

September 6, 2020

"Who do you say that I am?"

"Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, "Who do people say that I am?" They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets."

"But what about you?" he asked, "Who do you say that I am?"

Mark 8:27-29

Just as determining who or what we turn to in a time of crisis demonstrates who Jesus is to us, so also does the source of our values. We live in a world with literally thousands of rules and regulations, but those do not actually define who we are and who we follow. Instead, each of us has a set of personal values which determine our character in any and all situations.

Our personal system of values comes from numerous sources and many influences. Obviously our parents have a great deal to do with the development of our personal values, but so also do teachers, coaches, ministers, friends and other leaders. So, in answering Jesus' question, **"Who do you say that I am?"** our personal values in action also reflect the honesty of our answer.

During Jesus' ministry, as Mark records it, a group of Pharisees and Scribes challenged the Master because his followers were not following the prescribed rules for hand washing that had become a part of their own system of values. Over the centuries the Jewish religious teachers had evolved a complex system of regulations governing handwashing. Those who practiced this complex system of regulations were 'righteous' and those who did not were not.

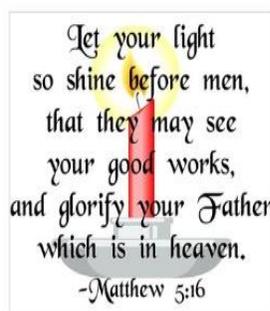
When challenged Jesus told these 'righteous' leaders that Isaiah was correct when he wrote, **"These people honor me with their lips but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain: Their teachings are but rules taught by men."** The Master told them, **"You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men."** (Mark 7:6-8)

For these religious leaders, personal values were the product of their traditions and not the product of God's direction. In truth they often set aside the direct and specific commandments of God to follow the teachings and traditions of men.

Like these leaders, you and I can easily exchange our own wisdom for the wisdom of God and this invariably shows up not so much in what we say, but in what we do. So, we might claim to be guided by Jesus' direct and specific teachings because to us he is **"...the Christ, the Son of God..."** but in our day-to-day interactions with others we are setting those same directions aside to do what others teach us to do.

When Jesus commands us to **"Love our neighbors as ourselves"**; or to **"...love others as I have loved you..."**; or to **"...treat others the way you would like to be treated..."**; those commandments should be reflected in our personal values and actions. If they are not then we have set aside the commands of God for some other set of teachings. Like these religious leaders, we are those who honor God with our lips, but our hearts are far from him.

In our times we are constantly being intentionally influenced to set aside the teachings of the one we call Lord and Master. If we would really claim that Jesus is not just the Lord and Master, but our Lord and Master, then



our personal values reflected in our words and actions must reflect that submission.

To set aside the direct and specific teachings of Jesus, no matter what the reason, means that we have become those who worship him with our lips, but little else. The choice to hold on to the personal values that mark you and I as true believers is never easy, but in these dark days, it has never been so essential. The light of Jesus shines through our words and our actions when we truly follow Him.

