

Jesus reveals the hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees who insisted that the “traditions of the elders” be obeyed. Jesus demonstrates that these traditions contradicted the commands of God and so obedience to them resulted in disobedience to God. He also shows that these traditions ignored the true source of our sinfulness: our own heart.

¹ Then came to Jesus scribes and Pharisees, which were of Jerusalem, saying, ² Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? for they wash not their hands when they eat bread.

“Then came to Jesus scribes and Pharisees, which were of Jerusalem” – These were scribes and Pharisees that lived and worked in Jerusalem where the temple was. They apparently were even more strict about their legalistic religious practices than the local scribes and Pharisees who lived in the Galilee region.

“Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders?” – The traditions of the elders were the oral laws that had accumulated since the Jews’ captivity in Babylon. They consisted of various religious rules deemed necessary by notable scribes and rabbis over the centuries. They had little basis in the law of Moses and represented the legalistic religious ideas of men.

“for they wash not their hands when they eat bread” – The tradition of washing the hands before eating was not concerned with health or hygiene but was a ritual washing intended to cleanse the hands of any ceremonial uncleanness so that food would not become spiritually defiled when handled during a meal and so defile the person when consumed.

³ But he answered and said unto them, Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?

Jesus responds to their question with a question of His own, questioning the legitimacy of their traditions. He asks why their traditions contradicted the commandments of God so that obeying the tradition resulted in transgression of the commandments of God?

⁴ For God commanded, saying, Honour thy father and mother: and, He that curseth father or mother, let him die the death.⁵ But ye say, Whosoever shall say to *his* father or *his* mother, *It is a gift*, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; ⁶ And honour not his father or his mother, *he shall be free*. Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition.

“For God commanded, saying...” – Jesus gives them an example of a command of God that their tradition contradicted: honoring your parents. He quotes the fifth commandment (Ex. 20:12) and then a supporting scripture from Ex. 21:17 that forbade the “cursing” of one’s parents under penalty of death. The Greek word for “curseth” means “*to speak evil of*” or “*to not show honor.*” God’s command was that they show honor and respect to their parents, including providing for them when they are in need.

“But ye say” – Jesus contrasts the command of God with the tradition that the scribes and Pharisees were insisting should be obeyed. He is reducing the dispute down to its essential question: What should we obey: the command of God or the traditions of men?

“Whosoever shall say to his father or his mother, It is a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me” – In Mark’s account, Mark uses the word “corban” which means “a gift for God” (Mark 7:11 “It is Corban, that is to say, a gift”). Their tradition allowed someone to avoid their God-commanded obligation to their parents by declaring assets to be “a gift” that was reserved for God. Instead of using their assets to help their parents, declaring them to be “corban” (a gift) removed the obligation and allowed the person to keep the asset indefinitely since there was no deadline for surrendering this “gift” to God.

“And honour not his father or his mother, he shall be free” – According to their tradition, declaring their assets “a gift” allowed them to disregard the commandment without becoming guilty before God.

“Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition” – The tradition, given by men, enabled the Jews to disobey the commandment given by God. In their mind, the tradition superseded God’s commandment.

⁷ Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, ⁸ This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with *their* lips; but their heart is far from me. ⁹ But in vain they do worship me, teaching *for* doctrines the commandments of men.

Jesus quotes Isaiah 29:13 as describing the scribes and Pharisees and their adherence to their traditions. The quotation describes people who talk as if they love God but in reality their hearts are far from Him. It also declares the futility of their worship because they choose to follow the commandments that were conceived by men rather than the commands of God. Human nature has not changed because today there are many people who use Christian language and act like they love God, posting scripture verses on social media but if you scroll on down you will also see their carnal postings. Some of these same people will follow the legalistic practices of their church but not show love and forgiveness toward others. Thus their “worship” of God becomes hollow and useless.

¹⁰ And he called the multitude, and said unto them, Hear, and understand: ¹¹ Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man.

