

Midtown Messenger

Volume 3

April 19, 2020

Issue 16

Washing Your Hands

By: Ron White

Hey, why aren't you all washing your hands? That's the accusation Pharisees and Scribes hurled at Jesus when they declared his followers ate without proper hygiene, Mt. 15:1-6. Sounds like a reasonable rule of thumb to practice, doesn't it? We hear the same kind of guidelines urged by civic administrators nowadays.

What basis did these accusers use for rebuking Jesus? The Lord's "disciples transgress the tradition of the elders," (Mt. 15:2). Note their admission -tradition. Hand washing before eating was not a requirement in the Old Testament. These Pharisees made the disciples' conduct seem like a serious crime.

Let's remember the definition of "tradition." Whether in Hebrew, "to deliver, hand down," or in Greek, "to deliver, transmit," tradition amounts to customary practice. Among those Jews it referred to what was called oral law, which they declared had been successively handed down from Moses, through every generation to them. Eventually scribes compiled oral law into the Mishneh, explained by Talmuds.

"They believed that Moses, before he died, delivered this law to Joshua; he to the Judges; they to the prophets; so that it was kept pure until it was recorded in the Talmuds," (Albert Barnes, see Adam Clarke). Their specifications became so exacting that they defined the amount of water used, method of scrubbing and direction water must run from fingers down to the wrists, (Vincent). As abbreviated in Mark 7:3, "For

the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash the hands with the fist [diligently], holding the tradition of the elders."

Here was their estimation of "oral law" held by such troublesome Jews: "The words of the Scribes are lovely beyond the words of the law [Moses' RBW], for the words of the law are weighty and light, but the words of the Scribes are all weighty," (Cambridge Bible).

In our Bible studies, brethren sometimes bring up samples of man-made doctrines from church history. During second and third generations in church history, we find a similar malady that afflicted Judaism in Jesus' day. Men exalted human opinions. In the passing of time, decrees of councils and papal "bulls" saddled church members. Some problems sprang from church elders, men Paul labeled "wolves." They taught "perverse things to draw away disciples after them"(Acts 20:28 ff). Standard church histories commonly lay the blame for churches becoming subjected to human customs by the very behavior Paul warned about. So, histories mention enforced decrees from councils and dogmas from exalted bishops, arch bishops and popes.

Among present day churches, do we sometimes see the same human tendencies? When a pandemic strikes our country, congregations which respect Bible commands, inferences, perpetually binding examples run up against brethren who say, "This new plan does not sound right. That's not the way

we've done it in the past." Sure, customs commonly grow out of recognizing what works well, does not ruffle the feathers of members' scruples, keeps time frames that fit human needs and match local travel situations. When our customary arrangements get changed, that disrupts what we are used to doing. It messes with our habits so we might not like the change. How do you think Jews in Babylonian captivity felt when men could not travel to Jerusalem to keep God's appointed annual feast days (Ex. 23:14, 17; 34:22-23)? See the lament in Psalm 137. Instead, they resorted to forming synagogue meeting places.

During a health epidemic, a small congregation might have members drive to a parking lot, stay in their cars, roll down their windows to listen to a Bible lesson, sing together from their cars, then take the Lord's supper in their respective vehicles to maintain "social distancing." Another might use live streaming, or electronic connections. If early believers met at member's houses, such as Aquila and Prisca (1 Cor. 16:19), possibly in a brother's courtyard, then why can't we do the same in emergency situations?

Perhaps we should soberly ask ourselves in such times, "Is this modification compelling us to transgress the commandment of God? Or is this change from custom simply running up against the tradition of the elders?" Be careful about making condemning judgments. As brother Jared Jackson recently wrote, "The fact is that Christians have long understood that during times of grave danger or natural disasters, the public assembly may not continue 'business as usual.' We are facing a health natural disaster of epic proportions" (Christian Courier, March, 2020).

1 Kings 4:29.

Solomon was wise, but there was one question he couldn't answer. He asked the question in the book of Ecclesiastes: "What does a man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun?"

That's a big question. Who can answer it? Solomon tried. He was the wisest man of his generation. He searched for anything under the sun that might prove to be profitable, and in the end he came up empty.

"Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity." (Ecccl 1:2; also 12:8)

Ultimately, Solomon had to search and look "above the sun" to find meaning and purpose:

"The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil." (Ecccl 12:13-14)

And what was explained by Solomon in theory, was shown to be true by Jesus in reality. Jesus' resurrection gives us hope of a life "above the sun" where we are not stuck in an endless cycle of meaninglessness. Jesus gives our labor meaning, as the apostle Paul said in his great chapter on the resurrection:

"Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain." (1 Cor 15:58).

-Selected-

Hope Above the Sun

And God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding beyond measure, and breadth of mind like the sand of the seashore...

PRIVILEGED TO SERVE
Week of April 19, 2020

Sunday Morning:

Announcements:
Scripture Reading:

Lord's Supper & Offering

Bread:
Fruit of the Vine:
Offering:
Assist:

Sunday Evening:

Prayer

A.M. Opening:
A.M. Closing:
P.M. Opening:
P.M. Closing:

Song Leaders:

Sun. A.M.:
Sun. P.M.:
Wednesday:

Ushers:

Wednesday Devotional:

Open/Close Building:

Sound System:

Greeters:

Prepare Communion:

****Per the Men's meeting held Wednesday evening, March 18, 2020, it was decided to suspend all services effective immediately due to the Coronavirus and resume services on Sunday, May 3, 2020 if the CDC guidelines have been lifted. ****

IN NEED OF PRAYERS:

Please pray for the country during this time of the Corona Virus Pandemic.

BIRTHDAYS & ANNIVERSARIES:

Happy Birthday: Kelly Cannady (14); Nia FitzSimmons, Sandra Marie (17)

MEMBER INFORMATION UPDATE:

Clark and Barbara Withers - 301 Fieldstone, Victoria, TX 77901; home phone: 361-220-7329. Cell phone is the same.

**Sermons are available on
our website
www.midtowncoc.org
under Resources**

KEEP IN PRAYER

MIDTOWN MEMBERS:

Jeff Cannady
Les Daltry
Janice FitzSimmons
Dee Gilpatrick
Wayne Martin
Ann Pantel
Veronica Serenil
Clark Withers

SHUT-INS:

Faye Henderson
Charlie Mabe
Sandy Malone

If you would like to add or remove a name on the "Keep in Prayer" List, please see Nina Siegel.

MIDTOWN CHURCH OF CHRIST

Minister: Ronnie Scherffius
Secretary: Nina Siegel

TIMES OF SERVICES

Sunday Bible Class: 9:00AM
Sunday Morning Worship: 10:00AM
Sunday Evening Worship: 5:00PM
Wednesday Bible Class: 7:00PM

RECORD OF ATTENDANCE

Week of April 12, 2020

Bible Class.....
A.M. Worship.....
P.M. Worship.....
Wednesday Bible Class.....

Offering week of April 12, 2020.....\$3,316

Reading for this week:

And God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding beyond measure, and breadth of mind like the sand of the seashore...
1 Kings 4:29

SUPPORTED WORKS

India - Mani Pagidipalli
Bible Land Passages - John & Carla Moore
Southwest School of Bible Studies - William Pedigo

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