

Tradition and the Word of God

📖 Matthew 15:1-20

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Last week we studied Matt 14:22-35, Jesus and Peter walking on the water. In 14:22 Jesus immediately forced His disciples to get into the boat while he sent the crowds away because the crowds had recognized that He was the Messiah and were planning to invoke His disciples to help them take Him by force and make Him King. In 14:24, after dampening the Messianic aspirations He went up on the sloped hillside by Himself to pray. It was probably about 7pm and the emphasis is that He was all alone. In my estimation He was setting up the circumstances in order to teach the disciples a lesson. In 14:24 the boat had already made it about three miles from the land and was being battered by the waves since the wind was against them. In 14:25, between 3 and 6am He came to them walking on the water. When the disciples saw Him in 14:26 they were obviously terrified. They may have thought that they were about to die and this was "a ghost" that had been sent to welcome them into the afterlife. In any case they sought some explanation as we all would. In 14:27 Jesus immediately set them at ease saying, "Take courage, I AM; do not be afraid." At the center of this chiasmic literary structure stands Jesus as the great I AM. Because He is the great I AM they had nothing to fear. In 14:28, Peter is introduced with all his spontaneity and devotion saying, "Lord, since it is You, command me to come to you on the water." Peter knew it was the Lord and wanted to go to Him but knew it would require His word. In 14:29 He said one word, "Come," and Peter, in a remarkable act of faith, got out of the boat and walked on the water toward Jesus. But in 14:30, upon seeing the wind, he became frightened and began to sink. Peter had taken his eyes off of Jesus, he was no longer walking by faith. As he sunk he cried out "Lord, save me!" and in 14:31 the Lord immediately stretched out His hand and took hold of him. It was the Lord alone who saved Peter. Jesus then said to Peter, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" There was no reason to doubt the One who was walking on the water and felt none of the effects of the storm, for He was the great I AM. In 14:32 they got into the boat and the wind stopped because the lesson was over. The lesson was that during the interadvent age they would have to continually walk by faith in order to be victorious over Satanic forces which stir up chaos. In 14:33 those who were in the boat recognized Him and worshiped Him saying, "You are certainly the Son of God!" Significantly, Jesus accepted their worship. The lesson served to give them a greater apprehension and appreciation of His Person than they had ever had. In 14:34-36 Matthew shows that others in the region had an appreciation of Him but it was not on par with that of His disciples.

What was the main point of this pericope? The entire situation was designed by the Lord Jesus in order to instruct His disciples in the supernatural walk of faith that was required in the coming interadvent age to overcome Satan, evil and the stormy trials of life. When we keep our eyes focused on Jesus we are walking by faith and enjoying a supernatural victory. When we take our eyes off of Him we are walking by the flesh and we immediately begin to sink. While we are sinking, if we call on Him for deliverance He will rescue us immediately, bringing us back into fellowship with Him. Some people wait longer to call on Him, like Jonah, and others almost immediately, like Peter. In this respect, we want to be like Peter who always wanted to be with the Lord and never be separated from Him.

Today we come to Matt 15:1-20. This section continues to follow the pattern we said is characteristic of Matt 13:53-19:2, the Reaction of the King. There are four steps in the pattern: *opposition* to the King, the *withdrawal* of the King because it is not yet His time, the *training* of the King and some *mighty work*. We have already seen opposition to the King in Nazareth and then by Antipas. Then we saw Him withdraw into the territory of Herod Philip II where He taught the crowds. Then we saw Him do mighty works; the feeding of 25,000, walking on water with Peter and healing the multitudes at Gennesaret. The pattern has completed the cycle and it is now time for the cycle to begin again and so we return to opposition.

