



The King's Ransom

Matthew 20:28

Text

Matthew 15:1-20

Topic

In a parable, Jesus says it's not what goes into the mouth that defiles you, but what comes out of it

Title

"Heart in Mouth Disease"

Introduction

You might want to rethink your after-church lunch plans.

You've seen the mandated signs in restaurant restrooms, saying, "Employees must wash hands before returning to work."

According to the FDA, more than half of all employees in the fast-food industry fail to wash their hands properly.

Nearly two-thirds of restaurant workers who handle raw beef aren't washing their hands afterward.

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Matthew 15:1-20

"Heart in Mouth Disease"

Employees serving ready-to-eat food at farmers markets rarely wash their hands.

In our verses, a delegation of religious leaders accuse Jesus' disciples of failing to wash their hands before eating. Before you say, "Ew, that's gross," you need to understand that the type of hand washing in question had nothing to do with their personal hygiene. They were describing a ritual hand washing that was supposed to have spiritual value.

Jesus will use their accusation to expose the delegation as hypocrites who put the traditions of men above the commandments of God to the spiritual detriment of themselves and their followers.

The traditions of men mask what Jesus wishes to unmask - a defiled heart that needs transformation.

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 The Traditions Of Men Mask Your Defiled Heart, and #2 The Commandments Of God Unmask Your Defiled Heart.

#1 The Traditions Of Men Mask Your Defiled Heart

(v1-11)

From the time Moses was given the Law of God, the Jews began to interpret it to try to apply it in every conceivable situation. These interpretations were passed down both orally and in written form.

By the first century, there were literally thousands of burdensome rules and rituals, many of which (as we will see) contradicted the very Law of God they were seeking to clarify.

These interpretations are what Jesus called "the traditions of men," one of which was ritual hand washing.

Mat 15:1 Then the scribes and Pharisees who were from Jerusalem came to Jesus...

We've been pointing out that Jesus was being rejected by Israel's leaders. Because of it, He would return to Heaven to await His Second Coming. We live in that time between His two comings and are His messengers to spread the Gospel.

It is significant that these scribes and Pharisees "were from Jerusalem." They seem to be an official delegation, sent to discredit Jesus in the eyes of the people.

Mat 15:2 [saying], "Why do Your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread."

It's likely that the disciples *did* wash their hands for hygiene before eating. The scribes and Pharisees were talking about a very particular ritual hand washing that had nothing to do with hygiene. In fact, your hands needed to be clean *before* you observed ritual hand washing.

Listen to one description of the ritual:

The method of washing is by pouring ½ pint of water over both hands from a receptacle with a wide mouth, the lip of which must be undamaged. The water should be poured over the whole hand up to the wrist, but is effective as long as the fingers are washed up to the second joint. The hands must be clean and without anything adhering to them; rings must be removed so that the water can reach the entire surface area. The water should not be hot or discolored and it is customary to perform the act by pouring water over each hand three times. Care must be taken that the unwashed hands do not touch the water used for the washing.

After washing, lift your hands chest-high and say the following blessing (if you intend to eat more than two ounces of bread): "Blessed are you, Lord our God, King of the universe, who has sanctified us with His commandments, and commanded us concerning the washing of the hands."

Rub your hands together and then dry them. Be careful not to speak or get involved in anything else until you've recited the blessing on your bread and swallowed some too.

This ritual washing was performed to correct what the Jews considered an impurity, e.g., coming into contact with Gentiles, or having been in the marketplace. Such activities, they said, rendered you "unclean" with respect to worshipping God.

Since Jesus and His boys were in Gentile territory, rubbing elbows and hands with them, tradition demanded that they ought to be washing their hands often.

It's interesting to note that Jesus' disciples no longer engaged in ritual hand washing. It seems they were growing, at least for the time being, in their liberty in Christ.

Mat 15:3 He answered and said to them, "Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition?"

When you asked Jesus a question - especially one that was an accusation - you were in the intellectual big leagues.

Jesus' answer to their question is indirect but insightful. They were talking traditions of the elders. He was talking commandments of God. Commandments always trump traditions.

Jesus provided an example of how a tradition of the elders was allowing, and even encouraging, sin.

Mat 15:4 For God commanded, saying, 'HONOR YOUR FATHER AND YOUR MOTHER'; and, 'HE WHO CURSES FATHER OR MOTHER, LET HIM BE PUT TO DEATH.'

Mat 15:5 But you say, 'Whoever says to his father or mother, "Whatever profit you might have received from me is a gift to God" -

Mat 15:6 then he need not honor his father or mother.' Thus you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition.

The fourth commandment given to Moses on Mount Sinai was to honor your father and mother. Later in the Law, in the Book of Exodus, the Jews were instructed to uphold the fourth commandment to the point of being allowed to putting to death anyone who disrespected his father or mother.

A big part of honoring father and mother in the Jewish culture was caring for them in their old age.

It obviously put a physical and financial burden on the children; but it ought to be a blessed burden to bear.

The Jews started looking for a loophole. They started looking for a way to keep their property and possessions for themselves, without having to care for their elderly parent or parents, but without technically violating the fourth commandment.

