

JESUS REBUKES THE TRADITIONAL JEWS' HYPOCRISY

Matthew 15:1-28

Key Verses: 15:10,11

"Jesus called the crowd to him and said, `Listen and understand. What goes into a man's mouth does not make him "unclean," but what comes out of his mouth, that is what makes him "unclean."'"

In the last passage we learned that Jesus gave his disciples storm [training](#). In the stormy sea, when the disciples looked at Jesus by faith, they could walk on the water. But when Peter, while walking on the water, looked down at the turbulent waves of the sea, he sank into the water. Thank God that he gives us storm training from time to time, so that we may look at God by faith, not at the sea ghost. Today Jesus talks with the traditional Jews. Jesus rebukes their hypocritical way of life, which was based on their traditions. In this passage we learn that we should not be hypocritical and habitual Christians; we must be Christians who are right with God.

First, the Jews came to Jesus (1-2). At that time Jesus was in some part of the Galilean district. The Pharisees and the teachers of the law came to Jesus from Jerusalem to ask a question. Their question sounds very funny to modern people. Their question was, "Why don't your disciples [wash their hands](#) before they eat? Thus they break the tradition of the elders!" In view of their history, tradition made Jewish people survive and spread, even though they were like a "fiddler on the roof." Because they kept the traditions about how to eat and how to sleep, covered their heads always and observed the Sabbath, they could maintain their Jewish identity and remember God's purpose for them as the chosen people. They could endure any kind of suffering. But when they forgot the key point of God's word, which is the Ten Commandments, their traditions gradually made them hypocritical and ritualistic. Their tradition was good, but when it was not based on the word of God it became useless. It also distanced them far from the law of God. When the Jews came from Jerusalem to Galilee, their purpose was to crush Jesus and his disciples' lifestyle and ministry. They asked, "Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders by not washing their hands before they eat?" It was a head-on collision between Jesus and leaders of the orthodox Jews. Measured by the orthodox Jews' tradition of the time, the disciples' act of eating without washing their hands was impermissible. All the Jews were supposed to wash their hands before eating something. But the region of Palestine didn't contain much water, especially in the Galilean district. Usually the traditional Jews used an egg shell of water to wash their hands, then claimed they had washed their hands; so they were ceremonially clean and ritually right. Those who did not were branded as rebels who broke the tradition of the elders.

To the Jews, handwashing was the symbol of being clean in the sight of God. But Jesus did not think so. He considered handwashing entirely a ceremonial matter, just a ritualistic procedure; handwashing does not make a person clean before God. If they kept traditional cleansing ceremonies, the Jews thought they were clean before God. If they washed their hands with one cup of water before eating, they thought they were clean before God. If they didn't touch unclean things, they thought

they were clean before God. For example, a woman was unclean if she had an issue of blood, even if that issue of blood was that of her monthly period. Those who touched people with contagious diseases were all unclean. Measured by their tradition, many Chicagoans are unclean, because our colorful weather makes most of us catch cold, and many friends contract a cold from their friends.

Of course, in other countries there have been many examples about uncleanness. In India, high caste people thought low caste people were all unclean. In Egypt, all animals were unclean except cats and crocodiles. But the Jewish tradition regarding clean and unclean had a political bent. The elders of the Jews demanded people to be clean. According to Leviticus 11, if ordinary people wanted to be clean, they had to go through all kinds of rituals. They had to practice rituals at the time of birth, at the time of marriage, at the time of death, and especially at the time of getting a job. They were like people in the Catholic church before the Middle Ages who practiced seven rituals. In order to keep the tradition, they had to practice rituals and ceremonies, and they had to pay much money to those who performed the rituals. In this same way the Jewish elders extorted money from poor people. As a result, the Jewish elders made a great deal of money. But they lost the original concept of their tradition, and they lost the command of God completely.

Second, Jesus said, "Why do you break the command of God?" (3-9) Let's look at verse 3. "Jesus replied, And why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition?" Their tradition made the people habitual and superficial, and there was no heart of God in their tradition. For example, the Bible says, "Honor your father and your mother," and "Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death" (4). This is the fifth of [the Ten Commandments](#) combined with Leviticus 20:9. So they must honor their parents even at the cost of suffering loss. But most of the traditional Jews made use of the word "a gift devoted to God" (5). In Mark's Gospel, "a gift devoted to God" is called "Corban" (Mk 7:11). Corban was one of their traditions. This tradition of Corban justified not honoring their parents as follows: If rich children legally registered their property and money to the elders' community, it was regarded as a gift devoted to God. So, rich children said to their parents, "Corban, Corban. I gave everything to God. So I cannot support you." As a result, these rich children did not honor their parents at all. Jesus said to them, "Thus you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition" (6b).

Even in Isaiah's time, the people of Israel honored God with their lips, but their hearts were far from God. They worshiped God in vain. Their teachings were but rules fabricated by men. Look at verses 7-9. "You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you: These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men." These days there are many hypocritical Christians and traditional Christians. There are many people who do not go to church to worship God. Instead, they watch a TV worship service and say they are saved. And there are people who regularly attend church and offer tithes. So they think they will go to heaven. But if they are hypocritical and habitual like the traditional Jewish elders, they are greatly mistaken. We must not worship God habitually. We must worship God with all our

hearts and all our souls and all our strength and all our mind. Third, Jesus taught his disciples how one can be clean (10-20). Look at verses 10-11. "Jesus called the crowd to him and said, Listen and understand. What goes into a man's mouth does not make him "unclean," but what comes out of his mouth, that is what makes him "unclean."" Jesus rebuked the traditional Jews' hypocrisy. But the disciples were afraid of the Jewish leaders and came to Jesus and asked, "Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this?" (12) They were so terrified by the Jewish leaders that they did not listen to Jesus.

