

1. Heartless religion feeds on manmade traditions. (1-9)

What man-made traditions have been elevated to the position of doctrines of God in your life? Do you measure the 'godliness' of others based on your traditions?

The Pharisees were masters at finding excuses to avoid the authority of God's Word while using religious arguments. Do you ever use one part of the bible to exclude you from your responsibility to another part of the Bible? (i.e. grace vs. truth, saving vs. giving, working for Christ vs. resting in his work, etc.)

There has been a lot of media attention surrounding the Roman Catholic Church lately. Do you know what the major distinctions are between Protestant and Catholic theology? Would you be able to speak biblically about Justification by faith alone, baptism, purgatory, the worship of Mary, the authority of scripture, etc.

Do you think these doctrines are big deals or minor differences?

2. Heartless religion can't wash a polluted heart. (10-20)

What kind of things regularly come out of you that you are not proud of? Where does it come from? Do you excuse your behavior by disconnecting your actions from your heart?

Read v. 19. How many of the seven things that Jesus said come out of the heart have been part of your life?

How does a polluted heart get washed? How was your heart washed from these things?

3. Heartless religion crumbles at the table of mercy. (21-31)

Jesus "went away" from the religious people for a while. Have you ever been in a place you felt like Jesus had left?

How have you had to exercise faith on behalf of one of your children?

How do you respond to unanswered prayer? What are you believing God for this week with great faith?

4. Heartless religion lacks the compassion to satisfy the hunger of your soul. (32-39)

Why do you think Matthew recorded two stories of Jesus feeding large crowds with only a few slight differences? (Matt. 14:13-21, Matt. 15:32-39) What are the only differences in the stories?

Do you ever feel like a religious outsider? Do you think Jesus expressed the same compassion and satisfied the same hunger for both religious and irreligious people? What is the significance of this for you?

Additional Scripture

- Jeremiah 17:9
- Proverbs 4:23
- Hebrew 3:12
- Colossians 2:18-22
- Titus 1:14
- James 3:5-8
- Isaiah 1:13-15
- Rom. 3:29
- Rom. 10:12
- Eph. 3:8