

How to Get Clean Dishes



A Devotion-

This brief devotion is intended to be a reflection upon the problem presented by the dirty dishes that Jesus refers to in declaring the seven woes of the pharisees in Matthew 23. He uses the analogy of the pharisees being like cups and plates that are clean on the outside but filthy on the inside. I believe that the following scriptures will help us to know the difference in two options for getting clean dishes, which I take to represent personal holiness. One of these methods leads to life and one leads to death.

“25 “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. 26 You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and the plate, that the outside also may be clean.” (Matthew 23:25–26, ESV)

The Dilemma-

- ➡ We all have unclean dishes. We all have sin that lingers in us and we have failures and we struggle against various things that threaten us. There is a battle that the law of sin wages in our members against the law of God in our minds (cf. Romans 7:23).

We need clean dishes

- **Holiness commanded-** “14 As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, 15 but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, 16 since it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”” (1 Peter 1:14–16, ESV)
- **A holiness required-** “14 Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.” (Hebrews 12:14, ESV)

The pharisees cleaned their plates vigorously but the result was death. Jesus literally told them that they would go to hell if they continued in their way...

- **Hypocrites are in grave danger-** “29 “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!...33 You serpents, you brood of vipers, how are you to escape being sentenced to hell?” (Matthew 23:29a, 33, ESV)

The Solution-

➡ Plates can be cleaned one of two ways.

- **Life or death decision-** “13 For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.” (Romans 8:13, ESV)

Don't miss the qualifier in this statement by Paul. He did not say that we must wash our plates or we will die. This would be the route of the pharisees. He said we would live if our dishes were cleaned BY THE SPIRIT! Yet he does say “you put to death” in that sentence as well. We are no doubt involved...

➡ How do I then clean my plates “by the Spirit”?

Our personal holiness must be a consequence, not the substance of righteousness

Let's pickup at the next verse in Romans 8 about the life or death decision...

- **Identity rather than activity-** “14 For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. 15 For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you

have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!”” (Romans 8:14–15, ESV)

So the cleanliness of our dishes is an evidence of our identity! We are adopted sons of God, not busy dishwashers! Our holiness is a consequence of who we are and we cannot seek it directly.

The pharisees, at best, sought personal holiness as the substance of their righteousness before God, but this leads to death. We must find our personal holiness not through vigorous dish washing but by crying “Abba, Father!”

- **Communion rather than resolution-** “13 Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness.” (Romans 6:13, ESV)

Do we try to go straight from sinning to personal righteousness? Do we think it is in our power to change? Do we think a resolution to do better can do it? Self-help is undone here by Paul.

We must come and meet with God for transformation...this is not white knuckling or willpower. This is recognition and gratitude and gladness. This is surrender. This is humility and confession of our rebellion. This is reliance upon God. This is practicing the fear of the LORD. This is the prodigal returning in filth before his father and accepting the consequences.

- **Dependence rather than righteousness-** “14 Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving, and perform your vows to the Most High, 15 and call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me.”” (Psalm 50:14–15, ESV)

God does not ask us to present to him our righteousness. This is what the rich young man tried to do in Mark 10. God asks us to come to him for mercy in total dependence, like blind Bartimaeus later in the chapter. We should not ask, “What must I do to prove myself to you”, but “Have mercy on me O God and give me sight”. The question is not what we do for him but what he will freely do for us and how we will offer thanksgiving by our devotion. The rich young ruler, with money in hand, left Jesus holding nothing but sadness. But blind Bartimeaus, with new sight found, followed Jesus seeing only gladness.

Our personal holiness must be sought in the person of Jesus alone

Let's look and see what Jesus told the grumbling crowds following him regarding the way to eternal life...

- **Feasting rather than washing-** “53 So Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. 54 Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. 55 For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. 56 Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him.” (John 6:53–56, ESV)

And Paul's admonition regarding how to have a righteousness that comes apart from dishwashing...

- **Value the living Christ above all and trust him for your dirty dish problem-** “8 Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—” (Philippians 3:8–9, ESV)

So I suggest that the only way to get clean dishes is to meet with God in humble surrender, feast upon his Word, and value Jesus above all in our life. The blood and the body. The wine and the bread must be placed into the filthy vessels. This is the only thing that can clean the cup and the plate. Union with Christ. Abiding in Christ is our only access to righteousness. The righteousness of Christ is the only thing we can offer to God.

Therefore- the christian life is not a struggle for holiness, but a fight for joy in Christ.

God Is Not Hiring Dish Washers.

He Is Looking For People To Come And Gladly Feast Upon His Glorious Son.