

Matters of the Heart - radio

(The title of our message today is "Matters of the heart." Our scripture is Matthew 15:1-20.)

"The scribes and Pharisees came to Jesus and asked Him, "*Why do your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they wash not their hands when they eat bread*" (v2)

There were mostly two kinds of people who came to Christ: those who had great needs and those who were blind to their need. These men were of the latter group. When they came, they came to deny, to accuse, to fight.

People were coming to Jesus in droves. These religious leaders were losing the respect and praise of men because the people were going to Christ. They envied Christ. So they tried to discredit Him by finding fault in Him (Jn. 8:46). They wanted to condemn Him publicly. They tried to discredit Him as a teacher. They wanted to show their superior religious knowledge. These men were nothing but religious pretenders. All that they did, they did to be seen of men. Their religion was only external, and it was full of error.

They accusingly asked Jesus why His disciples did not wash their hands when they ate? This was a tradition they had received from their teachers over several generations, whom they called their "fathers."

But Jesus was fully aware of both their hypocrisy and their motives. So He turned the tables on them. He answered them with a question of His own. They came to accuse His disciples publicly that they might discredit Christ. Therefore, He exposed them publicly. They came to declare their superior doctrine in order that they might regain the esteem of men. But Jesus publicly showed that their doctrine was false in order that He might save men. Their doctrine was false and they sought man's praise at the expense of men's souls. But Jesus is the Truth who sought the glory of God in the salvation of men.

Jesus answered their question with a question: “*Why do you transgress the commandment of God by your tradition? For God commanded, saying, ‘Honor your father and mother: and, He that curseth father or mother, let him die the death.’ But you say, ‘Whosoever shall say to his father or his mother, It is a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; and honor not his father or his mother, he shall be free. Thus have you made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition’*” (vv3-6)!

Jesus does at least two things here.

- First, He denounces their traditions in general by citing a specific case. Man’s traditions are not a matter of indifference. They are not innocent additions that support the truth. They are pernicious, evil attempts to set aside the truth of God for a lie with the secret aim of exalting men.
- Second, Jesus shows that they were motivated entirely out of self promotion and covetousness in opposition to the truth and honor of God.

The scribes and Pharisees had a tradition that excused men from their duties to their parents. They told men that a gift to the temple was more important than caring for their needy parents. Of course, these religious pretenders were motivated by covetous greed. They themselves benefited from whatever was given in the temple or synagogue. They had a conflict of interest. Because they benefitted from the gifts to the temple, they were unable to impartially dictate the rules for giving. Their giving tradition set aside God’s command to care for their parents. They taught for doctrines the traditions of men.

God’s command to honor father and mother shows His compassion for the needy and shows His wise design for us. As parents grow older and have needs, it is God’s purpose that their adult children care for them. This is a God-given responsibility. Our parents provided and cared for us and guided us when we were children. They took care of us when we were needy. They even put up with us when we were disobedient. But God’s motivations go higher. We are to do all that we do as unto the Lord. “*Children, obey your parents in the Lord*” (Eph. 6:1). “*Whatsoever you do, do all to the glory of God*” (1 Cor. 10:31). To do all that we

do to the glory of God requires faith. Labor, giving, patience in the face of opposition, all these demand an eye on God's sovereign rule and care over us in all things to His glory. We must commit our entire lives into His care. "*Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you*" (1 Pet. 5:7). Love must move us to give our time and labor throughout our lives to glorify God in His purpose. Yet there is no love where there is no faith.

Now, the traditions of men are not matters of indifference; they are positively wrong. They not only are not helpful, but they actually oppose the truth. Wherever there is a tradition of man taught as a rule of life, it will displace the truth of God. 1Tim. 4:1-3 gives two examples. "*1 Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; 2 Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; 3 Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth*" (1 Tim. 4:1-3). God says that there will be a time when religious pretenders will forbid men to marry under the false pretence that marriage makes you unholy, or keeps you from serving God. The motivations for this are at least twofold. First, it makes men celibate so that they will support the greater religious organization in their hierarchy of rank in which some men hold a higher office than others. Men wickedly love to have preeminence among men. They will do anything to gain it and hold onto it. Second, this tradition gives men an outward lifestyle by which they can distinguish themselves as more holy among men. But God designed marriage. He declared it to be holy (Heb. 13:4). Forbidding marriage is therefore positively evil. It sets aside God's purpose that a man give himself in love to his wife as a reflection Christ's love in giving Himself for the Church. The second example in 1 Tim. 4 is abstaining from certain kinds of food, such as meat. Again, this takes from men a God-given gift, and with it, the thanksgiving they ought to give God for His kind provision. Men are motivated to abstain from what God has given so that they can make outward religious distinction. All of man's traditions exalt the work of man as a way for men to be acceptable to God and to have religious advantage over others. All such things are therefore evil.

