

## **Lesson #16- Matthew Chapter 15 Questions for Discussion (With Help for Teachers):**

1. The scribes and Pharisees came to Jesus with a question/ accusation that His disciples broke the tradition of the elders. Jesus answered with a question, “Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?” Discuss the difference between a command and a tradition. Are there any traditions we have adopted that violate the commands of God?

### **Help for Teachers:**

The **commandments** given by God to Moses number 613, by the count of most scholars. These included the ceremonial laws. These 613 laws are found in Scripture. The Jewish religious leaders created an enormous number of “fence” laws, the idea being to fence in the actual commands of God with a barrier of rules that would create layers of protection against violating an actual command of God. Concerning sabbath alone, there were over 1500 “fence laws”. To further complicate things, all these additional requirements were passed down orally. This man-made system of protection around the actual commands of God became known as “the **traditions** of the elders”. These traditions were often regarded as more important than Scripture, and unfortunately sometimes also conflicted with Scripture. Such was the case with the tradition often used as a reason to not help aging parents with one’s wealth, saying that your savings account was reserved for whatever (presently unknown) offering that you might want to offer to God in the future (also known as “corban”, Mark 7:11).

The commands in view here are the irrevocable edicts of the Sovereign King of all creation, the all-wise, all knowing, all-powerful, perfect God (Matt 5:18, Matt 24:35). In comparison are the traditions thought up and adopted by mortal humans, ignorant, weak, and unrighteous.

It has been said that Christianity came to the Greeks and became a philosophy, then it came to Rome and became an institution, then it came to America and became a business. It is impossible to not have cultural influences on our worship. As an example, the sound and style of music in our worship is very different from that of the churches of the first century. Even comparing present time against present time, wonderful Christian worship music is very different in our church as compared to a God honoring church somewhere in third world Africa. Our worship style is a tradition, a wonderful tradition, but to decide that it is the only acceptable style of worship music and condemn anyone who doesn’t sound the same, is to take a great tradition and elevate it above the laws of God. To impose our traditions on others is not our right. To be unable to distinguish between the commands of God (doctrinal truth) and traditions we have inherited or adopted, almost always built around culture, is a serious error. The Greeks allowed their love for trying to understand the mind to pollute the clear truths of the

gospel. The Romans loved to dominate and pursued world conquest, and so they tried to forcefully impose their brand of Christianity on all their subjects, even killing those that refused to conform. America loves money and the power and the luxury that it brings, and thus many here have modeled their churches after secular business, the measure of success no longer being true worship of God and the advancement of His kingdom by the gospel. That has been replaced by spreadsheets and bank accounts and assets that reflect “healthy” growth and stability. We need big and plush buildings to make people want to come to church. We need dynamic speakers and technology to capture the attention of our audience. What became of the power of the gospel (1 Cor 1:17-18)?

How many “that’s just not right’s” do you think we would get at Tuscanooga if one Sunday morning the preaching came first, followed by a twenty-minute time of silent prayer, and then one hymn to dismiss? “That’s just not right”, not followed with a Biblical reason why it is not right, is usually strong evidence that we have elevated a tradition to a status it doesn’t deserve, above the commands of God.

2. Looking at verses 7-9, what does it look like for us to honor God with our lips but have a heart that is far from Him?

### **Help for Teachers:**

We previously read in Matthew 12:34 where Jesus said, “O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.” Jesus calls these scribes and Pharisees hypocrites. What is coming out of their mouth, seemingly (religious piety and self-righteousness), is not what is in their heart. Because their unregenerate heart is evil, the “good” they are trying to speak from their mouth, is actually deceptions masked to sound holy. They are truly “blind leaders of the blind” (Matt 15:14).

Even as children of God with a new heart, we must be careful not to allow the influences of this world to cause us to drift from loving Him as our priority (Rev 2:1-4).

Other verses:

- “And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?” (Luke 6:46)
- “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.” (Ps 51:7)
- “But the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart.” (1 Sam 16:7)
- “Shall not God search this out? for he knoweth the secrets of the heart.” (Ps 44:21)

- "The tongue of the just is as choice silver: the heart of the wicked is little worth." (Prov 10:20)

3. The disciples make it known that the Pharisees were offended by Jesus' response to their question. What are your thoughts about how Jesus responds in verses 13-14?

