

GETTING IT RIGHT Sunday School- May 18, 2014

Unifying Topic: JESUS' TEACHING ON THE LAW

Lesson Text

I. The Letter Of The Law (Matthew 15:1-6)

II. The Spirit Of The Law (Matthew 15:7-11)

III. Jesus Teaches The Law (Matthew 15:15-20)

The Main Thought: The people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men Matthew 15:8-9, KJV).

Unifying Principle: Traditions are powerful guides for determining actions and behavior. How can Christians avoid using traditions to set up the word of the Law against the spirit of the Law? While Jesus was a firm believer in tradition, He warned against a misuse of tradition that makes "void the word of God" (Matt. 15:6, NRSV).

Lesson Aim: To provide the students with an example of how misused traditions can become barriers to pleasing God.

Life Aim: To embrace the spirit of the Law and to embrace sacred traditions that help guide one's words and actions.

15:1 Then came to Jesus scribes and Pharisees, which were of Jerusalem, saying,

15:2 Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? for they wash not their hands when they eat bread.

15:3 But he answered and said unto them, Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?

15:4 For God commanded, saying, Honour thy father and mother: and, He that curseth father or mother, let him die the death.

15:5 But ye say, Whosoever shall say to his father or his mother, It is a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me;

15:6 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.

15:7 Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying,

15:8 This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me.

15:9 But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.

15:10 And he called the multitude, and said unto them, Hear, and understand:

15:11 Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man.

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

15:16 And Jesus said, Are ye also yet without understanding?

15:17 Do not ye yet understand, that whatsoever entereth in at the mouth goeth into the belly, and is cast out into the draught?

15:18 But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man.

15:19 For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies:

15:20 These are the things which defile a man: but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man.

HISTORY:

In the 14th chapter of Matthew we find that King Herod had John the Baptist killed. John's disciple came for his body, and buried him. They tell Jesus the news and after He hears this, He goes off by Himself on a boat to a remote area. However, the crowds followed Him. And there being such a large crowd in the evening, Jesus feeds five thousand men plus all the women and children that were not counted. Usually in the Jewish culture of that day, men and women usually are listed separately. As we continue in chapter 14, Jesus tells His disciples to get in the boat and go to the other side of the lake. He did not get into the boat but at night fall He is seen walking on the water. They were afraid but Peter was the only one to get out of the boat to meet Jesus. The disciples came to the conclusion that "Jesus is really the Son of God!" Finally Jesus is in Gennesaret, located on the west side of the Sea of Galilee, where those that were sick came to be healed. They begged to just touch the hem of His garment; and all that did, were healed!

There will be three audiences in this next chapter: (1) Pharisees and Scribes; (2) the multitude, and (3) the disciples. The message will be directed to what defiles a man: (1) a traditional religion, (2) a foul mouth, (3) a blind spirit, (4) a corrupt heart.

LESSON:

Matthew 15:1-6 The Letter Of The Law

15:1 Then came to Jesus scribes and Pharisees, which were of Jerusalem, saying,—¹The people of Gennesaret were glad to see Jesus, but the religious leaders did not like him. The people in Gennesaret who touched Jesus became well (whole) again. But the Pharisees would not touch someone whom they considered "not clean." The verse opens by focusing attention on some key people, Pharisees and scribes. They were Jesus' first audience; from Jerusalem, the

¹ <http://www.easyenglish.info/bible-commentary/matthew-lbw.htm>

<http://pitwm.net/pitwm-sundayschool.html>

center of Jewish authority, to scrutinize Jesus' activities. They had added hundreds of religious traditions into God's laws and considered them all equally important.

15:2 Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? for they wash not their hands when they eat bread. They confront Jesus regarding traditions of the elders. A section of these laws had to do with keeping oneself physically clean by washing with water. One of the rules said that a person had to wash his hands before eating a meal. The washing consisted of pouring a trickle of cold water over the outstretched hands. The water had to then drip off of the wrists; otherwise the person's arms would become unclean. And therefore, the disciples had broken the tradition of the church (the ritual) and embarrassed the religious faithful of their day. Well, in their eyes the disciples had transgressed (disobeyed; sinned) according to the elders. They were really watching close to catch this. They weren't concerned with the disciples not practicing good hygiene. They were upset because their tradition taught that before every meal, hands were considered unclean and had to undergo a laborious ceremonial cleansing.

15:3 But he answered and said unto them, Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?— Jesus answers with a question to them. *"Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?"* Jesus had actually brought charges up on them, by saying that they had also broken God's Law in order to keep their own traditions of their religion. **This is the first thing that defiles a man: traditional religion.** Jesus goes on to give them an example.

15:4 For God commanded, saying, Honour thy father and mother: and, He that curseth father or mother, let him die the death. To *"honor"* is to obey, to reverence, to speak kindly to, to speak and think well of. To *"curse"* is to disobey, to treat with irreverence, to swear at, to speak ill of. This is the fifth commandment of the Ten Commandments. Jesus commanded them to honor parents. For children, it means to obey them; for adults, it means to support them. ²God said that people should give honour to their parents. When parents need something, their children have a responsibility to help them.