In 15:1 we see the opposition arising from the leadership in Jerusalem. Then some Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem... Apparently news of Jesus' teachings and miracles had spread to Jerusalem. This shows that the things that Jesus was doing were well-known and caused a stir. The news was so stirring that local scribes and Pharisees from the Galilean synagogues were insufficient to investigate. Instead top authorities of the Pharisees and scribes who were stationed in Jerusalem were sent. The scribes, if you recall, were known to be around from at least the time of King David. Originally they were dedicated families who copied manuscripts. Through the time of the Kingdom Decline they organized into guilds and taught the priests and Levites the Law. During the Exile, Ezra re-organized the scribes into a group of individuals who took a strict vow to resist heathenism. This group became known in the intertestamental times as the Hasidim. The Hasidim continued until the Maccabean revolt when Antiochus Epiphanes IV desecrated the Temple. Through the exploits of the Maccabees the Temple was re-captured, cleansed and restored and the Hasidim saw no need to continue resistance. However, in the aftermath the Maccabees took control of the temple priesthood which belonged to the Levites and so the Hasidim resisted them to the point of martyrdom. When at last one Maccabean ruler insulted the Hasidim they disappeared as a class and gave way to the Pharisees. The Pharisees were something like scribes in that their name means "the exponents" of the Law. Over time they formulated oral laws in addition to the Law of Moses. The oral laws went far beyond the Law of Moses and regulated every area of life in painstaking detail. During this time a special group within the Pharisees came to be known as the scribes. They were considered the experts of the oral laws and the Law of Moses. It was these two groups that verse 1 says came to Jesus from Jerusalem. The fact that they came...from Jerusalem signifies that Jesus posed a threat to the establishment. It would be like the FBI showing up at your doorstep. Toussaint says, "It will be noticed that

the religious leaders are from Jerusalem and not merely a local synagogue. This indicates the impact of Christ's ministry and also the extent to which the opposition of the Pharisees had been aroused."¹ Jesus was becoming a real problem for the established leadership of Israel.

In 15:2 they apparently followed Him around and investigated Him and His disciples and made this observation; Why do Your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread. They may well have been among the 25,000 that He had fed on the hillside through His disciples but it may have included other occasions. In any case it was the tradition of the elders that they wash their hands when they eat bread and they observed that Jesus' disciples did not do this. It is startling that they observed this failure to keep tradition but failed to observe the multiplication. This signifies the judicial blindness that Jesus pronounced in Matt 13. Interestingly they charge Jesus' disciples with breaking the tradition of the elders and not Jesus Himself. Does this mean that Jesus kept the tradition of the elders? No. He did not keep the tradition. However, they knew that Jesus was extremely popular and that it would not be wise to attack Him. Constable says, "They did so because they could attack Him less directly than if they had questioned His personal conduct. In view of Jesus' popularity, they may have chosen this approach because it was safer..."² It was safer. They were very concerned with their political reputation and so it was politically expedient to avoid attacking Jesus and attack His disciples instead. They had done the same thing in Matt 12:1ff.

This particular tradition regarding washing hands when you eat bread was, at the time, only an oral law. It had not yet been formalized in writing in what later became known as the Mishnah. The Mishnah is the codification of the oral law that occurred between AD135-200. In the various tractates you can find very detailed regulations on life that had been formed by the scribes and Pharisees over the centuries. The particular tractate which deals with washings is known as Kelim. The Messianic Jew Alfred Edersheim says, "Only those who know the complicated arrangements about the defilements of vessels that were in any part, however small, hollow, as these are described in the Misnah (Tractate Kelim), can form an adequate ideal of the painful minuteness with which every little detail is treated."³ Shepard adds, "Before and after every meal and whenever they came from the market-place or townsquare, they had to wash or take a bath according to certain ceremonial restrictions. All cups, pots, and brazen vessels as well as tables and perhaps dining couches must be thoroughly cleansed. The Pharisees carried their ablutions to such an extent, as to completely overshadow with their ritual the fundamental moral principles of the Scriptures."⁴

This was the fundamental problem. They had taken the Law of Moses and added to it oral law. To do this was a violation of the Law. In Deut 4:2 God said, "You shall not add to the word which I am commanding you, nor take away from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you." The inference is that if one adds or takes away anything from the word of God that one will no longer keep the commandments of God but that which he has added or taken away. Therefore, any addition or subtraction to the word of God introduces a fundamental change to the word of God and leads to disobedience. This is what

Jesus says their tradition had done a few verses later in verse 6, And by this you invalidated the word of God for the sake of your tradition. Tradition fundamentally changes the word of God despite what the exponents of tradition assert. Whenever and wherever this happens tradition becomes more authoritative than the word of God itself. This was certainly true of Judaism. In the Talmud we read, "My son, give more heed to the words of the Rabbis than to the words of the Law." This was the fundamental problem and it is also the fundamental problem of Roman Catholicism. Shephard says, "This attitude of Judaism toward their oral law has been a deciding factor in the high esteem in which the Church of Rome holds oral tradition as "of equal weight with the Scriptures."⁵ In other words, Rome elevates its interpretations of Scripture as equal to Scripture because they are following the example of the scribes and Pharisees. They seem to have missed passages like this that argue for the invalidity of all such enterprises. The word of God alone is the sole authority for all doctrine and practice.