One of the worst traditions that is common in churches today is giving men things to do to be saved. “If you want to be saved, come forward in church.” “Raise your hand.” “Ask Jesus into your heart.” All such things are not only unbiblical, but are positively evil. Why? Because they displace the one thing God tells sinners to do, believe Christ, with something man can do. The Gospel commands us to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. What does coming forward in church, raising a hand, or asking Jesus into my heart have to do with faith in Christ? These things get men to looking at what they must do, and taking confidence in what they have done. The entire experience becomes the focus. Salvation is thought to be a step that I take, a decision that I make, something that I do or a recipe that I follow to get God to save me. But we must look to Christ alone. We must come to Him alone. We must believe Him alone. Salvation is a heart matter. God’s word concerning Christ and what He has done must be our only ground of faith. All such traditions are strongly condemned as evil in scripture.

After Jesus exposed the error of traditions in general and exposed the motives of the scribes and Pharisees in making up traditions, He plainly condemned them before all. He said, *“You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, saying, ‘This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoreth 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’”* (v8-9).

The Pharisees accused Jesus’ disciples because they did not wash their hands. They claimed washing made men acceptable or holy before God. Jesus now addresses their original accusing question. And He also makes a point of further exposing their hypocrisy. He shows their doctrine to be false. He shows their motives to be evil. He tells His disciples to have nothing to do with them. And in all of this, He reveals to us our own condition before God.

Our Lord establishes a most fundamental truth here: **God must be honored in the heart**. It is not outward, external actions that God judges; it is our thoughts and motives. Even our words come from our heart (Matt. 12:34). What we are in the core of our being determines who we really are. The world puts all of the emphasis

on appearance. We feel comfortable when others approve of us and accept us. We fear their frowns if we lose their approval. But all of this is entirely external. What's on the inside is what counts. What we truly are before God is not what men see, not even what we see.

The scribes and Pharisees claimed that washing hands and other things made them acceptable to God. Jesus says no. He tells the crowd, "*Hear, and understand: Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man: but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man*" (v10-11). It's not what you eat or drink, it's what you say that defiles you. This immediately shows the hypocrisy of dietary restrictions.

The disciples knew that Jesus greatly offended the scribes and Pharisees by what He said. But Jesus told said, "*Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up*" (v13). These men claimed to be of God. All who teach and preach a false gospel are like them (Gal. 1:8-9). But only those whom God plants are of God. All who are not of God will be uprooted. They will be uprooted by the world and its enticements. They will be uprooted by afflictions and temptations. They will be uprooted by believing heresies. They will be uprooted by their offense at the preaching of the Gospel.

All who teach and preach a Gospel that adds something to who Christ is and what Christ has done, or a Gospel that takes something away from who Christ is and what Christ has done, is a false Gospel. To deny the person and work of Jesus Christ, or add to the person and work of Jesus Christ is fatal to our souls and to the souls of men.

Jesus warned His disciples. He said, "*Let them alone*" (v14). Have nothing to do with them. Don't listen to them. Don't argue with them. Don't try to convert them. Don't pray for them. God will remove them. God commands us to love our enemies and those who spitefully use us. But He does not command us to pray for those who oppose the Gospel of Christ to the destruction of men's souls. In Psalm 139:21-22, David said, "**21** *Do not I hate them, O LORD, that hate thee? and am not I grieved with those that rise up against thee?* **22** *I hate them with*

perfect hatred: I count them mine enemies” (Ps. 139:21-22). And the apostle John said, “There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it.” (1 John 5:16). Leave them alone. “16 what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. 17 Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you” (2 Cor. 6:16-17).