15:5 But ye say, Whosoever shall say to his father or his mother, It is a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me;— But the Pharisees had another tradition. People could put things aside that their parents needed. Then they could say that they had given those things to God. Sometimes they only pretended to give these things to God. But this avoided the need to help their parents. In other words, their tradition says that once a person vows to give a gift to the temple, he can never back out of the vow, even if he later needs the gift to take care of his parents. Think about Ananias and Sapphira. Well, the Pharisees wanted to go to battle over traditions, yet they are breaking the Word of God! (funny!) The Pharisees were making a tradition more important than their responsibility to their parents and to God's Word. And since it was a gift to the temple, they could continue enjoying the proceeds themselves.

15:6 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. ³The tradition of the elders taught giving to the temple freed one from giving to his or her parents, thus rendering the command of God of no effect; without authority, null and void. There are traditions of men today with similar affect, such as the practice of sprinkling for baptism, a tradition of man. When one keeps the tradition of sprinkling, they make the command of God to be baptized (immersed) of no effect! Through keeping such traditions, one is actually rejecting the command of God!

NOTE:

There are and always have been two religions in the world. There is the religion that stresses the outside and the religion that stresses the inside. Through the years, the Jewish religion, in an attempt to keep man religiously and morally clean, had come up with thousands upon thousands of rules and regulations governing man's behavior.

- External religion says be physically and morally clean – Internal religion says be spiritually regenerated and made into a new creature.
- External religion says that if a person keeps the outside clean the inside will be clean. – Internal religion says that if a person is clean on the inside then he will keep the outside clean.

² <http://www.easyenglish.info/bible-commentary/matthew-lbw.htm>

³ http://executableoutlines.com/matt/mt15_1.htm

<http://pitwm.net/pitwm-sundayschool.html>

- External religion develops a system of laws to govern behavior. – Internal religion behaves out of a heart of love and respect for God and man.
- External religion says be faithful to religion (the church) and its practices and moral teachings and you will be clean. Internal religion says be cleansed within by Christ and you will be faithful to the church and live justly.
- External religion is man-made religion of ritual, ceremony, laws, and works. Internal religion is God's religion based upon His Son Jesus Christ who changes or recreates the heart of man. This act of recreation gives man a new heart, a heart that reaches out to both God and man in love and respect.

Matthew 15:7-11 The Spirit Of The Law

15:7 Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying,— Jesus deals with people in two different ways. When He deals with the multitude, the harlots, prostitutes, thieves and other sinners, He confronts them in compassion and invites them to His salvation. But when He deals with the religious leaders, He approaches them with bluntness and hardness. This approach is obviously not going to win Him any friends. He confronts them directly by saying, "*You hypocrites.*" Jesus has already said enough to set the Pharisees on edge, but He wants to be sure everybody knows what He is talking about.

Religionist or Tradition:

- A religionist sets aside God's Word for tradition and can be described as institutional or personal.
 - "*Institutional traditions*" are such things as rituals, rules, regulations, schedules, form, services, procedures, organizations—anything that gives order and security to the persons involved.
 - "*Personal traditions*" are such things as church attendance, little rituals, prayers, habits, ceremonies, and objects which a person uses to keep himself religiously secure.

When Jesus mentions Esaias prophesy, Jesus used words from Isaiah 29:13 in the next verse.

15:8 This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me.

- *A religionist is hypocritical*—gives lip service while keeping his heart far from God. He acknowledges God and attends worship, but this is about all he does. They study, witness, show care, help the needy, and keep the rules. They struggle and would fight to maintain religious tradition, yet Christ says they are hypocrites. Why? Because their heart is not God's. They do not know God personally, not in the depths of their heart Jh.14:6.

A three-step process that people follow to replace God's Word with man's religion:

1. They add a tradition to the faith, which causes them to begin to neglect the Word of God.
2. Then, when that tradition contradicts the Word, they have to set aside the Word to keep their tradition.
3. Ultimately, the Word of God is entirely invalidated as that tradition is handed down through the generations.

This is why God says of religion, Matt. 15:9 ... "*In vain do they worship ME, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.*"

15:9 But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. The Pharisees knew a lot about God but didn't know God. Their worship was not sincere. Service and obedience are two different things.

- A religionist worships, but with an empty heart. True worship must be "in spirit and in truth."
- A religionist teaches tradition as God's commandments.

False teachers can teach as their doctrine the precepts (principle, rule, instruction) of men rather than the instructions of God, and the result is vain worship because God did not command it; and it did not come from God.

15:10 And he called the multitude, and said unto them, Hear, and understand: – So Jesus addresses His next audience, the multitude. When He had called the multitude to Himself, He said to them, "Hear and understand:

15:11 Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man. What are they to hear and understand? Well He says, "*It's not what goes into the mouth that defiles a man; rather it's what comes out of the mouth: this defiles a man*" and it reveals that we have unclean (defiled) hearts. The word "*defile*" (*koinoi*) means *to make common; to make unholy; unclean; to become polluted and defiled*. **The second thing that defiles**

a man is a foul mouth. ⁴A person might obey all the rules about food, but that does not make their thoughts good. What a person says shows what he is like deep inside himself. In this specific context, Jesus spoke about ceremonial cleanliness in regard to food. The mouth can be full of *foul words, filthy words, critical words, deceptive words, harsh words, unkind words*. What comes out of the mouth shows a person's mind and thoughts. It's not about washing with "unclean hands" or any other such thing that we "put into us", or even the food we put into our mouths.