Their question was why had His disciples broken the tradition. In 15:3 He answered their question with a question. This is an important strategy to develop in dealing with those who oppose you but you have to be able to isolate the fundamental problem so that they are trapped. Jesus was able to do this with great skill. And He answered and said to them, "Why do you yourselves transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition?" They charged His disciples with breaking the tradition of men; He charged them with breaking something higher, the commandment of God. The issue was one of authority. It would be difficult for them to credibly recover from such a damaging blow.

In 15:4 Jesus cites one thing God had said that they had broken, For God said, "HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER,' AND, 'HE WHO SPEAKS EVIL OF FATHER OR MOTHER IS TO BE PUT TO DEATH.' 5But you say, 'Whoever says to his father or mother, "whatever I have that would help you has been given to God," he is not to honor his father or his mother.' And by this you invalidated the word of God for the sake of your tradition. Now there are two commandments here that had been violated. On one hand children are commanded to "HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER." Depending on how you count the Ten Commandments this was either the fourth or the fifth commandment. Roman Catholics consider it the fourth commandment. Most Protestants the fifth commandment. It is significant because it is the only commandment with a promise attached to it. The promise related to living long in the land. If the Israelites honored father and mother, they would live long in the land. Toussaint says, "they had annulled the fifth commandment (the first commandment with promise, the very promise which was associated with the land)..."⁶ Honoring one's father and mother was essential to living long in the land because the home is where a child learns to respect authority. If the child does not learn to respect authority in the home he will not learn to respect authority outside the home. Therefore, breakdown in the family will carry over to breakdown of society at large. Jesus may have cited this commandment because they were about to be booted out of the land in AD70.

To stop this problem, the parents had their own command. On the other hand, 'HE WHO SPEAKS EVIL OF FATHER OR MOTHER IS TO BE PUT TO DEATH.' The rebellious child was to be put to death upon the testimony of

the parents. This was to stop rebellion from transferring to society at large so that society broke down and the nation was booted out of the land. So the two-fold commandment that they had broken relates to living long in the land and Jesus may have cited it as a warning that they were about to be booted out of the land in AD70.

So they had the clear commands, how had they gotten around the clear commands? The first command is the one Jesus focuses on. Under the command to honor one's father and mother a son's responsibility was to take care of his elderly parents. This naturally involved a financial responsibility. In order to get around this responsibility and ease their conscience the oral law said that they could pronounce 'Corban' over it. 'Corban' means "a gift" or "given to God." That's what you are reading in verse 5, But you say, "Whoever says to his father or mother, "Whatever I have that would help you has been given to God." "To God" is not in the original and may or may not be validly supplied but the major point is that the son was saying that he couldn't help his needy parents because the money was already dedicated to another purpose. Smith says, "...it was a monstrous iniquity when a son played the trick upon his needy parents, answering their appeal by the very formula which our Lord quotes: "Whatever of mine thou mightiest be profited by is corban." It was frequently done, and the rulers encouraged it for the sake of the profit which it brought them. The peculiar odiousness of it lay less in the inhumanity itself than in the circumstance that it was perpetrated in the name of God."⁷ Edersheim, however, does not think that the rulers in the Temple profited from this money. He says, "It must not be thought that the pronunciation of the votive word "Qorban," although meaning "a gift," or "given to God," necessarily dedicated a thing to the Temple. The meaning might simply be, and generally was, that it was to be regarded like *Qorban*—" that is, out of reach for the parents. The bottom line is they were keeping this money for themselves simply because of the burden of taking care of their parents. This was a flagrant violation of God's word.