We are to leave any group who teaches or preaches anything but the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. *“18 Many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: 19 Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things” (Philippians 3:18-19).*

Peter then asked the Lord to explain what He meant when He said, *“Not that which goeth into a man defiles a man; but that which comes out of the mouth, this defiles a man” (v11).* Now, it is on this point we must pay close attention. Here, Jesus takes occasion to **teach us what we are**. It’s easy to see the hypocrisy of others. It’s painful to see our own. When God’s word searches me out, what is my condition before God? Our Lord speaks to His disciples here. He wants us to know that evil comes from within man. If God were to reveal what’s in my heart, what would He say? What about you? *“The LORD looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God. 3 They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no, not one” (Ps. 14:2-3).* He would say that the best I do is full of sin. *“We are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags” (Isa. 64:6).* There is not one thing about me that God can accept. My best is full of sin. Do you know that your natural heart is corrupt? Even as we say this it offends us, doesn’t it? We don’t want to admit that the bright light of God’s law exposes our best works as evil. *“The carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be” (Rom. 8:7).* What I am in myself is all bad in God’s eyes. That’s the truth of scripture. We might spend our days trying to improve, trying to live right, trying to find acceptance with God. But at the end of

it all God's word says: "*We know that what thing soever the law saith, it saith to them which are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God*" (Rom. 3:19). What God requires I have failed to give. This is my condition and your condition by nature. And we can do nothing to improve it. God's word says, "*By the deeds of the law*" -- by my own personal obedience to God's law -- "*there shall no flesh be justified in His sight*" (Rom. 3:20). What is my condition by nature? I have an evil heart! What can I do about it? God's law is holy. He requires continual whole heart, soul, mind and body obedience. My heart, by nature, is full of sin. No amount of personal effort or reform will make a difference. Sure, we can make ourselves more pleasing to men. But we can never make ourselves pleasing God. Our heart is the problem. Evil comes from within. Joseph Conrad, a nineteenth century English novelist wrote, "*The belief in a supernatural source of evil is not necessary; men alone are quite capable of every wickedness.*"

Is there no hope then? If the heart I was born with is all bad, if I am guilty before God, and my best obedience cannot make me acceptable to God, what am I to do? As the Philippians jailer cried out, "*Sirs, what must I do to be saved*" (Acts 16:23)?

If Matthew 15:19 teaches us anything, it teaches us to take no confidence in our flesh, what we are by nature. Jesus told Nicodemus, "*That which is born of the flesh, is flesh.*" It can rise no higher. Our heart cannot be improved. We need a new heart. Now, realizing what we are before God, and that we can do nothing about it, makes the Gospel good news indeed.

With the heart, man believeth unto righteousness

Evil comes from the core of what we are. We sin because we are sinners in heart. God requires continuous, whole heart, soul, mind and strength obedience. Inward purity is required where only inward corruption lurks. And to complicate our problem, God cannot clear the guilty. Even if we could somehow change ourselves inwardly and outwardly, from ungodly to godly, from unrighteous to righteous, from evil to holy, from bad to good, we could not erase our past sins. Now, the

Gospel is God's wisdom that both meets His requirements and saves us from our plight. The Gospel starts with the ruin of man's own righteousness. "*There is none righteous, no, not one...there is none that doeth good, no, not one*" (Rom. 3:10). It is from here, in this context, in all the guilt and ruin of my soul, and in light of God's holy law and justice, that the Gospel reveals another righteousness: the righteousness of God! Man's righteousness is his own personal obedience to what God requires. Deut. 6:25 says, "*It shall be our righteousness, if we observe to do all these commandments before the LORD our God*" (Deut. 6:25). That is man's righteousness. The Jews were given God's law. In it, God required obedience. On condition of continuous, perfect, obedience from the heart, those who kept God's law were allowed to live. But none ever did. And none ever can. Gospel righteousness is the righteousness of God! It is called the righteousness of God because God requires it (Rom. 10:4; Gal. 2:21). And because God provides it (Isa. 54:17; 45:24; 1 Cor. 1:30). And because it consists of the obedience -- not of man, not my personal obedience to God's requirements -- but the obedience of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God (2 Cor. 5:21; Philippians 2:6-8). Therefore, it is called the righteousness of God. The only righteousness that God can accept is His own righteousness! God's righteousness is the only righteousness there is. "*I will make mention of thy righteousness, even of thine only*" (Psa. 71:16). **God's righteousness is the obedience of Christ in life, and His obedience in suffering and death, in the place and on the behalf of His people** (Rom. 3:24-25; Philippians 2:6-8). As by Adam's sin, all men were made sinners. So by Christ's righteousness, all who are in Christ are made righteous: "*As by one man's disobedience, many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one, shall many be made righteous*" (Rom. 5:19; 1 Cor. 1:30).

