

July 5, 2009

WHAT REALLY MAKES A MAN UNCLEAN?

MATTHEW 15.1-20

Jesus rebukes the scribes and Pharisees because through their extra-scriptural traditions they have distorted what it means to be truly loyal to God by misrepresenting the true source of man's defilement.

1. JESUS REBUKES THE SCRIBES AND PHARISEES FOR THEIR HYPOCRISY (1-9)

"Why don't you wash your hands?" (1-2): Scribes and Pharisees: religious leaders in Israel at this time; representatives of all of Israel, their character defining the present state of Israel.

Have taken the place of Satan who comes and questions/tests Jesus.

From Jerusalem: place of throne of David and God.

Why check up on Jesus? Jesus was a kingdom prophet. He was declaring that the long-awaited kingdom of heaven was being inaugurated in and through him. He is gaining popularity. They need to know where he stands.

Hand-washing: has ritualistic meaning; about removing defilement. They would contract uncleanness through food.

No real basis in the Law. Ex 30.17-21 refers to Aaronic priests entering the Tent of Meeting; Lev 15.11 speaks about an unclean person passing uncleanness to someone else. Neither of these justifies this practice.

May have thought they contracted uncleanness by touching someone/something unclean (e.g. Gentile, tax-collector).

Interesting in this context of food: feeding of 5,000+ (14.13-21); giving children's bread to the dogs (15.21-28); feeding 4,000+ (15.32-39). All along Jesus has been eating with the wrong people (9.10-13).

The Pharisees concern about how the disciples were eating seems to be concerned, at its heart, with how they handle eating with certain types of people. When you share a table with someone, you are saying something about your relationship with that person.

Jesus is not making "proper distinctions." Pharisees want to keep those lines.

"The tradition of the elders" - oral law tradition and its interpretation; communicated at Sinai (they said) but handed down orally.

Oral law became *de facto* superior to the written word b/c it provided the authoritative interpretation.

"Why don't you honor your parents?" (3-9): Note: This is not tradition v. novelty. This is tradition v. Scripture. This is disobeying God's clear commands by the wrong use of tradition.

What is the wrong use of tradition? It is adopting beliefs and practices that are explicitly or functionally equal to or above the Scriptures themselves. Tradition is misused when it is used to avoid responsibility given in God's clear commands.

Contrast set up: "For God commanded/said" then 5th Word and specific law relating (Exod 20.12; 21.17).

First, God has spoken and put it down in writing. Jesus assumes the superiority of the written word over any tradition.

Second, God has spoken plain enough in certain instances that it can be readily understood.

"But you say" - v. 5 contrast to "For God said/commanded" in v. 4. It is their word—the tradition of the elders—against the word of God. It is has been a battle of whose word is authoritative from the Garden. Serpents are still twisting God's word.

"Gift" ("Corban" in Mk) - gift for the Temple service. Apparently, they could dedicate all of their money to the Temple, still use it while they were alive, and upon their death it would go to the Temple.

When parents age and you need to help them, you have an excuse not to care for your parents. Who can question it b/c it is money given to the Temple. There is an appearance before others of great dedication and spirituality, but it was direct disobedience to the clear command of God.

Those who don't honor but curse (which in this case would be not caring for their needy parents) are subject to the death penalty.

Hypocrites - play actors wearing a mask, pretending to be something that they are not. They are pretending to be dedicated to God, but they are, in fact, not.

Quote from Isa 29.13: prophecy dealing with God's judgment against Jerusalem (there called "Ariel") and its destruction. In short, God has closed the eyes of the prophets and covered the heads of the seers so that they are indeed "blind guides" for the people. They are leading them to destruction. Can't read and understand the Scriptures.

Heart - not drawing near; loyalty is to something other than God's word.

2. JESUS TEACHES THE CROWD THE SOURCE OF MAN'S DEFILEMENT (10-11)

"hear and understand" - Crowd being called to an obedience to God's command by rejecting the tradition of the elders.

If what I said about eating with certain people is accurate, then it is possible to eat with people without becoming unclean. (cf. Gal 2)

3. JESUS COMMAND HIS DISCIPLES TO ALLOW THE PLANTS TO GROW (12-14)

The offended Pharisees (12): "Offended" - could be "shocked" or "hurt feelings," but could also be setting a stumblingblock that causes them to sin (i.e. refusing to follow Jesus).

Dealing with the harvest (13-14): Plants harking back to parable of wheat and tares; "leave them alone;" i.e., until harvest (13.28-30).

The "eyes" of Israel—that is, those who are the leaders—are blind. As such, all those who follow them will follow them to "the pit" or into the ditch (i.e. destruction). This is the consequence of their vacating the commands of God for their traditions.

4. JESUS TEACHES THE DISCIPLES THE SOURCE OF MAN'S DEFILEMENT (15-20)

Parable - a story about the story that emphasizes particular aspects of it.

Jesus says that it is what comes out of a man that defiles him. The Law taught this. Men and women were unclean when certain emissions came from their body or erupted on their skin exposing the "flesh" underneath.

Not "internal" v. "external." Heart is the source, but the things that proceed from the heart (i.e. those products which include "externals") defile a person.

List seems to complete the 2nd table of the law (Commandments 6-10). Jesus expounds 5th Word and then completes the 10 Words.

Emphasis on what it means to love your neighbor.

- *Evil thoughts* and *murders* - reveal that you are at odds with your neighbor and want to see him harmed.
- *Adulteries* and *fornications* violate covenant bonds with your neighbors.
- *Thefts*. There is no respect for the property of others.
- *False witness* and *blasphemies* are sins of the mouth which defame and put your neighbor in the position to be punished; whether formally or informally it matters not. The goal is to have your neighbor shunned by the community.

All of these things defile you b/c they destroy the bonds of the community as God intends it to be and is reflected in his relationship within himself as a Triune community. They defile you b/c they cut you off from life as it is intended to be lived. They strike at the very heart of your humanity; a humanity that is intended to be lived in mutual love with others and that reaches outside of our little self-made groups and includes and cares for others.

1. *How do we find ways around God's Word in order to sustain what we want to do?*