Is 29:13. But all were thinking of V14 – good news!
8. Vv8-12 “You have let go of the commands of God and are holding onto human traditions” – EG tradition of Korban. (Cf honor parents Ex 20:12, Deut 5:16; Mark explains here for Gentile, Roman audience – and us!)
 - a. Dogma / Doctrine / Opinion (*Who Needs Theology? An Invitation to the Study of God*, Grenz & Olson, 70–77; and also *Finding the Right Hills to Die On: the Case for Theological Triage*, Ortlund)
 - b. “*In the necessary things unity, in the secondary things liberty, in everything love*”, written in 1617) Marco Antonio de Dominis, 676), & Rom 14:1.
 - c. So what to do when commandments (appear to) conflict?
 - i. The ethics of radical obedience. God always makes a way.
 - ii. Re moral dilemmas see ‘No Small Faithfulness: A Loving God Who Will Never Leave Us to Our Own Devices’, by (sorry) Nic Gilmour, <https://www.dropbox.com/s/1wzdw2zdrq16433/No%20Small%20Faithfulness%20-%20Moral%20Dilemmas%20-%20N%20Gilmour.pdf?dl=0>
9. V13 “Thus you nullify the word of God” – hyperbole. They actually nullify (or ‘void’) their own legitimacy, for the Word of God is always true.

Vv14-16 PEEPS (Crowd listening to Jesus)

10. V14 “Listen...and understand”. When hearing alone will not suffice.
11. V15 “Nothing outside a person can defile them”
 - a. Sin as ‘defilement’. Poison that we drink – small but pernicious.
 - b. Triumphant over awful things: contexts, thought-diet, even abuse.
12. V15 “it is what comes out of a person that defiles them”
 - a. “*Simul iustus et peccator!*” Luther’s famous phrase, ‘simultaneously saint and sinner’. (Rom 3:23, Is 64:6, and, thankfully, 2Cor 5:21, 1Jn 4:10!)

Vv17-23 DUDES (Disciples – including us!)

13. V19 “into their stomach, then out of the body”.
 - a. Analogy: digestive tract.
 - b. Q: at what point does it “enter into” our body? A: when it becomes a ‘source of life.’ (See *The Myth of a Christian Religion*, Greg Boyd)
14. V19 “declared all foods clean”
 - a. Lobsters everywhere tremble! (cf “unclean” Lev 11:1-47)
 - b. Peter’s reaction in Acts 10:9-16 is all too common to us.
15. V21 “evil thoughts...theft, murder...slander, arrogance, folly” (yikes!)
 - a. Jesus: ‘it’s the thought that counts’ (Matt 5:21-22). Sin is not “a sort of germ” (as per Confucian, Jewish, Islamic belief, and beyond), but “like a cancer, growing within us” (see *Mark*, Cole, in NBC, 962)
 - b. Jas 1:21, KJV “Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.”
 - c. Perfection is not graded on a curve. It’s pass or fail!
16. V23 “these evils...defile a person”
 - a. Thus the importance of renewing our hearts. “Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life” (Prov 4:23, ESV)
 - b. “Streams of living water” Jn 4. What would it look like for HS renewal within?!

BLESSING: Ezek 37:1-10

~ FOR THE BRAVE OF HEART ~

- Dwell on this for 1 minute: “just how rotten am I?”
- Dwell on this for 1 lifetime: “just how wonderful Jesus is!”
- How are you hypocritical? (When you focus on: your reputation, religious practices, or other’s sin; rather than your character, intimacy with God, or your shortfalls)
- How have you muddled dogma/ doctrine / opinion? Were you charitable and loving about it? If ‘no’, who do you need to hold you to account that you’ll go apologize?
- “Are you so dull?” When was the last time that was said to you? (ie if it’s longer than a week or so, you might need to upgrade your friendships!). Read Prov 27:6.