

## Matthew 15: 1-20

**Then came to Jesus scribes and Pharisees, which were of Jerusalem, saying, <sup>2</sup>Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they wash not their hands when they eat bread.**

Notice the groups that approach Jesus....hypocrites in the church. They ask the question, why don't his disciples follow their rules and traditions? They didn't wash their hands before eating.

Logically, this makes sense. You should probably wash your hands before you eat.

Background: It was not part of the scriptures but rather a custom that became a religious rite. They stressed it and believed not washing your hands before eating would defile you.

What do you think the motivation is behind this question?

- Perhaps to prove they were righteous, and Jesus wasn't
- Perhaps they wanted to maintain control and cast doubt on Jesus' ministry
- Perhaps they didn't want Jesus to succeed and/or wanted him to conform to their style
- Fear of losing control and power.

This is about perspective. They have their perspective, but they are missing God's perspective.

**<sup>3</sup>But he answered and said unto them, Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?**

**<sup>4</sup>For God commanded, saying, Honour thy father and mother: and, He that curseth father or mother, let him die the death. <sup>5</sup>But ye say, Whosoever shall say to his father or his mother, It is a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; <sup>6</sup>And honour not his father or his mother, he shall be free. Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition.**

Jesus' response is initially in the form of a question that he flips back on them. Notice the following:

- Notice Jesus doesn't address or defend their accusations against his disciples. That is not the major issue. **Important** – he doesn't let them focus on the wrong issue. They are wanting to discuss the wrong thing.
- While they say his disciples transgress the traditions of men, Jesus asks why they transgress the commandment of God. He is showing their fault is much greater than the fault they are focused on.
- Let's them know that the very traditions they so proudly keep may in some instances be working against the commandments of God.
- Gives them a specific example of how their traditions work against the Kingdom of Heaven.

Matthew Henry

- What their tradition was; That a man could not in any case bestow his worldly estate better than to give it to the priests, and devote it to the service of the temple: and that when any thing was so devoted, it was not only unlawful to alienate it, but all other obligations, though ever so just and sacred, were thereby superseded, and a man was thereby discharged from them.
- Partly from their ceremoniousness, and the superstitious regard they had to the temple, and partly from their covetousness, and love of money: for what was given to the temple they were gainers by.
- Some go further, and supply it thus, "*He doth well, his days shall be long in the land, and he shall be looked upon as having duly observed the fifth commandment.*" The pretence of religion would make his refusal to provide for his parents not only passable but plausible. But the absurdity and impiety of this tradition were very evident and had they known what that meant, *I will have justice, and mercy, and not sacrifice*, they had not thus made the most arbitrary rituals destructive of the most necessary morals. To break the law is bad, but to *teach men so*, as the scribes and Pharisees did, is much worse, [ch. 5:19](#).

The specific example:

- Jesus says God's law was to honor your parents and that there is judgement upon those who curse them (Exodus 21:17).
- But instead of obeying God, they developed a work around where someone could dishonor their parents and buy their way out.
- Instead of honoring and supporting parents, they created a loop hole where you could declare your possessions dedicated to the Temple as a gift. They as a result, were justifying not providing for their parents.
- By placing their tradition above the law of God, it no longer has the impact or effect on God's people that He designed.
- They replaced God's desire and instruction with their own man-made rule.

**<sup>7</sup>Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, <sup>8</sup>This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. <sup>9</sup>But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.**

Jesus called them hypocrites. Hypocrite translated is an actor or pretender. **If Jesus is in effect calling them pretenders, what are they pretending to be?** They are pretending to be holy and righteous people of God. In reality, they are not holy and they are not in right standing with God. So, they are fooling themselves and others, but not Christ.

He brings in the scriptures and prophesy which should have served as a warning and wake up call (Isa 29:13). We should be cautious as well not to fall into this category. Try using the scriptures like Christ did to convince people to change....don't just take my word for it.

How are they pretending? With their words they try to approach God and say the right things, in their praise they honor God with their lips (lip service), but their motivation for doing this is not led by the Holy Spirit. They are not doing it for God, they are doing it for themselves and to impress others. You can be very religious and still not have a heart for God....because you don't obey the God you say you serve.