By doing this, Jesus says in verse 5 that they did not honor their father and mother and in verse 6, they invalidated the word of God for the sake of... tradition. The word invalidated means "made to no effect, voided." In other words, the end to which the word of God had been given was no longer being met. Tradition always ends up invalidating the word of God. It is an addition to the word of God. This is a serious lesson and warning against the formulating of tradition. What is strange and almost universal about tradition is that people get more attached to their tradition than the word of God. That is the simple reason people don't leave their church when they go apostate. They simply are more attached to doing church, following their family tradition or whatever. The simple reason is because the traditions put at ease the conscience whereas the word of God convicts the conscience. They don't want Bible teaching. It is too hard to break with tradition for sound Bible teaching. Pentecost says, "The tradition of the elders therefore absolved the son from responsibility to his father and eased the conscience of the son from the guilt that failure to fulfill the law would bring."⁸

In verse 7 Jesus calls the scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites. The word hypocrites is from the word which means "an actor, a pretender." A hypocrite is one who puts on a mask in order to act like someone he is not. The scribes and Pharisees acted like they were the true exponents of the Law but in reality they were not. He then quotes

Isaiah as being fulfilled by in them, rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you, ⁸THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME. ⁹BUT IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE PRECEPTS OF MEN.” Where does this quote come from? Isa 29:13. Isa 29:13 is not prophesy but history. The people of Jerusalem in Isaiah’s day were giving lip-service to the Lord but not heart-service. He literally says in Isaiah’s day “their reverence for Me consists of tradition learned by rote.” They were just going through religious motion. Jesus is making application of what Isaiah wrote to the scribes and Pharisees of His generation. The context in Isaiah is also interesting because in the prior verses it says that tradition is like a veil that covers your understanding. He says, “The entire vision will be to you like the words of a sealed book, which when they give it to the one who is literate, saying, “Please read this,” he will say, “I cannot, for it is sealed.” ¹²Then the book will be given to the one who is illiterate, saying, “Please read this.” And he will say, “I cannot read.” The point is that whether the person is literate or illiterate the tradition rendered them incapable of understanding the Bible. It’s the same way in Judaism and Roman Catholicism today. If you talk to orthodox Jews about Isa 53 they’ll say we’re not permitted by the rabbis to read that chapter. We don’t know what it means. And if you talk to the rabbis about that chapter they’ll quote their tradition from Rashi that it speaks of Israel as the suffering servant. Whether literate or illiterate they don’t know what it means. Roman Catholics are the same way. If you ask them about things in the Bible they’ll defer to the priest. If you talk to the priest they quote the tradition of the Roman Church. Isaiah says they give lip service to God but not heart service. They worship in vain, they teach the precepts of men. They are hypocrites, actors, putting on a face. They do not know what the word of God says because their traditions are blinding them to the meaning.

In 15:10 Jesus decided to use this as a teaching opportunity. After Jesus called the crowd to Him, He said to them, “Hear and understand.” If they had ears to hear they would understand, but as we know by prediction from Matt 11:25-30 and by fulfillment from 13:11-15 that generation was under judgment and though He would speak to them in parables they would keep on hearing but not understanding, they would keep on seeing but not perceiving. So He said to them, “Hear and understand” but we know they would not Hear and understand. Only His disciples had been given ears to hear and understand, but even they, as we will see, did not yet understand.

In 15:11, what are they to hear and understand? That it is not what enters into the mouth that defiles the man, but what proceeds out of the mouth, this defiles the man. Jesus is opposing Pharisaic doctrine. The Pharisees taught that they were clean within because they did not put any unclean food into their mouth. Therefore, they viewed that which defiled a man inside was only something coming from the outside. Because they had nothing unclean coming in they considered themselves acceptable to God. Pentecost said, “The Pharisees considered themselves to be clean within and therefore wholly acceptable to God. According to their thinking, only that which touched them from outside could render them unclean and defiled in the sight of God. Christ repudiated this erroneous doctrine and taught that the seat of uncleanness and defilement is not external but internal (Mark 7:15).”⁹ This doctrine was so out of touch with what all Jews were taught from birth that even His disciples in

verse 15 ask Jesus to "Explain the parable." And Jesus said, "Are you still lacking in understanding also? Do you not understand that everything that goes into the mouth passes into the stomach and is eliminated?" This is Biology 101. You don't even need biology to figure this one out. Their theology was obviously way out of kilter with reality. This is simply a reality check but it shows what tradition will do; it will distort your view of reality so far that you miss the most obvious things, like whether there is any magic in the sacraments as Rome teaches or whether there is regeneration in baptism as many teach. These ideas are far away from reality, they are nonsense.