God's righteousness is unearnable. It is a gift. "*They which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ*" (Rom. 5:17). Jesus describes every man's condition by nature in Matthew 15:19. "*Out of the heart of man proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies*" (Matt. 15:19). Yet, wonder of wonders, The righteousness of God is a gift that God gives to these who are ungodly and unrighteous in themselves. In His wisdom and in His grace, God has found a way

to declare the ungodly to be righteous! How is that? **God has made Christ, who knew no sin, to be sin for us, who knew no righteousness, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him** (2 Cor. 5:21). How can God justify sinners? First, God provided a soul and body for His holy Son. In that perfect soul and holy body, the Lord Jesus kept every commandment of God from His heart. He loved God's will. He only did God's will. He fulfilled God's will. Then, after perfectly obeying God's law, God put the sins of His people on His Son. "He made Him to be sin for us." He who did no sin and who knew no sin, was made sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him! With those sins, under God's law, the Lord Jesus offered Himself to God in His holy nature. This was itself the highest obedience that could have been given. The holy Son of God, who perfectly obeyed all of God's law in a real human nature and soul, willingly took the sins of His people, out of love to His Father and love for His people, and He endured the very wrath of God against their sins in His own soul and body. "*Being in an agony...His sweat became as drops of blood falling down onto the earth*" (Luke 22:44). Though He obeyed in all things, He endured suffering and anguish as a transgressor. Yet in His sufferings, He desired nothing more than to honor God for His righteous treatment of Him, because by this He saved His people from their sins! "*Trouble and anguish have taken hold on me: yet thy commandments are my delights*" (Psalms 119:143). "*Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him*" (Job 13:15)! Though God forsook Him, He never denied God. Now, in Christ we see true honoring of God's law and justice. And we see the infinite display of God's love and grace to sinners: that One so high and so holy would be required and so willingly, to take the place of those who were so foul and so lowly!

Throughout their generations, the Jews misunderstood God's righteousness. They were ignorant of the righteousness of His law. It demands nothing less than perfect conformity to the holiness of God Himself. But their most fatal mistake was that they were ignorant of the righteousness that God provided in Christ. And this is the Gospel to which we must be obedient. God looks to His Son for all of the obedience He requires of His people. God received this obedience from Christ in His life and death. The obedience Christ rendered was to take to Himself the sins of those He would save, and endure the full outpouring of God's justice. He did all

of this as the Substitute for His people, in their place. He lived and obeyed and suffered and died to take away their sins and to give them His own obedience. Christ is all God considers for His people. Though our hearts, by nature, are the very spring and source of evil, yet God grants to us life from spiritual death to believe Christ, because Christ obeyed in all things for His people.

But how do I know that Christ's righteousness is mine? "*With the heart, man believeth unto righteousness*" (Rom. 10:10). All for whom Christ died are given His righteousness. But they only know and receive it in believing God's word concerning Christ. We are plagued in heart. Our heart is a cesspool of evil. We are dying. God comes to us in the Gospel. He tells us what Christ did, taking the sin and curse for His people. We are commanded to look to Christ. He is the Son of God, the Son of man, the Lord from heaven. He is the one Mediator, who was made sin for His people. We are told to come to Him and call upon Him with confidence and dependence. All who look to Him, live. Jesus is the Son of God. He is God Himself. And He is the Son of man. He took the nature of His people. And He took their plight and their place before God to do God's will by saving them from their sins. In their nature, He fulfilled God's law to God's glory. Now God says to all men everywhere, "Repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ!" Change your mind. Trust your traditions and your works no more! Don't think for a moment about what you can do to fulfill God's requirements. Think only of Christ. God accepts His obedience alone. By Him alone am I raised from spiritual death to life; He is the Word of God. He satisfied God and cleansed all of His people from all of their sins by the offering of Himself; He is God's High Priest. He must command my salvation. He has triumphed and has dominion over all my enemies: my sin, my sinful self, death, the devil and the world. He must deliver me. He is God's King. Therefore, I call upon Him and come to God by Him alone.

How do I know I believe Christ? Because God's word tells me that Christ, by His doing and dying and rising and interceding, is enough to save me to the uttermost, and keep me and present me holy and blameless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy! This truth is the whole truth about the way things are between me and God! In my conscience I go to Him asking Him to do what He has said.