NOT APART OF THE LESSON Verses 12-14

The Jewish leaders showed offense at this deliberate contradiction of their own teaching. Now Jesus switches His conversation to the audience of His disciples. In two vivid pictures (vv.13-14), the Lord tells His disciples that the Pharisees have no real mission from God and are themselves blind. *"Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up. Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind..."* He's saying, they and their man-made doctrines shall be rooted up. **The third thing that defiles a man is a blind spirit.**

The letter of the law vs the spirit of the law:

"But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter" Rom. 7:6.

- *"The letter of the law"* is what the law states; what is written, and *"The spirit of the law"* is a social and moral consensus of the interpretation of the letter.
- *"The spirit of the law"* refers to a proper attitude, and *"the letter of the law"* refers to compliance with the explicit dictates of Scripture, it certainly is true that a person can distort or disregard "the spirit of the law" while following carefully "the letter of the law." A person may engage in external, rote compliance without heartfelt, genuine love for God and His will. It is possible to obey and not love; but it is not possible to love and not obey.

Matthew 15:15-20 Jesus Teaches The Law

15:15 Then answered Peter and said unto him, Declare unto us this parable. More explanation is needed for the disciples, and Peter comes forward acting on behalf of the others. Peter is referring to the difficult, harsh statement that Jesus made to the multitude in verse 11: *"It is not what enters into the mouth that defiles the man, but what proceeds out of the mouth, this defiles the man."* The disciples didn't quite understand, and Jesus explains.

15:16 And Jesus said, Are ye also yet without understanding?— Jesus seemed surprised that the disciples did not understand.

15:17 Do not ye yet understand, that whatsoever entereth in at the mouth goeth into the belly, and is cast out into the draught? The question is asked again of the disciples: *"Do you not yet understand that everything that goes into the mouth passes into the stomach, and is eliminated?"* "Draught" literally means latrine.

15:18 But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. The things which proceed out of the mouth are coming from the heart, and they defile a man. The food never touches the heart. But evil thoughts come from deep inside a person's spirit. And they cause a person to behave in a wicked way. They change a person, so that the person is no longer clean.

15:19 For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: **The fourth thing that defile a man is a corrupt heart.** This proclaims the depravity of the unconverted human heart, which was the condition of the Pharisees, despite their religiosity. The heart is the inner man. It is what you are as a person. The Pharisees looked on the outward appearance to judge. Jesus looks on the heart of the inner man.

15:20 These are the things which defile a man: but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man. We are defiled from the inside out rather than from the outside in. And it has nothing to do with eating with unwashed hands.

⁴ <http://www.easyenglish.info/bible-commentary/matthew-lbw.htm>
<http://pitwm.net/pitwm-sundayschool.html>

SUMMARY:

⁵The Scribes and Pharisees joined forces and sent a delegation from Jerusalem to Galilee to investigate the ministry and teachings of Jesus and His disciples (v. 1). These religious leaders accused them of failing to observe the ceremonial washing of hands before eating (v. 2). Our Lord's reply to their charge was by asking them why they continued to break the direct command of God by failing to honor their father and mother. In escaping from their financial responsibilities, they would simply say that a particular item was a gift they had devoted to God and could not be used by an individual (their parents). This was simply a clever way of keeping things from passing to one's parents. This person would of course continue to keep those things in his own house for his own use (vv.3-6).

Jesus said such action was hypocritical. They used lip service for the heart was far from God. Their religion had become merely a set of man-made rules and their worship was a farce; it was in vain. They were teaching tradition as God's commandment (vv. 7-9). The multitude were told to hear and understand that it is not what goes into the mouth but it's what comes out of the mouth that defiles a man (vv.10-11).

Peter and the disciples didn't quite understand and wanted Jesus to explain the parable. And Jesus continues: Everything that enters the mouth goes into the stomach. Then it goes out from the body. But the words that come out of the mouth come from deep inside the person. These are the things that make someone wrong (vv.15-18). The deeds of a corrupt heart will cause thoughts that lead people to do wrong acts—murder, steal someone else's wife or perform wrong sex acts; steal; lie or gossip falsely about other people. These things defile a man for they come from the heart, but eating with unwashed hands does not make a person wrong (vv.19-20).

APPLICATION:

Saints, this is the key to understanding the right way to be a Christian. Forget the religion. Throw it all away. God wants from us only that which is in the Word. Any time anyone tries to say, —A good Christian is supposed to do this, or not supposed to do that, simply and sincerely respond by asking, —Where is that in the Bible? If they can show you, then incorporate it into your life. But if it's not in there, then it shouldn't be in your Christianity, either. It's called getting it right by God's standards!

⁵ <http://www.family-times.net/commentary/ritual-over-relationship/>
<http://pitwm.net/pitwm-sundayschool.html>