Now the parallel in Mark 7:19 says that by this statement in verse 15 "He declared all foods clean." In other words, the foods were not declared clean in Acts 10 with Peter's three-fold vision of the sheet coming down out of heaven with all kinds of clean and unclean animals. The foods were declared clean in this passage when He made this statement. This teaching, therefore, is preparatory for the coming interadvent age when the Jews dietary restrictions will have to be lifted for them to have fellowship with Gentiles in the church. Jesus is training His disciples for the interadvent age so that as it unfolds these things will come to their remembrance!

In 15:12 we see how powerful the Pharisees were and with what high regard the Jews reputed them. Then the disciples came and said to Him, "Do You know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this statement?" The disciples were obviously concerned that Jesus had crossed a line here. Toussaint says, "The seriousness of this breach and its implications is indicated by the concern which the disciples manifest. No doubt it was dangerous to incur the wrath of these religious leaders from Jerusalem!"¹⁰ Jesus no doubt knew that they were offended. He was not trying to make friends; He was trying to distinguish truth from error. He was not trying to make amends with the Pharisees; he was making a break with the Pharisees. The Pharisees were offended. The Greek verb is *σκανδαλιζω* and in the passive voice means "to cause to stumble." They were caused to stumble over Him because His saying contradicted their official doctrine. This was too bad since Jesus had said earlier, "Blessed is he who does not take offense at Me" (Matt 11:6). In effect what Jesus said in verse 11 that offended the Pharisees was that what the Pharisees ate did not make them accepted by God but what they said made them rejected by God. The disciples were obviously concerned about the alienation such a radical statement caused.

But, in 15:13, He answered and said, "Every plant which My heavenly Father did not plant shall be uprooted." The Jews, including Jesus' disciples, thought that the Father had planted the Pharisees as their religious leaders. However, with the parables of Matthew 13 in the background it is hard to miss the meaning of this statement. Jesus is referring to the parable of the tares in 13:24ff. In this parable the landowner had his servants sow good seed in his field but while they were asleep the enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat. The two were allowed to grow up alongside of one another until the harvest when the tares would be gathered up and burned and the wheat gathered into the barn. Jesus explained this parable to His disciples saying that the landowner is the Son of Man, the field is the world, the good seed are the sons of the kingdom and the tares are the sons of

the evil one. The two would grow side by side until the end of the age when He would send forth His angels to gather the tares and burn them with fire and the wheat would be gathered into the kingdom. In that light the saying, Every plant which My heavenly Father did not plant shall be uprooted means that the Pharisees were sown by the evil one and shall therefore be uprooted and burned with fire. Toussaint says, "...the plants to which the Lord makes reference were those deliberately planted by Satan. They look like wheat in their hypocrisy but are really darnel at heart."¹¹

In 15:14 Jesus says to His disciples Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind. And if a blind man guides a blind man, both will fall into a pit. The people considered the Pharisees to be spiritual guides or leaders (Rom 2:19). They knew the Law and the traditional interpretations of the Law. Jesus' statement they are blind guides of the blind probably shocked His disciples. If they did not already see the break between Jesus and the official religious leaders, they no doubt saw it now. Jesus said, Let them alone. The influence of the Pharisees was like leaven, everything they taught would penetrate and corrupt an individual. Jesus explained, And if a blind man guides a blind man, both will fall into a pit. This is another picture illustrating why it is so dangerous to follow a false teacher. If a blind man entrusts himself to being guided by a blind man a treacherous end will await them both. Therefore, the disciples should not have anything to do with the Pharisees. However, the majority of that generation was blind and followed these blind guides. They all fell into a pit in AD70 with the destruction of Jerusalem.

