

## Cosmic Guide to Guilt-Free Living

✦ Washed of vain worship (vv.1-8)

✦ Cleansed inside out (vv.14-15,21-23)

In the name of Jesus, the soul's best Friend, dearly redeemed from guilt and sin:

Sometimes it takes a dumb story to illustrate highly religious foolishness. So let's say I've figured out a way to make driving through southern Minnesota less boring. I'm convinced it's wrong to fall asleep at the wheel. So next time I'm driving I-90 from Rapid City, I take the 80 mph Speed Limit signs across the border and replace the 70 mph Minnesotans. My reasoning is flawless (in my own mind). Drivers should be more alert....Higher speeds are less boring....No one stopped me, so it must be alright.

State Patrol could give better examples of dumb solutions to people's perceived problems. But from a spiritual standpoint, see how folks can soothe their guilt by convincing themselves they're right, or at least they didn't get caught. We need help from above, God's **Cosmic Guide to Guilt-Free Living**.

✦ Washed of vain worship (vv.1-8)

Ever since the Fall into sin, sons of Adam have followed the way of Cain. He felt God should accept his offering – as if Cain could choose his own way to serve God. The worldwide Flood of Noah's day wiped out all the Cainites; God started over. But sin has still clouded our view of God's Law written on our hearts. So God chiseled His Ten Commandments in stone on Mount Sinai for Moses and the Israelites. Since God's Ten Commandments are repeated in New Testament form, we understand them as a summary of God's holy will, His moral law for all people of all time. In our Old Testament Lesson, God commanded through Moses: ***“Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it, but keep the commands of the LORD your God that I give you.”*** (Deuteronomy 4:2 NIV84)

During the centuries before Christ, Jewish religious leaders decided Ten Commandments were not enough to take away guilt and make people right with God. So they added a few, 613 rules by one estimate, regulating the Israelite's lives right down to the tiniest details.<sup>1</sup> Mark reports the Pharisees were angry with Jesus for forgiving sins, eating with tax collectors and “sinners,” not making His disciples fast, healing on the Sabbath Day. ***“The Pharisees...began to plot...how they might kill Jesus.”*** (3:6)

By the time we get to our text in Mark 7, the Pharisees are boiling mad. Their traditional rules apparently required a special way to wash hands with a closed fist. Failing that they considered serious sin. The fact that Jesus would not make His disciples wash their way, put them over the edge. So many of us Americans can see their sin of religious intolerance, but miss our own sin of arrogant pride.

“During the fall of Cambodia the Communists used a simple but very effective way of controlling their prisoners as they forced them to walk through the jungle. Using a long needle they would thread something like fish line through the palms of each of their captives. If a prisoner lagged behind or tried escaping, the pain would be excruciating for all. When people think of being under sin's bondage they often think of the ‘big and dirty’ sins like murder, adultery, addictions. They picture sin's bonds as heavy duty chains. But the devil is smart. He often controls people like those Communists in Cambodia controlled their captives – with slender threads of pride, bitterness, and the like. One of his most common ‘threads’ is self righteousness. That was the thread the devil used to bind the Pharisees of Jesus' day.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Wicke, H. E. (1988). *Mark*. Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Pub. House.

<sup>2</sup> Mark Cares, “The Captivity of Sin.” Blog posts about Truth in Love to Mormons. <http://hishealingnow.wordpress.com/>

Are we not also in danger of highly religious pride? That's why we need help from above, God's **Cosmic Guide to Guilt-Free Living** in Christ. Otherwise, we can easily become the hypocrites "*in vain...worship...teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.*" (v.7 KJV) Good traditions like Christmas trees, lights, Easter lilies, pulpit-altar-font furnishings, our treasured liturgy can easily become requirements in our minds. We may even think Christians in other cultures are not really worshiping God unless they use our liturgies and sing our songs our way. By nature we refuse to let go of our own human traditions and opinions, while we fail to get a grip on God's Word. We need the LORD to take hold of us with His Word and sacraments. By His grace we can guard His twin teachings of Law and Gospel.

Adding more laws to God's Ten Commandments is like sending texts that it's illegal to text while driving. You'd have to break the law to read them! Making New Testament law of the Old Testament tithe would decrease the offerings of repentant tax collectors like Zacchaeus (Luke 19:8) and grateful widows like the one Jesus honored in the temple (Mark 12:42-44). Likewise church customs: "When it comes right down to it, both traditionalism and faddism in worship and ministry forms tend to be two sides of the same coin. Both are often the result of intellectual, even spiritual, slothfulness. Rather than giving God our best, we give him the easiest, the 'most comfortable,' and too often the most mundane."<sup>3</sup> We need to be **Washed of vain worship** by God's Word from above. Then we can also be...

### ✦ **Cleansed inside out (vv.14-15,21-23)**

We need to understand the three purposes of God's Law. Written on our hearts it does *curb* foolish drivers from texting or removing road signs: They might get caught. But unless we Christians also see God's law as a *mirror* to show us our sins, we do foolish things like Hollywood lately.

What happens when reality shows set up Christian families as role models? Is the impression given that Christians are not "as bad"? Won't nonbelievers research all the dirt they can find? They don't care about God's morality. They insist, "There is no right or wrong." (At least until you try to steal something of theirs!) But they take the devil's delight using God's law against God's people. Rightly dividing Law and Gospel is difficult enough in our Christian lives. It will never be clear in the media. Only a repentant heart, convicted of personal sin by God's Law + comforted by God's Gospel of forgiveness can be **Guilt-Free** in God's sight. Hypocrisy does terrible damage to the cause of Christ. God's Law has no power to make people right. As God said through His Apostle Paul: "*Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.*" (Colossians 2:23) The Law is good to show us the sin in our sinful hearts and our need for cleansing. But only the Gospel can cleanse.

"*Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst*" (1 Timothy 1:15 NIV84). Paul has looked into the mirror. But in the Gospel he sees your Savior here too! Christ came for sinners just like Paul, you and me. Not by works but by inheritance of God's grace we hope for heaven.

We were taught growing up to celebrate God's grace in daily devotions at breakfast or dinner. When my stepfather first dated my Mom, he heard us reading *Meditations* at the table. For years he told how he said to my future stepsister driving home, "I don't know what that family has. But whatever it is, I want it." You know, because your family too has this sweet, sweet forgiveness from Jesus. His amazing grace makes us love one another as Christ loved us and to forgive as we've been forgiven. The Good News Gospel has the divine power to make us want to use God's perfect Law as a *guide* for thankful living. For months in hospice and through his last breath last week Johnny trusted God's grace in Christ. He got his wish to wake up from hospice saying, "Good morning, Jesus!" God's **Cosmic Guide to Guilt-Free Living** in Christ is so sweet because the Holy Spirit is working with Word and sacrament to make us new, **Cleansed inside out**. Let God's tradition get a grip on us! Amen.

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<sup>3</sup> Prange, Peter M. "Worship and Ministry: What of God and What of Men? A Study of the Augustan, Articles XII-XV, Part II" *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Vol. 101, No. 1, Winter 2004, p. 33.

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