Connection with Unit Theme: To complement the small group study *Jesus Changes Everything*, these sermon outlines will use the same Scripture passages as the small group study, so the pastor can reinforce the study from the pulpit.

The Point: Jesus calls us to a higher standard.

Introduction: Celia and I have a dear friend who was a member of our church several years ago. He had to relocate to another town because of his job situation, but we still see him once in a while. He was just an old country boy and didn’t have a pretentious bone in his body. He had a great sense of humor and a lot of common sense. One evening we were having a fellowship after church, and he told us about a time he was invited to eat at a very posh restaurant. He noticed a small bowl of water next to his plate. He picked it up and drank it. When the waiter found out about it, he had a good laugh. He explained to our friend that it was a finger bowl and it was for washing one’s hands. Our friend’s reply to the waiter was priceless: “Where I come from, we always wash our hands before we sit down!”

In the seventh chapter of Mark, the Pharisees got on to Jesus and His disciples for not washing their hands before they ate. In Jewish society, washing hands was not done for physical cleanliness, but for spiritual cleanliness. They implied that Jesus and His disciples were ceremonially unclean. Jesus used the occasion to teach them a lesson on true spiritual cleanliness.

I. **A strained confrontation.**

   A. Jesus was asked why His disciples did not wash their hands before they ate bread.
      1. The accusers.
         a. The Pharisees were a sect of Judaism that demanded strict adherence to the Law of Moses. They also elevated their own traditions to the level of the law.
         b. The scribes were experts in interpreting law and tradition.
      2. The offense.
         a. Before Jews ate bread, they would wash their hands in a very specific and detailed manner.
         b. The practice was more about ritual purity than hygiene.
         c. It was rooted in tradition, not Scripture.
   B. Jesus called them out for their hypocrisy.
         a. Isaiah had rebuked the people of Israel for going through the motion of worship when their hearts were not devoted to Him.
         b. He also accused them for teaching manmade regulations instead of His revealed Word.
      2. Jesus applied this passage to the Pharisees.
a. They, too, were so obsessed with all their rituals and ceremonies, but their hearts were not truly devoted to God.
b. Their traditions had taken the place of Scripture.
c. Jesus called them “hypocrites”, which originally referred to an actor playing multiple roles. In this case, Jesus was speaking of people whose conduct did not match their words.

- Some years ago I visited a church in California that talked a great deal about “standards”. They wanted to be completely different and set apart from the world, so they adopted very stringent rules on what a person could and could not do. The trouble was, they talked about their “standards” than they did about Jesus. There’s nothing wrong with standards, but when you’re so obsessed with them that you lose sight of everything else, something is wrong.

II. A stern counterargument.

A. Jesus gave an example of how the Pharisees disregarded the law.
   1. The law required people to honor their parents.
      a. Cursing one’s parents was a capital offense.
      b. Children were expected to take care of aged parents.
   2. The Pharisees undermined this commandment with their tradition.
      a. “Corban” – This was a transliteration of a Hebrew word which means “a gift dedicated to God”.
      b. If someone declared that certain valuables were corban, they were not obliged to use these things to care for their parents.

B. How do people undermine God’s Word today?
   1. Through tradition (“The Bible is the product of the church, and therefore can only be interpreted by the church.”)
   2. Through subjective experiences (“That may be what the Bible says, but God told me…”) 
   3. Through current trends (“I know what the Bible says, but we’re living in a different day now.”)
   4. Through excuses and justifications (“I know it’s wrong, but….”)
      • The late Chuck Colson said, “I learned from my White House days that the human capacity for self-justification and self-rationalization is infinite. We really know how to make ourselves feel good about doing bad.”

III. A sensible caution.

A. Jesus called the crowd together again and instructed them.
   1. “There is nothing from without a man…” – The context indicates that Jesus was talking about food.
      a. As Jesus noted, food enters the body and then leaves it (v. 19).
      b. Some foods may be unhealthy for the body, but none of them make a person spiritually unclean.
   2. “The things which come out of him…” – That is, ungodly attitudes and immoral actions.
      a. Jesus named a few of them in verse 22.
      b. When a person does evil works, it indicates he has an evil heart.
         As the old saying goes, “Whatever’s down in the well will come up in the bucket.”

B. How does this apply to us today?
   1. Healthy eating is fine, but we must keep it in perspective.
a. No matter how well you take care of your body, it will continue to get older and will someday die.
b. A person can be physically healthy and still go to hell.

2. Though physical health is important, spiritual health is more important.
   a. Do you know that your sins are forgiven through faith in Jesus Christ, and that you’re going to heaven when you die?
   b. If you do know Jesus as your Savior, are you honoring God with both your words and your deeds?
   c. Are you avoiding things that pollute the heart and the soul? These can include books, TV programs, websites, music, magazines, and a whole host of other things. I heard a man talk about this issue when I was a teenager, and he said something I’ve never forgotten: “You don’t put garbage in your mouth, so why put it in your mind?”

Conclusion: I recently turned 50. As I’m getting older, my doctors are really getting on to me about taking better care of myself. They’re right, of course. This body is the only one I’ll have in this life, so I do need to take better care of it. However, as important as your physical health is, your spiritual health is much more important. How well are you taking care of yourself spiritually? Are you spending time with God daily in prayer and in the study of His Word? Are you serving Him through a local church? Are you honoring Him, not only with your outward actions, but with your thoughts and attitudes? Remember, Jesus calls us to a higher standard. God has not called us to “fit in” with this world, but to stand out. Let us live in a way that brings glory to Him.


Ken Jones is the senior pastor of Worsham Baptist Church in Farmville, Virginia. He holds a B.S. in history from the University of Tennessee at Martin and an MDiv. from Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary. His wife, Celia Carroll Jones, is an associate professor of government at Hampden-Sydney College.