

TRADITIONS OF MEN OR THE COMMANDMENTS OF GOD?

BIBLE TEXT : Matthew 15:1-20

LESSON 95 Senior Course

MEMORY VERSE: "For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies" (Matthew 15:19).

BIBLE TEXT in King James Version

Matthew 15:1-20 (KJV)

¹ Then came to Jesus scribes and Pharisees, which were of Jerusalem, saying,
² Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? for they wash not their hands when they eat bread.
³ But he answered and said unto them, Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?
⁴ For God commanded, saying, Honour thy father and mother: and, He that curseth father or mother, let him die the death.
⁵ But ye say, Whosoever shall say to *his* father or *his* mother, *It is a gift*, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me;
⁶ 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.
⁷ Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying,
⁸ This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with *their* lips; but their heart is far from me.
⁹ But in vain they do worship me, teaching *for* doctrines the commandments of men.
¹⁰ And he called the multitude, and said unto them, Hear, and understand:
¹¹ Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man.
¹² Then came his disciples, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the Pharisees were offended, after they heard this saying?

BIBLE REFERENCES:

1 Accusation of the Scribes and Pharisees

1. They accuse the disciples of transgressing the traditions of the elders, Matthew 15:1, 2
2. The Pharisees transgress the commandments of God by their traditions, Matthew 15:3
3. The Lord commands us to honor our parents, Matthew 15:4-6;

Exodus 20:12 (KJV)

¹² Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee.

Deuteronomy 5:16 (KJV)

¹⁶ Honour thy father and thy mother, as the LORD thy God hath commanded thee; that thy days may be prolonged, and that it may go well with thee, in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee.

Proverbs 23:22 (KJV)

²² Hearken unto thy father that begat thee, and despise not thy mother when she is old.

Ephesians 6:2 (KJV)

² Honour thy father and mother; (which is the first commandment with promise;)

4. They honor God with their lips and not with their heart, Matthew 15:7, 8;

Isaiah 29:13 (KJV)

¹³ Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near *me* with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men:

5. The Pharisees teach for doctrines the commandments of men, Matthew 15:9;

Colossians 2:20-22 (KJV)

²⁰ Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances,

²¹ (Touch not; taste not; handle not;

²² Which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men?

II Defilement Explained

1. Jesus calls to the multitude to hear, Matthew 15:10
2. It is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a man, Matthew 15:11;

Titus 1:15 (KJV)

¹⁵ Unto the pure all things *are* pure: but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving *is* nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled.

3. The disciples tell Jesus the Pharisees are offended, Matthew 15:12
4. Every plant, not planted by the Lord, shall be rooted up, Matthew 15:13;

1 Corinthians 3:13 (KJV)

¹³ Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is.

III Blind Leaders

1. If the blind lead the blind both shall fall into the ditch, Matthew 15:14;

Isaiah 9:16 (KJV)

¹⁶ For the leaders of this people cause *them* to err; and *they* that are led of them *are* destroyed.

Malachi 2:8 (KJV)

⁸ But ye are departed out of the way; ye have caused many

¹³ But he answered and said, Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up.

¹⁴ Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch.

¹⁵ Then answered Peter and said unto him, Declare unto us this parable.

¹⁶ And Jesus said, Are ye also yet without understanding?

¹⁷ Do not ye yet understand, that whatsoever entereth in at the mouth goeth into the belly, and is cast out into the draught?

¹⁸ But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man.

¹⁹ For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies:

²⁰ These are *the things* which defile a man: but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man.

to stumble at the law; ye have corrupted the covenant of Levi, saith the LORD of hosts.

2. Peter asks Jesus to explain the parable to them, Matthew 15:15, 16

3. Jesus explains that it is what comes out of the heart that defiles a man, Matthew 15:17-19;

James 3:6 (KJV)

⁶ And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell.

Genesis 6:5 (KJV)

⁵ And GOD saw that the wickedness of man *was* great in the earth, and *that* every imagination of the thoughts of his heart *was* only evil continually.

4. Unwashed hands do not bring defilement, Matthew 15:20

NOTES:

Traditions

The scribes and Pharisees put a great deal of stress on tradition, which they claim was an unwritten law, given by God to Moses on Mt. Sinai, and handed down to descendants by oral communication. No doubt with each succeeding generation there had been rites and customs added, and the Pharisees who were fanatics for the letter of the law had no spiritual discernment to know that the letter killeth but the spirit maketh alive. We still have in many churches today those who put stress on ceremonies, rites, and customs above the Word of God.

