

Pentecost Study 11 BPUC

Matthew 15:1-20. *Some Pharisees and teachers of religious law now arrived from Jerusalem to see Jesus. They asked him, ² "Why do your disciples disobey our age-old tradition? For they ignore our tradition of ceremonial hand washing before they eat."*

³ *Jesus replied, "And why do you, by your traditions, violate the direct commandments of God? ⁴ For instance, God says, 'Honour your father and mother,'^[a] and 'Anyone who speaks disrespectfully of father or mother must be put to death.'^[b] ⁵ But you say it is all right for people to say to their parents, 'Sorry, I can't help you. For I have vowed to give to God what I would have given to you.'⁶ In this way, you say they don't need to honour their parents.^[c] And so you cancel the word of God for the sake of your own tradition. ⁷ You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you, for he wrote,*

⁸ *'These people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. ⁹ Their worship is a farce, for they teach man-made ideas as commands from God.'^[d]*

¹⁰ *Then Jesus called to the crowd to come and hear. "Listen," he said, "and try to understand. ¹¹ It's not what goes into your mouth that defiles you; you are defiled by the words that come out of your mouth."*

¹² *Then the disciples came to him and asked, "Do you realize you offended the Pharisees by what you just said?" ¹³ Jesus replied, "Every plant not planted by my heavenly Father will be uprooted, ¹⁴ so ignore them. They are blind guides leading the blind, and if one blind person guides another, they will both fall into a ditch."*

¹⁵ *Then Peter said to Jesus, "Explain to us the parable that says people aren't defiled by what they eat." ¹⁶ "Don't you understand yet?" Jesus asked. ¹⁷ "Anything you eat passes through the stomach and then goes into the sewer. ¹⁸ But the words you speak come from the heart—that's what defiles you. ¹⁹ For from the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, all sexual immorality, theft, lying, and slander. ²⁰ These are what defile you. Eating with unwashed hands will never defile you."*

Q.1. Speculate – why had the Pharisees come from Jerusalem (120km) to see Jesus?

Q.2. What might some of the Pharisees' 'age-old traditions' v.2 be? What did they believe about these traditions with respect to the OT teachings (Torah or law)?

Q.3. How would the Pharisees have understood 'purity'?

Q.4. Why did the Pharisees begin with a critique of handwashing among the disciples?

Q.5. How would you explain Jesus' accusation against the Pharisees vv.3-6?

Q.6. How does Jesus support his charge of 'hypocrisy' v.7?

Q.7. Jesus quotes Isa 29:13 as referring to the Pharisees vv.8-9; what is the basic charge of this quote?

Q.8. Use your own words to explain v.11 "It's not what goes into your mouth that defiles you; you are 'defiled' by the words that come out of your mouth."

Q.9. What's the difference between 'offense' and 'harm'? Why does Jesus call the Pharisees 'blind guides' who lead others into harm v.14?

Q.10. 'The words you speak come from the heart—that's what defiles you' v.18; do you agree? How can 'words' reveal our true intentions?

Application: for reflection, prayer and action

Q.11. What one family tradition did you have as a child, still do now and hope will be carried on by your children?

Q.12. Are there unspoken 'traditions' in our church that might make it hard for newcomers to feel at home among us?

Q.13. What resources has Jesus offered to help you become and stay pure/holy? Look up Hebrews 1:3; 1 Pet 2:24; 1 Jn 1:9; Acts 10:9-15; Gal 5:13-25; 2 Tim 3:14-17

Q.14. Have you ever felt like 'the blind leading the blind' when it comes to knowing the difference between a true Bible tradition and a human tradition or rule? How can we be better at this?

Matt 14:13-21 (my suggested answers)

NB. Please answer the questions yourself. We all have different ways of answering; God may give you greater insights than mine. Put '*John thinks*' ... before each answer.

A.1. They came to check out Jesus' new movement – was it dangerous or not?

A.2. Some age-old traditions were: hand-washing before meals, 613 sabbath rules, tithing ideas, proselytism, public prayers, clothing etc. They believed these traditions directly arose out of a serious study of the Torah (OT teachings & laws)

A.3. Purity begins with the outward i.e. handwashing, dish-cleansing, ritual baths. The Pharisees stopped there – whereas Jesus looked to the inner cleansing also.

A.4. Handwashing was an obvious 'disobedience' of their traditions among Jesus' disciples – it was a test-case to see if Jesus' new movement was ok or dangerous

A.5. Jesus accuses them of undermining the 5th Commandment through a tradition they'd created that allowed a son/daughter to vow a sum of money/property to God and thus avoid looking after elderly parents. It created a loop-hole God didn't intend.

A.6. Jesus supports this charge by pointing out the pretence of being outwardly pious yet inwardly trying to avoid God's harder commands.

A.7. Two problems: i. Their words are insincere and ii. their teachings are non-biblical

A.8. Our words will eventually betray our motives – pure or impure.

A.9. An offense is against a tradition (can be made), whereas 'harm' is person-directed and should be avoided. Jesus 'offended' others but didn't 'harm' people's self-esteem.

A.10. I agree. Words will catch up with us and reveal our motives/attitudes/intentions

A.11. Your answer

A.12. Discuss.

A.13. His death cleanses us, his Spirit transforms and renews, and his word teaches us how to behave with purity/holiness

A.14. We can better do this by knowing Jesus and being daily guided by Scripture – it takes humility, prayerfulness, and community