

HE MESSED UP THE SYSTEM!

Jesus was murdered not just because He claimed to be God... that was a convenient excuse, however, the real reason was much more diabolical. In fact, as we will look closely and see that if Jesus were here today our institutions of Christianity would have many of the same reactions that the religious people of Jesus' time had. Many would stand with the Pharisees and Sadducees in accordance with the death of a real troublemaker who was disrupting their programs. In fact it would seem reasonable, rational and a natural thing to do in the face of His outrageous ideas. To protect the holy doctrine something had to be done!

The devils tactics never change but repeat themselves as men fall into the same errors of the past. They argue over the same issues and would repeat the actions of the past to save tradition. Jesus said that Himself... “ How terrible it will be for you! For you build tombs for the very prophets your ancestors killed long ago. Murderers! You agree with your ancestors that what they did was right. You would have done the same yourselves. Luke. 11:47-48

I write this so we all may look into the dark spiritual areas of our lives and judge ourselves. To ask the question “Would we have nailed Christ to the cross if He had done the same to us as he did to the Hebrew leaders of His time? This is a question, not a statement or accusation. Let us reflect, as a new day is coming for us and the church. The time is ripe for Christ to do the same today as He did 2000 years ago to make His bride the church ready.

Jesus turned the Hebrew religious world upside down. He questioned their very salvation and defied their most holy ordinances. He hated their tribal mentality that this is our ‘Holy exclusive club spirit’. Jesus brought change and questioned empty faith and religious structure that oppresses instead of serving. But nobody likes their symbols and rituals destroyed. Not then or today.

What clinched Jesus' fate was His bold challenge to the symbols of Jewish identity. He announced a new order and a new day. God was

saying, “I am moving beyond your traditions and forms. Your faith no longer serves but must be served and for that reason it is wrong. It binds people instead of liberating them. The new kingdom will be much bigger and embrace a larger family and will be created by Me not your useless forms and rules. This was Jesus’ message that put Him and His life in jeopardy. He went against those who wanted to create an exclusive faith. All can come and drink of this new life was Jesus’ preaching. All were welcome Jew, Gentile, prostitute and sinner.

Jesus’ attitude toward parts of the oral law got Him in big trouble. There were two Torahs types of religious laws: the written five books of Moses and the oral interpretations of the written law. This is what Jesus attacked, the oral laws. This was men’s interpretations of divine law. The Pharisees followed the oral law or the tradition of the elders to the letter. We look at the Pharisee as an evil bunch today, but in that time, they were very sincere in having a vision of the law calling a Holy nation back to God through strict observance of the oral law. They were considered the most spiritual and the closest to God of all the Jews. The problem they had was that it wasn’t the Word of God they worshiped but the opinion and interpretations of men by the oral law.

Why did Jesus deplore religious ritual? He broke the rules of piety by working on the Sabbath, disregarding ritual cleansing, associating with disreputable and unclean persons according to the law. He also cleansed the temple of merchants and moneychangers which touched their personal finances. This made their blood boil as they were greedy. “How terrible it will be for you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! You are so careful to clean the outside of the cup and the dish, but inside you are filthy—full of greed and self-indulgence! Mt.23: 25. The temple was used as an industry that brought large profits to the ruling elite of the temple.

Jesus’ violation of Sabbath norms made the rulers of the temple mad. Surely He knew better. It was a distinctive feature of the Hebrew faith. It set the Jews apart from the rest of the world. Offenders received the death penalty. Jesus destroyed some of the binding customs of the Sabbath but upheld the principle of the Sabbath. Jesus defends his

disciples for shelling grain with their hands on the Sabbath. They were also not eating the proper ritual meal in its preparation. They were not eating a pure Sabbath meal by far. Jesus was then warned to follow the religious traditions or pay the consequences. This was to be cast from the temple and 'disfellowshipped' by the pure and this went to anyone else who followed Him. This was a form of punishment and with stoning to be the final outcome. Then they put him under surveillance to watch Him and find fault. They were the religious KGB of their day. This form of oppression is not new today.