How did Jesus help his disciples? Look at verses 13,14. "He replied, Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be pulled up by the roots. Leave them; they are blind guides. If a blind man leads a blind man, both will fall into a pit.'" After hearing Jesus' courageous comment on the traditional Jewish leaders, the disciples' morale came back. Peter said, "Explain the parable to us" (15). Until now, whenever Jesus told a parable or spoke a certain teaching, his disciples never understood at first. In Matthew's Gospel they always asked the meaning of Jesus' words once again. It was because they were very fearful of the world and ambitious for their selfish goals. So they became scatterbrained. They could not catch what Jesus said to them.

Jesus rebuked them in verses 16-18: "Are you still so dull? Don't you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body? But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man unclean.'" Jesus explained that whatever one eats with unwashed hands doesn't make him unclean; instead, if one's heart is not right, what he speaks from his heart makes him unclean. Look at verses 19-20. "For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are what make a man unclean'; but eating with unwashed hands does not make him unclean.'" Jesus says that food doesn't make people unclean, because it goes into the mouth and comes out of the body; but when one has an evil heart, his heart makes him unclean with many evil thoughts and wickedness.

When national leaders have evil hearts they can make a whole nation unclean. The people of the state of Minnesota elected a wrestler as their governor. It is indeed a funny story that a wrestler became a governor. A wrestler can be a wrestler; a wrestler is far away from politics. However, the people of Minnesota learned that people in the federal government wrestle too much these days. They did not know which side would win in their wrestling politics. So the people of Minnesota elected a wrestler as their governor and said, "Hey, we send a wrestler to you." It is a ridiculous event. But it pictures the present condition of national leaders. Elected officials must work hard for this nation as representatives of the people and stewards of God's world. They must glorify the name of God. But these days many politicians are like fighting cats and dogs in dealing with the President's scandal. It goes on for such a long time, aggravating the reputation of the United States of America worldwide and making our nation unclean.

Unclean hearts and evil thoughts are also a problem in the church. For the last 25 years, CAN members, who are deprogrammers and

brainwashers, have damaged gospel-centered churches and organizations so much. But American churches have been silent. They have had no strength to fight against anti-Christians' evildoing. For quite a long time, the church seemed dead, while anti-Christians were mighty powerful. In this environment, so many people have begun to suppress the truth of God and become perverse, and God-haters. They provoke God's anger. For example, God made man and woman. But many have become homosexuals or lesbians. In reality, these are all by-products of hypocritical churches. How can one be clean? He must have a clean heart. How can one have a clean heart? Let's look at one woman of faith and see.

Fourth, Jesus admires the Canaanite woman's faith (21-28). Until now, we thought about hypocritical people, especially traditional Jewish leaders and modern church leaders who are spiritually dead and have produced many perverse people in this generation. Now we are going to think about a Gentile woman's faith. Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon (21). Jesus intended to go to Gentile territory and have a retreat with his disciples. But there was no time for Jesus to have a retreat. A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is suffering terribly from demon-possession" (22). Jesus did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and urged him, "Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us" (23). When Jesus was silent at her loud cry, his disciples thought he didn't like her, so they urged him to send her away.

Jesus' response was surprising. Look at verse 24. "He answered, I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel." It sounds like Jesus despised the Gentile woman; but he did not. To say that he was sent to save only the chosen people was a test of her faith. The woman didn't retreat, she advanced. "The woman came and knelt before him. Lord, help me!" she said" (25). Jesus replied, "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs" (26). It sounds like Jesus regarded her as a Gentile dog. Usually women are delicate and sensitive. So if they are humiliated, they become upset, lose their reason and become emotional and revengeful. What was her response? She was not emotional at all. She was not revengeful at all toward Jesus. Look at verse 27. " Yes, Lord,' she said, but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table.'" What a humble woman! What a wise answer! She was indeed a woman of faith. Her faith and wisdom enabled her to pass Jesus' faith test. How did Jesus finally deal with her? Look at verse 28. "Then Jesus answered, Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted.' And her daughter was healed from that very hour."

Today we thought about a great contrast. The traditional Jewish leaders were bigoted, political and hypocritical. They honored God with their lips, but their hearts were far from God. Through this we repent the sin of modern American churches' hypocrisy and money-oriented policy. On the other hand, a Gentile woman was not hypocritical. She was a woman of faith, and she was full of compassion for her daughter who was suffering from demon-possession. Jesus tested her faith very severely because she was a Gentile woman. She never retreated, but advanced with faith and obtained God's blessing from Jesus. In a word, she was a woman of heart. She probably did not know about Jesus well.

But she had simple faith. And she had a compassionate heart for her daughter. Jesus regarded her compassionate heart as great faith, and admired this Gentile woman, and granted her request.

Today we learned that we should not be hypocritical Christians; we should be men and women of heart and men and women of compassion. Then our Lord Jesus Christ will increase our faith.