

Title: MYTHS OF HUMAN DEFILEMENT, MATTHEW 15:1-20  
(Chatham, NJ; 08/14/11, AM) [D & S-P, Myth versus Reality]

Theme: In addressing the Pharisees and their understanding of what defiles a person Jesus demolishes some of their cherished myths and ours as well.

Purpose: To address myths about human nature and sin and to exhort us to believe correctly about what is wrong with humanity.

Introduction:

1. Let's do a little myth busting today! (Perhaps you've seen the show "Mythbusters.")
2. We saw them once outside of the Letterman show: balloons.
3. No doubt you've seen articles with the same format: a list of things commonly believed is stated while the truth is explained to debunk the myth.
4. Since Jesus and his teachings are about truth, this is a logical format.
5. There may even be a grain of truth in some of them, but we'll demonstrate how untrue these ideas are.
6. The discussion began with a challenge about why Jesus' disciples don't wash before eating. The deeper issue is about religious and spiritual cleanliness.

I. Myth #1 – The Pharisees were legalists who sought righteousness by fastidiously keeping the Law of Moses. We incorrectly assume from this that being keeping the commandments is bad.

A. Defining legalism

1. A system whereby we earn righteousness by keeping all the rules
2. They might fit this in one sense
3. They adhered to a set of rules of their own making (vs. 9)
4. Romans 10:1-4 tells us that the Jews sought their own righteousness apart from the righteousness supplied by Christ.

B. But they weren't legalists in the eyes of God's Law

1. They created a loophole that allowed them to disobey the 5<sup>th</sup> commandment.
2. In reality they didn't keep the law; they disobeyed it.
3. They weren't law-keepers (legalists); they were lawbreakers.

II. Myth #2 – Tradition is bad

A. True in a sense

1. Tradition can be bad.
2. But it is bad only when tradition becomes more important than God's way.
3. We do things that others have done because they've always done it that way or maybe because we thought it was a genuine way to please God.
4. David wanted to build a Temple, but God said, "I never asked for that."

B. Tradition is not bad in this way

1. The word for tradition in the NT is the same word for "teaching."
2. Paul says, "Hold to the traditions that you were taught by us," 2 Thess. 2:15.
3. The trick is to differentiate between those that are from God and those that aren't.

III. Myth #3 – In two parts: first, avoiding certain foods is a religious duty; second, eating the right foods will make my life better. Jesus addresses food in the second part of his discussion.

A. Partly true

1. Good food is good for your body.
2. Too much of the wrong kinds of food can ruin your health.

3. Taking care of the body that God gave you is important.

B. Not true

1. Food does not make you a better person.
2. NOTE: A. Hitler was a strict vegetarian.
3. Jesus says that food passes out of your system, Mt. 15:17.
4. Mark 7:19 inserts in this same discussion that Jesus “declared all foods clean.”
5. Romans 14:17 sums up the truth about food, “For the Kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.”
6. Food neither helps nor hinders.

IV. Myth #4 – Dirt causes defilement, also stated as cleanliness is next to godliness.

A. True in one sense

1. Cleanliness helps prevent some diseases.
2. Sometime in the 19<sup>th</sup> century doctors learned that if they washed their hands in going from one birth to another, they cut down the infant mortality rate.
3. L. Pasteur discovered bacteria, and medical practices changed dramatically.

B. Not true in another

1. Jesus says eating with unwashed hands does not cause spiritual defilement, 20.
2. The real issue with cleanliness may have health benefits, but spiritually it is matters of the heart that cause defile us.
3. Inner cleanliness and outer cleanliness are not related.
4. It is much harder to deal with internal uncleanness.

V. Myth #5 – People are basically good at heart.

A. Seems to be true

1. The image of God has stamped some great things on humanity.
2. Ability to reason, to love, and to demonstrate self-sacrifice.
3. But this ignores the issues Jesus raises: evil thoughts, etc. (19).
4. What proceeds from the mouth is what is in one’s heart (18).

B. Not true in another

1. Paul says, “All have sinned and fallen short.”
2. Wicked deeds and thoughts have marred the image of God in us.
3. Jesus even says that we are evil (Mt. 7:11).
4. Whatever good is in us is there because of the presence of Christian teachings, not because we are inherently good.

Conclusion:

1. Beware of myths!
2. Satan’s lies are very subtle.
3. Believe the truth that is found only in the teachings of Christ.
4. We are defiled by the evil in our hearts; that can be dealt with only by the Gospel.
5. The Gospel makes changes where change really matters.