After a warning He profanes the Sabbath again by healing. Why is Jesus so bold? Why get thrown out of the fellowship of the temple? Why play with death? Why does He lash out at oral tradition? He couldn't have waited one more day to heal? Why? Jesus struck at the leader's heart when He attacked oral tradition. It is no different today. To ask why something is done and if it is scriptural can bring down judgment even today. To ask why some scriptures are ignored and early church principle not considered can bring the accusation of being rebellious and having a contrary spirit against the things that have always been done. The message is clear 'don't question anything'. Jesus refused to take this position and it cost His life.

Those who obeyed the Sabbath of oral law were righteous and those who didn't were wicked according to the rulers. But the problem was that the Pharisees had made it so difficult and burdensome with their many additions. A man couldn't walk over 3 kilometers in the day. He couldn't tie a knot or put out a fire. A sick person could not be touched by a doctor. They used the Sabbath to control and oppress the people. And they couldn't obey it themselves but insisted on others to do so.

They had made something bad the Lord had originally established for a blessing and rest. So people could have time to honor God. But it was changed into something that was a burden and hated by the masses. The people couldn't wait till the beginning of the week to be free from it and the slavery it had become. The Sabbath was originally designed to serve people. To refresh us after six days of sweat. To help us physiologically, physically and emotionally. Jesus destroyed their oral traditions and said the Sabbath was to be a servant not a master.

Jesus called all those enslaved by custom to serve God. That infuriated the leaders as they controlled the people with their man-made customs. By violating the Sabbath He undercut the authority of the Pharisees. Jesus was saying: Don't place custom ahead of feeding and healing. Repeatedly Jesus places human need above religious dogma. For the Pharisees religion had become an empty ritual that benefited only them. The point was simple but profound. Who was in control of the Sabbath? The Pharisees got really mad when Jesus took this point of control from them.

Jesus got the religious leaders mad by skipping ceremonial washing. Mt.15:1-20 Pharisees walked 80 km to Galilee to question Jesus about this. In the Gospel of Luke the Pharisees were astonished that He ate without ritual washing. The Pharisees stressed eating with the right people (the pure) who obeyed the purity laws. They held to the tradition of the elders that required washing hands before eating. Why? Jesus stated: You abandon the commandment of God and hold to human tradition. "These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far away.

Their worship is a farce, for they replace God's commands with their own man-made teachings.'*

For you ignore God's specific laws and substitute your own traditions." (Mk. 7:8-9). Yes, they worshipped with their lips but not their heart. They once again taught human ideas as if they were divine doctrine. How much of that do we see today? The Pharisees had elevated oral tradition to divine status. Jesus openly condemned them for this. He was telling them, "You aren't God "I Am". Because of this murder came into their hearts and they wouldn't be satisfied until they carried it out.

Jesus was harshly criticizing the purity laws when he said defilement comes from things that come from the mouth, not those that go in. Gossip, deceit, false witness and slander defile a person not food. Perfect cleansing, He said, comes when acts of charity that flow from the heart is our actual nature. "So give to the needy what you greedily possess, and you will be clean all over" Lk.11:41.

What got the leaders madder than dirty hands were dirty friends. Tax collectors and sinners were considered filthy and wicked ones by the elders of the temple. They were considered beyond the sight of God's redemption. They were hopeless reprobates that were to be shunned from the exclusive club of the righteous. The religious leaders rejected them but Jesus showed what the religious rulers really were and their true motives of the heart and they burned with hatred and contempt by being exposed. By accepting everybody He sealed His doom. The spirit of exclusivity is dangerous to those who oppose it. But in the end it is life. Once again the leaders were infuriated and mocked Jesus. "Look He is a glutton and drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners". Mt.11:19 ...They attached His character. This is always the first line of defense by the self-righteous. The act of accusing others relieves the guilt and gives temporary rest to the evil heart. When one thinks he's more righteous than the victim he is accusing, it brings self-justification.