Some rabbi suggested that you could make an oath declaring that your property and possessions were dedicated to God. It was referred to as *Korban*, which is translated, *a gift*.

Here's how it got around the obligation to care for your parent(s). The laws governing oaths were such that you could not really renege on an oath. So if you said, "whatever support I might have given to my aging parent(s) is *Korban*," then it was dedicated to God, and you were free from your obligations to use it for your parent(s).

In other words, they elevated a general principle in the Law regarding oaths to a position higher than the fourth commandment.

The catch was that you need not really give your property and possessions to God; you retained full ownership and use of them. You only had to dedicate them with an oath.

This devious interpretation of the laws regarding honoring parents and oaths was simply a ruse that allowed you to break God's commandment. It elevated the traditions of men above the Word of God. It was wicked.

Mat 15:7 Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying:
Mat 15:8 'THESE PEOPLE DRAW NEAR TO ME WITH THEIR MOUTH, AND HONOR ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR FROM ME.
Mat 15:9 AND IN VAIN THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE COMMANDMENTS OF MEN.' "

Isaiah was addressing Jews in his own time, but what he said applied equally well to the Jews of Jesus' time.

"Hypocrite," as you know, derives from the Greek stage. Actors portrayed their parts by wearing masks. Hypocrite means *behind the mask*. It came to have a decidedly negative connotation.

Mat 15:10 When He had called the multitude to Himself, He said to them, "Hear and understand:
Mat 15:11 Not what goes into the mouth defiles a man; but what comes out of the mouth, this defiles a man."

This is a short parable. Jesus will explain what He meant in a minute. We already understand what He meant - that the heart of every man is defiled. It is full of all manner of wickedness.

By "heart" we mean the inner person; the real person - our mind, will and emotions.

The traditions of men, when they contradict the Word of God, mask a defiled heart. The religious leaders were not just allowing people to keep their property and possessions. They were telling them it was spiritual to do so. They were making them feel good about breaking God's Law.

You don't want to mask **your** defiled heart with some religious tradition that tells you that you're OK. That's exactly the kind of thing that keeps a person on the broad road that leads to eternal damnation.

Any religion that suggests that you can somehow work your way to Heaven by doing good deeds, or by participating in ceremonies or sacraments that contribute to your salvation, is a hypocritical masking of your defiled heart.

You *want* God's commandments to expose your defiled heart so it can be transformed.

#2 The Commandments Of God Unmask Your Defiled Heart

(v12-20)

Billy Graham likes to say, "the heart of the problem is the problem of the heart."

There is something wrong with us, and we know it. Religion, philosophy, and to a certain extent, the social sciences - all these are man's attempts to discover and then make right what is wrong with us.

What is wrong with us is that we inherit a sin nature from Adam and Eve. We are defiled from within and cannot hope to reform our hearts. Our hearts must be transformed by Jesus Christ.

Mat 15:12 Then His disciples came and said to Him, "Do You know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this saying?"

I'm not sure what motivated this question. It could come from either a positive or a negative perspective on the scribes and Pharisees. The disciples could have been saying, "Wow, Jesus; you sure told them"; or they could be worried that The Lord had offended an official delegation.

Whatever their motive, it tells us that there will be times that God's truth offends others. If we do offend - let's be sure it's the Word of God doing the offending, and not our personalities. After all, we want men to hear the Gospel and be saved.

There's an old word you hardly ever hear anymore - winsome. It means *generally pleasing and engaging often because of a childlike charm and innocence*. We could put it in one of those word-plays people seem to love so much when retweeting, by saying, "Be winsome in order to win some to Christ."

Mat 15:13 But He answered and said, "Every plant which My heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted.

Jesus had previously told a parable about an enemy sowing tares among the wheat. He interpreted it as nonbelievers growing alongside believers who would at His Second Coming be separated only to be cast into Hell.

The scribes and Pharisees Jesus was dealing with were tares among the wheat. Not all of them; we remember Nicodemus, for example. But certainly this delegation, and most of the rest.

Being part of a powerful majority doesn't make you right. Being right according to God's Word is what makes you right.

Mat 15:14 Let them alone. They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch."

The scribes and Pharisees considered themselves spiritual guides to the spiritually blind. It was a description they used. But they themselves were spiritually blind and their leadership could only result in a path to the pit.

Jesus said, "let them alone." What terrifying words to come from the lips of the One Who loved the world of men so much that He came to die for their sins.

It meant God was leaving them alone, at least for a time, to reap the consequences of their unbelief and disobedience. Sometimes it is God's judgment to leave a person to experience the consequences of their own refusal to believe.

Mat 15:15 Then Peter answered and said to Him, "Explain this parable to us."

By Jesus' answer we understand the parable to be the comments regarding what goes into, versus what comes out of, the "mouth" of a man.

Mat 15:16 So Jesus said, "Are you also still without understanding?"

Not really what you want to hear from Jesus. They ought to have been a little more perceptive by now, or so Jesus thought.