Jesus had been performing many miracles around the Sea of Galilee. Wherever He went, into the villages, country, or streets of the cities, they brought the sick to Him and besought Him that they might touch the border of His garment, and as many as touched were made whole (**Mark 6:56 (KJV)** ⁵⁶ And whithersoever he entered, into villages, or cities, or country, they laid the sick in the streets, and besought him that they might touch if it were but the border of his garment: and as many as touched him were made whole.). The devil always has emissaries to find fault, criticize, and try to overthrow the faith of believers. We find here that he sends the scribes and Pharisees from Jerusalem for that purpose. They soon found something to find fault about. The disciples were eating without first washing their hands, which was against the tradition of the elders. Jesus knew full well what was in their hearts and that it was not because of sanitary measures they were finding fault but because eating with unwashed hands transgressed their tradition. Jesus asked them, "Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?" (Matthew 15:3). He did not leave them in the dark as to what He meant. He told them one of the commandments they were breaking. The Lord had told them to honor their father and mother, but their tradition had changed the commandment and let them give a gift to the church and the gift would free them from the responsibility of doing anything more for their parents. We find that people today have drifted farther away than that from the commandment of God; without as much as giving a gift to the church they are leaving their parents for charity to take care of.

Blind Leaders

The most scathing remarks that Jesus made were made against hypocrites, those with a pretense of religion but with hearts full of every evil thing. They had ears to hear but could not hear, eyes to see but could not see - blind leaders of the

blind. Jesus said, "Let them alone: . . . both shall fall into the ditch" (Matthew 15:14). Paul, speaking of those who receive not a love for the truth that they might be saved, says the Lord will send them strong delusion, that they might believe a lie and be damned (II Thessalonians 2:10-12). Paul also warns not to give heed to Jewish fables and commandments of men (**Titus 1:14 (KJV)** ¹⁴ Not giving heed to Jewish fables, and commandments of men, that turn from the truth). He also says to refuse profane and old wives' fables. No doubt these fables were some of their traditions handed down and were not in conformity with the Word of God.

The Call to the Multitude

Jesus calls the multitude to hear and understand the truth. Although some hear and will not heed, yet the Lord wants all to hear. The Word tells us to be doers of the Word and not hearers only. These Pharisees were wrapped up in their own righteousness and were not concerned about the righteousness that comes from God out of Heaven. We should watch lest we try to substitute good works for God's righteousness in our hearts.

It is this glorious Gospel that makes a new creature out of us and changes the heart that is corrupted by sin into a new heart full of righteousness and truth. It is this new heart the Lord wants us all to have. This heart made new by being born again will receive the truth and love it.

Defilement Comes from Within

Jesus told them plainly that not that which went into the mouth defiled a man but that which came out of the mouth brought defilement. In Jeremiah 17:9 we read: "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" The Lord answers, "I the LORD search the heart, I try the reins" (Jeremiah 17:10). If we keep our hearts open to the Lord, He will search our hearts and let us know if there be any wicked way in us.

Pharisees Offended

The disciples told Jesus that the Pharisees were offended at His saying. Jesus said, "Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up." In Psalm 52:3-5 we read, "Thou lovest evil more than good; and lying rather than to speak righteousness.... Thou lovest all devouring words, O thou deceitful tongue. God shall likewise destroy thee for ever, he shall take thee away, and pluck thee out of thy dwelling place, and root thee out of the land of the living."

Disciples Without Understanding

When Peter asked the Lord to explain the parable unto them Jesus seemed surprised, and said, "Are ye also yet without understanding?" Then He explained to them that it was not what went into the mouth that defiled a man; but what came out of the mouth and proceeded from the heart was the thing that defiled a man. "For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: these are the things which defile a man: but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man" (Matthew 15:19, 20). The heart is the center of life, and it is the heart that God deals with. "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life" (Proverbs 4:23). "For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he" (Proverbs 23:7). We find that God deals solely with the

heart. Sin defiles the heart, and there is only one cure for sin, the Blood of Jesus.

The Blood can wipe sin out, root and branch, and make the heart pure. No fountain can send forth at the same place both bitter and sweet water (**James 3:11 (KJV)** ¹¹ *Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet *water* and bitter?*) Sin sends forth bitter water; a pure heart sends forth sweet water. "A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil: for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh" (Luke 6:45). To eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man, but a sinful heart brings defilement.

QUESTIONS

- 1 What are traditions?
- 2 What accusation did the Pharisees bring against the disciples?
- 3 What accusation did Jesus bring against the Pharisees?
- 4 What defiles a man?
- 5 Where did Jesus say defilement comes from?
- 6 How can one keep from being defiled?
- 7 If the blind lead the blind what will happen?
- 8 What will happen to every plant not planted by the heavenly Father
- 9 Which is greater, the traditions of the elders or the commandments of God?