#### **Help for Teachers:**

"Let them alone" was Jesus' very direct answer. He preceded His answer with a with a very short and direct statement that provides pointed insight into why He answered as He did, "Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up." Once again, we encounter the often-repeated doctrine that salvation is all together the work of God, of which we play no part, other than to respond in God-given faith to the gospel call. Our salvation is by divine grace. A plant that is planted doesn't choose to plant itself, a farmer (husbandman, John 15:1) plants it. If it was not planted by the Father, then it was planted by the enemy and the Father will uproot it (review Matt 13:24-30 and 36-43). We sow seeds (the Word) everywhere as we go. Many times, the gospel is rejected by the ones we share it with, and it seems here Jesus is saying to His disciples (who were presently concerned that the Pharisees had been offended by the truth that Jesus taught), you need to move on, "Let them alone".

4. Peter wanted an explanation for the parable Jesus gave the multitude, "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." Discuss Jesus' explanation of how this parable should be understood.

#### **Help for Teachers:**

Confused by their own man-made rules about washing of hands, the Jewish religious experts had taken a spiritual principle and made it a physical practice, with a lost meaning. Washing the hands, in accordance with the law God gave Moses, was a ceremonial washing that the priests were required to do that depicted that the service they were about to perform meant nothing if done with an unclean heart.

The Pharisees tried to impugn the disciples, and therefore Jesus, by indirectly saying that they were defiled because they didn't wash their hands before eating their food (rendering them unfit for worship or service). For starters, God did not give any such

command to Moses in the law to the general populace, the command was directed to the priests, and as stated above, was ceremonial and pictorial in nature, intended to present a spiritual lesson. It had nothing at all to do with crud on the hands getting into one's stomach and making them unclean.

As was (and is) His practice, life's encounters become teaching opportunities to strengthen and encourage His disciples. Jesus then made the point that we were given by our Creator a digestive system. When crud from our hands gets in our belly, which is going to happen, it gets flushed out. If it's flushed out, it doesn't make the body sick.

The spiritual application is that we live in a fallen world and are exposed to wickedness all the time. If we don't focus on Jesus and His Word then this exposure will poison (defile) our heart (mind) (Rom 12:1-3), and what comes out of our mouth will be the evidence of our wicked thoughts (Luke 6:45). The unsaved, by nature of their heart, have no remedy for this unless God changes their heart (Rom. 1:14-32, Ezek. 11:19 and 36:26).

5. What do you think is the lesson(s) from the story of the Canaanite woman in verses 21-28?

### **Help for Teachers:**

Below are four popular theological views of how to understand this passage, taken from a conversation between Trevin Wax and Brandon Smith, hosts of a podcast called "Word Matters".

1: Jesus is being sexist and racist, then changes His mind and attitude toward her in response to seeing her faith. (Obviously terribly wrong. Consider how Jesus interacted with the Samaritan woman at the well, who would have been far more obviously deserving of condemnation.)

View 2: Jesus is simply reiterating the idea that He was sent only to the house of Israel, reiterating how Israel is the vehicle for salvation. (Referring to ethnic Israel, this seems an over-simplification, as Jesus knew that the church would rapidly become a mixture of Jews and Gentiles, and then become predominantly Gentile by the end of the first century)

View 3: Jesus isn't talking about race, sex, or nationality at all, but rather faith. He's testing her intentions. He's inviting her to a deeper faith, giving her the opportunity to respond in faith. The opportunity was afforded her to express her faith, accepting her

real state of need and condition before the Lord. Jesus allows her the opportunity to beautifully express the gospel in throwing herself confidently on His mercy and power to save.

View 4: A combination of views 2 and 3. Jesus does make it clear that salvation was to come to and through ethnic Israel, but Israel is not ultimately restricted to an ethnic people group, but rather people of faith in God. (Other verses to consider: Romans 4:11, Romans 11:16-24, Eph 2:11-15, Eph 3:1-6, Romans: 8-29, Romans: 9:4-8, Romans 9:22-26, James 1:1, 1 Peter 2:5-10)

6. Once again, Jesus feeds a great multitude of people, this time 4000 men plus the women and children. What similarities and/ or differences do you see compared to the feeding of the 5000? What lessons do you think we should learn from these stories?

#### **Help for Teachers:**

The stories are quite similar. Jesus compassionately cares for the needs of the multitudes. The first time (5000 fed), Matthew records that the disciples identified that it was late, and the crowd was hungry, bringing their concern to Jesus. The second time (4000 fed) Jesus brings the hunger of the masses to the attention of the disciples. I love that when the disciples tell Jesus of the hungry crowd, He tells them to feed them themselves. They then accomplish this impossible task by relying on His power to take their few resources and multiply them to meet the need, and they had leftovers! In both instances, the disciples are used by Jesus to accomplish what they could never make happen outside of His power. Amazing that God chooses to use human vessels like us to bring the gospel to the world. Though the task looks and is insurmountable and our resources don't appear up to the challenge, through His power we are able to get it done.