- They draw near physically. Matthew Henry -- *The Pharisee went up to the temple, to pray; he does not stand at that distance which those are at, who live without God in the world, but has a name among the people near unto him.*
- Ezek 33:31
- James 1:26

This area of self-righteousness is dangerous for the hypocrite as well as for those they "offend" by leading them astray and causing them to not trust and obey the word of God.

Jesus states their praise and worship is vain and of no benefit because it doesn't come from the heart or the Holy Spirit. Also, instead of teaching God's words, they have replaced them with man-made doctrine.

David Guzik -- God is interested in the internal and the real. We are far more interested in the merely external and image. One must take care that their relationship with God is not merely external and image.

**Key Application Point:** Learn to handle things like Jesus did so you don't lose focus....deal with the most important issue first. Jesus uses 4 steps:

1. Don't try to defend yourself. That causes you to shift the focus off the most important thing.
2. Respond with a question. The right questions help to reveal the truth and puts the focus back on what's most important.
3. Give a specific example for them to relate to.
4. Back it up with the Word. Don't just take my word for it, this is what God says.

Do this before you accuse someone. When you accuse someone as your first step, people will get defensive, and you may lose the opportunity to get them to see the need to change.

**Note the use of questions!** The devil asks questions too. His questions are designed to trick and cast doubt to the truth; God's questions are designed to reveal the truth.

**<sup>10</sup> And he called the multitude, and said unto them, Hear, and understand: <sup>11</sup> Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man.**

Jesus next sets out to correct this false doctrine that was being taught by the religious leaders. He called the multitude so this must be an important message he wanted them to hear. It is also therefore, important for us to both hear and to understand.



It is not what goes into the mouth that defiles you. He tells them this specifically because the Pharisees were teaching a different doctrine. Instead, what comes out of the mouth is what defiles a person. The Pharisees have it twisted around.

David Guzik -- This is not to say that there are not defiling things that we can take into ourselves; one example of this might be pornography. But in this specific context, Jesus spoke about ceremonial cleanliness in regard to food....

Matthew Henry -- We are polluted, not by the meat we eat with unwashed hands, but by the words we speak from an unsanctified heart; thus it is that *the mouth causeth the flesh to sin*

**<sup>12</sup>Then came his disciples, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the Pharisees were offended, after they heard this saying? <sup>13</sup>But he answered and said, Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up. <sup>14</sup>Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch.**

The disciples are concerned it seems because these religious Pharisees were offended by Jesus' response. Question, why do you think the disciples were concerned?

Are you ever concerned about what religious people might think about you? Are you careful not to tick them off?

Application Point: They were offended after they heard Jesus tell them the truth. Christ uses examples and questions. The self-righteous will be hard to reach and offended if the truth doesn't humble them into submission. Do not be surprised, be grieved, and pray that they will humble themselves and get back in right alignment with God. Don't fall into this self-righteous trap. Know how to minister to them with the truth. Sadly, not everyone who has God, really know Him as God in their lives.

Jesus refers to the plant example used in earlier parables. There are different plants in the world growing up together. Those plants not planted by God will eventually fail. There is an expiration date on this group. Key observations and danger for them:

- We don't need to battle them. Leave them alone, don't worry about their threats, their end is coming.
- They are blind which can mean they are unaware of where they are in the field. They don't see that they will not receive a desired end.
- Not every plant in the field is planted there by God. They may look similar on the outside, but the root structure is wrong....wrong type of seed, not good seed.
- Leave them alone, if you follow them, you will fall into the same blindness.
- Leave them alone, they will fall into the ditch and all those that follow them blindly will fall in also.
- Application – some folks you just need to leave alone because they just don't get it.

Matthew Henry – they are marked for destruction. Remember who these people are....hypocrites. They know God but don't really know God.

**<sup>15</sup> Then answered Peter and said unto him, Declare unto us this parable. <sup>16</sup> And Jesus said, Are ye also yet without understanding?**

Peter wants to gain a better understanding. Jesus responds in the form of a question.

- The Pharisees are blind and don't see they are in danger.
- Are you also not understanding the importance of this truth?