“And he called the multitude, and said unto them, Hear, and understand” – Apparently a multitude of people were witness to the conversation between Jesus and the scribes and Pharisees. Jesus calls out to the multitude because He wants them to understand the truth of the matter. He does this in blatant and public contradiction of the scribes, Pharisees and the traditions of the elders.

“Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man” – The point of this particular tradition was concerned with preventing ceremonial defilement by putting “unclean” food in your mouth. Jesus wants the people to understand that what went in the mouth did not spiritually defile a person but it was what came out of the mouth that did so. Apparently Jesus felt that this statement was self explanatory and does not explain it to the multitudes but He does explain it to the disciples when Peter asks (vs. 15-18).

Verses 12-14: No doubt the scribes and Pharisees had become angry when Jesus publicly contradicted them and the traditions of the elders. He had defied the authority of the scribes and Pharisees (who had attempted to enforce these traditions with Jesus and His disciples) and likely embarrassed them in front of the multitudes. Thus the disciples asked Jesus if He realized just how much He had offended the Pharisees with what He said. Jesus replied that the Pharisees had bigger problems than that because they would be “rooted up” by God the Father because they had not been “planted” by Him. As blind leaders of the blind, they and all who followed their teachings would end up in the “ditch” of their own destruction.

¹⁵ Then answered Peter and said unto him, Declare unto us this parable. ¹⁶ And Jesus said, Are ye also yet without understanding?

Peter asks Jesus to explain to him and the other disciples the meaning behind the parable that Jesus spoke concerning what goes in a man’s mouth versus what comes out. The meaning is not hard to understand and Jesus is surprised that the disciples require further explanation. He typically did not explain His parables to the multitudes and apparently Jesus felt that the disciples should have had enough spiritual discernment by this time to understand the meaning of the parable.

¹⁷ Do not ye yet understand, that whatsoever entereth in at the mouth goeth into the belly, and is cast out into the draught?

Jesus asks them if they understand that what a man consumes with his mouth goes directly into his digestive tract and is eventually passed out the other end. The Greek word for “draught” refers to the place where human waste is dumped. Today we might say that what goes in the mouth goes to the belly and eventually into the toilet or into the sewer system. Jesus is pointing out that the food we eat has no spiritual influence on our heart and cannot cause it to sin because eating and digesting food are purely physical processes. We might eat food or drink that is sinful but that is because we are acting as a result of the sin that is already in our heart. It was not the food that caused us to sin because the sin came from our heart.

¹⁸ But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. ¹⁹ For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies:

On the other hand, the things that come out of our mouths (our words) can defile us. The things we say reveal the sin that is already in our hearts. The mouth is usually the first place that the wickedness of our own heart will manifest itself because “out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.”

Matt. 12:34 *“O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.”*

Prov. 15:28 *“The heart of the righteous studieth to answer: but the mouth of the wicked poureth out evil things.”*

James 3:6-10 *“⁶ And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell. ⁷ For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind: ⁸ But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. ⁹ Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God. ¹⁰ Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be.”*

²⁰ These are *the things* which defile a man: but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man.

Jesus summarizes His explanation. A man is defiled by his own speech when it reveals the sinfulness of his heart. Eating with hands that have not been ceremonially washed cannot defile a man.

Verses 21-39: In vs. 21-28 Jesus travels to the border of Tyre and Sidon and a Gentile woman comes across the border to ask Jesus to cast a devil out of her daughter. Jesus initially ignores her and then later rejects her repeated pleas for help because she is not a Jew. When she expresses her faith through her persistence, Jesus commends her for her faith and grants her request. Likely His rejection was only a tactic to cause the woman to exercise and thus increase her faith. Then in vs. 29-39, Jesus returns to the area near the Sea of Galilee and when multitudes of sick people gather around Him, He proceeds to heal them. Jesus then has compassion on the multitude, knowing that many of them had not eaten in days. He then multiplies seven loaves and a few fish and feeds 4,000 men (besides women and children).