It's a good question to ask ourselves. What is it I still am without understanding about with regards to my walk with The Lord? If I can identify it, I can do something about it.

It's nothing to be ashamed of. All of us are deficient in some aspect of our spiritual lives; all of us are still works in progress.

Mat 15:17 Do you not yet understand that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and is eliminated?

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

The scribes and the Pharisees were all about ritual hand washing making you more spiritual. No matter how clean a persons hands were - either hygienically or ritually - what they put in their mouth with those hands was going to be digested and eliminated. Good hygiene will keep you healthier, but it has no effect on you spiritually.

Ritual cannot have any effect on you because the real you is who you are in your heart - in your mind, will and emotions.

The real you is revealed by what comes out of your mouth.

Now obviously you can lie about what is in your heart and fool people. You can't always review a persons words and know what they are truly thinking or what they are really like.

This isn't a teaching on how to speak. The simple idea Jesus was communicating is that physical rituals like hand washing cannot transform your already defiled heart.

Jesus described the human heart for us:

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

Mat 15:20 These are the things which defile a man, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man."

What you put in does not and cannot defile you. **You are already defiled.**

Maybe you haven't, for example, murdered anyone, or committed adultery. Well, you have. If you've ever been angry at someone, or ever looked upon someone with lust, Jesus said in His Sermon on the Mount, you've sinned and are guilty of murder and/or adultery because you've done it in your heart.

This is where God's commandments come in. They are how we discover we are defiled. The nonbeliever can read them and thereby understand that he or she has broken them. He or she will further see that since these are defilements that they were born with, no amount of reformation can help them.

Evangelist and author Ray Comfort has done a nice job of renewing our understanding that we can (should) use God's Law - especially the Ten Commandments - to show nonbelievers that they are sinners who deserve Hell but can have Heaven instead by trusting in Jesus.

A typical Ray Comfort tract will say,

Do you consider yourself to be a good person? Most people do. However, most of us differ as to the definition of "good." The Bible says that God is good, and the Ten Commandments are His standard of goodness.

Then he states one or all of the Ten Commandments and follows it with something like this:

The Bible says that God will punish all murderers, rapists, thieves, liars, adulterers, etc. He will even judge our words and thoughts. On Judgment Day, will you be found to be guilty or innocent of breaking His commandments?

The Ten Commandments show a person their defiled heart and their need for the salvation that Jesus alone can provide by believing on Him.

Let me tell you a personal anecdote. It's about my boyhood experiences with Roman Catholicism. I'm not accusing all Catholics of what I'm going to explain; but, for me, it was how the traditions of men masked my defiled heart.

When we were learning about going to confession in our catechism class, I asked if we would be forgiven all of our sins, even if we forgot to confess one or two.

The answer I received was, "Yes." When I went to confession, I **chose** to "forget" certain more terrible sins; but that was OK, because they were covered by the priest's absolution and by my repetition of *Our Father's* and *Hail Mary's*.

The whole exercise was, to me, an outward ritual that masked the fact that it was from a defiled heart that my behavior sprung. I might have gone on thinking the ritual was going to save me in the end and, like billions of other people in all the religions of the world, woke up in Hades to await judgment for my sins.

Jesus is also describing *your* heart, and *my* heart, **right now**, as being defiled.

When I am born again, I receive God the Holy Spirit into my heart; I receive a new nature from God. I become a new creation. Old things pass away; all things become new.

But I still have the flesh to contend with and I always will. If I yield my members to my flesh, I am capable of all the horrors Jesus listed, and many others as well.

I cannot allow **any** traditions of men - even my own - to mask the sin in my heart. Sin doesn't need masking; it needs slaying. I am to "put to death therefore what is earthly in [me]: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry" (Colossians 3:5).

That sentence was written by the apostle Paul to the church in Colossae. It wasn't an altar call for nonbelievers. It was a call to holiness for believers, a warning about the defiled heart.

Because we have died with Christ (Colossians 3:3), we have the spiritual power to slay the earthly, fleshly desires that want to control us. In another passage Paul called this "reckoning" ourselves to be dead to sin but alive in Christ (Romans 6:11).

Am I fooling myself about sin that I am harboring in my heart - thinking that by going to church, or having devotions, or serving The Lord, it is somehow covered?

It isn't. Sin is always dealt with the same way - but putting it to death, *not* by keeping it barely alive and feeding it every now and then. I can't manage sin; I must murder it.

I don't want to leave us there, wallowing in our defiled hearts. Jesus didn't leave us there. He left Heaven, became a man, to take our place as our Substitute and die on the Cross for our sins.

His sacrifice and subsequent resurrection provide the power so I can say "Yes" to God and "No" to sin. I am indwelt by the Spirit of God. I can yield my members - my body - to God and not to the flesh.

My defiled human heart need not defile me as I walk in the Spirit and deny the flesh.

Traditions, by themselves, are not evil. We all have family traditions, and it's OK to have church traditions.

Traditions go bad when they mask the defilements of the heart; when they tell us we are spiritual for doing something, even though what we are doing cannot possibly transform our hearts.

God's Word always trumps traditions.