**<sup>17</sup> Do not ye yet understand, that whatsoever entereth in at the mouth goeth into the belly, and is cast out into the draught? <sup>18</sup> But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. <sup>19</sup> For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: <sup>20</sup> These are the things which defile a man: but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man.**

Jesus explains because it was important for his disciples to understand. So, it must be critically important that we understand so we are not blind.

#### Understanding this parable.

- In the natural, what you put inside your body from the outside, naturally will come out the backend as waste.
- What would defile you is no longer in you and by design leaves you so it cannot continue to pollute the body. This is how toxins are removed. This is how it works in principle.
- However, the things that flow out of your mouth (and not out the backend) doesn't come from outside the body. It originates from inside the body.
- It comes from the heart or the mind. Things from within are the things which defile us. What are these sources which flow from the heart/mind and are manifested in our attitude and actions/words?
  - Evil thoughts instead of Kingdom thoughts.
  - Murder and killing of people literally, verbally, physically, etc. Includes hate.
  - Sexual sins and lust involving others. Not just about you, others are following you into the pit. See Matthew 5:28.
  - Thefts – coveting and taking what doesn't belong to you. Notice, there is a process involved here as with all sin.
  - Lying on others and slander and misinformation. Speaking evil against someone.
- Christians who display these traits are not only blind but defiled. If we are blind to these actions and the source, it will be difficult for us to see the need to change. This change must happen on the inside, in the mind!

- This is important to understand. Trying to address and clean up the outside doesn't deal with where the source of the problem is. Cannot effectively be successful if you try to fix this from the outside.
  - If you try to fix things from the outside, then we don't understand how this works, then we are blind too.
  - Must get to the root of the matter to be clean.
  - Jesus is teaching them to work from the inside out.
  - You can draw closer physically....and still be far away from the favor and presence of God.

How many times have we addressed things from the outside; clean up the outside first but never truly address the source of the problem. It is not a murder problem or stealing problem, it is a heart condition. If the above list comes out of you, you might have a bad heart or a heart defect.

Deal with the heart and the items on the list will not come out of you. Can followers of Christ and/or religious people have a heart condition?

Matthew Henry

An inordinate appetite, intemperance, and excess in eating, come out of the heart, and are defiling; but meat in itself is not so, as the Pharisees supposed. What there is of dregs and defilement in our meat, nature (or rather God of nature) has provided a way to clear us of it; *it goes in at the belly, and is cast out into the draught*, and nothing remains to us but pure nourishment. So *fearfully and wonderfully are we made* and preserved, and our souls held in life....if we eat with unwashed hands, and so any thing unclean mix with our food, nature will separate it, and cast it out, and it will be no defilement to us. It may be a piece of cleanliness, but it is not point of conscience, to wash before meat; and we go upon a great mistake if we place religion in it. It is not the practice itself, but the opinion it is built upon, that Christ condemns, as if meat commended us to God ([1 Co. 8:8](#)); whereas Christianity stands not in such observances

Note, Sin is defiling to the soul, renders it unlovely and abominable in the eyes of a pure and holy God; unfit for communion with him, and for the enjoyment of him in the new Jerusalem, into which nothing shall enter that defileth or worketh iniquity. The mind and conscience are defiled by sin, and that makes every thing else so, [Tit. 1:15](#). These therefore are the things we must carefully avoid, and all approaches toward them, and not lay stress upon the washing of the hands. *To eat with unwashed hands* (which was the matter now in question), *this defileth not a man*. If he wash, he is not the better before God; if he wash not, he is not the worse.

What are examples of things we have seen where tradition takes on a religious law from man but not from God?

The danger may be by obeying the traditions rather than God's Spirit, places us in a false sense of security, self-righteousness, and blindness. Don't fall into the ditch and take others with you.

Not the external but the internal that leads to righteousness. (Guzik)



'Murders' begin not with the dagger, but with the malice of the soul. 'Adulteries and fornications' are first gloated over in the heart before they are enacted by the body. The heart is the cage from whence these unclean birds fly forth." (Spurgeon)

**Observation:**

There is a process for righteousness (7 steps/The Feasts) and there is a process for sin. See 1 John 2:15-17 and compare with Gen 3:6.