What set Jesus apart from all the prophets of the time was that he held his arms out to those who were considered unclean and unworthy. Being invited to a meal was a sign of honor and set social boundaries. A Pharisee would never invite dirty and wicked people. In the Hebrew culture sharing a meal meant sharing fellowship with God. In Jesus' compassion and acceptance for the rejected shows God's compassion for all. This exposed the lack of compassion by the religious and self-righteous. Jesus welcomed this low class of people into the community of salvation. This further fired up the hate for Jesus and the desire for his death. The religious wanted the power to say who were saved and not saved.

Jesus' final provocation was against what motivates many. When they arrived back in Jerusalem, Jesus entered the Temple and began to drive out the merchants and their customers. He knocked over the tables of the money changers and the stalls of those selling doves, and he stopped everyone from bringing in merchandise. He taught them, "The Scriptures declare, 'My Temple will be called a place of prayer for all nations,' but you have turned it into a den of thieves."* Mark 11:15-17. The money doctrine: Oh, did Jesus hit this hard and it

cost Him His life! Many responsible people in the temple were made very rich by the finances generated by the buying and selling in the temple. It wasn't just any area but the area designated for the Gentiles to pray. It stank with the smell of the refuse of animals and was so offensive nobody wanted to use it for prayer. The leaders didn't care, as the value of Gentile prayers were not important to them. What was important was the money and large offerings the area generated by buying and selling animals, money changing with bribes for the prime spots. Many times today if we cut through a lot of the spiritual dialog in many fellowships many decisions are made with money being the real motive. And it is not to be used to feed the poor or help the widows. It is not to take in orphans and relieve suffering. But for enriching and expanding materially. I would not accuse all of this, of course, but some fall short in this area and it is more serious than we think.

What Jesus did was more than just opening up the plaza for Gentile prayer but He was saying the true family of God is bigger than you permit it to be. Even though He probably only shut it down for only a short time... the principle was earth shaking. He was saying 'soon there would be no more need for animal sacrifices'. Jesus was boldly challenging the authority of the priestly families who ran people's faith for gain.

Let me emphasize that Jesus was criticizing human religion and was establishing a real faith with His Father's principles as the basis of truth.

The tendency for groups is to turn inward and get so exclusive that others don't seem saved and so there is no reason to visit them or get to know them. It may not be said openly but the 'sectarian spirit' is there. "Don't be selfish; don't live to make a good impression on others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourself" Phil. 2:3. Some even go so far as feeling they are the guardians of true Holiness and do not permit their group to be contaminated by others who are not ritually pure. If Jesus were to return to today he would find plenty of tables to over turn in many Christian Temples.

I have faith that Jesus is going to do a work in this time just as he did two thousand years ago to bring reality to the church. It will be as it was then. We will truly be a family in love with God and one another. It won't be just words and nice messages about love and unity but a reality that will change the world. And Jesus once again will be the head of this. Some will shout and praise what God is doing, others will be offended as their human structures are being questioned. Some will feel insecure and others will be joyous at a new work world-wide to bring the bride of Christ to its magnificent fullness. And in it's beauty and power we will be over-comers and God's work will truly be glorious in these last days. Join with me in prayer and the joy of the Lord for that great time. Let's not repeat the past but in faith believe for the future and act upon it in our daily lives. I am convinced only Jesus can bring true justice and order to the disorder. For sure it's not starting another group and once again fall into the same traps of human intervention in trying to do only what God can do. However, we as individuals can hold on to the concepts Christ laid down and as the early church have faith for a real future.

With patience and hope we will see Him, as He really is, The Lord of Glory! I am waiting for that day but until then let's hold on to what Jesus has left us to be and do.

Amen!

Brother Clark