In 15:15 we see Peter. In the previous periscope, he had been introduced with all his spontaneity and devotion. Now we see that he is the lead spokesman of the group. Peter said to Him, "Explain the parable to us." Remember that a parable is a story well-known from life and true to life that is cast alongside a truth in order to illustrate one major point of comparison between the two. The parable Peter is referring to is verse 11; It is not what enters into the mouth that defiles the man, but what proceeds out of the mouth, this defiles the man." Peter, on behalf of the group says, Explain the parable to us. In 15:16 Jesus says, "Are you still lacking in understanding also?" This was a mild rebuke. It was understandable that the crowds did not understand but they were His disciples and should have understood. Constable says, "Jesus' rebuke was probably also a pedagogical device. It would have made the disciples try their best to understand what He was teaching in the future so they would avoid further rebukes."¹² Jesus did have expectations of His disciples. He expected them to try to understand and not merely ask a question without thought. Unless you are simply asking for a clarification, it is important to always think through what is taught before asking a question.

In 15:17 Jesus said, Do you not understand that everything that goes into the mouth passes into the stomach and is eliminated? This is well-known from life and true to life. We eat something and it goes out the other end. Therefore, if you ate something unclean it did not maintain one as being clean before God. What one eats is not what makes him acceptable to God. This is simply because it goes out the other end. As mentioned earlier, the parallel in Mark 7:19 says this is when Jesus declared all foods clean. That meant that all foods could be eaten.

The dietary boundary between Jew and Gentile was coming down in preparation for the interadvent age so that Jew and Gentile could fellowship in one body in the coming Church.

In 15:18 Jesus continues saying, But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man. Jesus held that one's basic nature was sinful. The reason that the evil thoughts listed in v 19 come out of a person's mouth is because they have an evil heart. The Pharisees rejected the biblical view of man's depravity. They denied that man was born with a sinful nature and out of this sinful nature committed personal sin. Jesus affirmed the biblical view of man's depravity. The evil things that we think are coming out of the sinful heart that we possess.

15:19 explains, For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders. The order follows that of the Ten Commandments showing Jesus' clear knowledge of them. The fact that it was out of the heart that evil thoughts contradicted the Ten Commandments shows that the Law did not just address the overt actions but the underlying attitudes and thoughts that people have. Jesus taught the same in the Sermon on the Mount when He repeatedly said, "You have heard it said...but I say to you." The bottom line is that when looked at this way no one can claim to have 'Kept the Ten Commandments.' If you have ever lusted after a woman you have committed adultery in your heart. If you have ever been angry with someone you have committed murder in your heart. Anyone with even an ounce of integrity has had these thoughts and cannot viably consider himself clean before God. God looks upon the human heart and sees filthy rags. Whether you eat clean or unclean foods under the OT dietary restrictions is irrelevant to the condition of the heart. Pentecost says, "The Pharisees were concerned about external contamination. They scrupulously observed traditional rituals to rid themselves of that uncleanness and did not deal with the uncleanness that came from within....the Pharisees concept led them to reject Jesus, who offered them a righteousness from God. They sensed no need of such a righteousness and insisted that ceremonial cleansings were sufficient, thinking they were essentially clean within."¹³ Constable said, "The Pharisees and scribes had become so preoccupied with the externals that they failed to deal with what is more basic and important, namely a real relationship with God."¹⁴

In summary, in 15:1 the news of Jesus' works had aroused the religious leaders at Jerusalem to send some Pharisees and scribes to investigate. After observing Jesus and His disciples in 15:2 they ask, "Why do Your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread. In 15:3 Jesus answers them with a question taking it one step further, "Why do you yourselves transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition." In 15:4 Jesus cited two commandments of God, the responsibility of a son honoring his parents and the responsibility of a son's parents putting him to death if he is rebellious. In 15:5 Jesus focused on the first of the two commandments. God said the responsibility of a son was to honor his mother and father by caring for them in their old age. But they said, "Sorry, I've already dedicated that money for some other purpose". This was a common practice so that a son did not have to help his parents and could ease

his conscience. In 15:6 Jesus says this practice invalidated the word of God for the sake of tradition. In 15:7 He referred to them as hypocrites and applied the historical situation of Isaiah's day to the scribes and Pharisees of His own day. They paid lip-service to God but not heart service, propagating the precepts of men. In 15:10 Jesus used this as an opportunity to teach the crowds saying "Hear and understand". As stated in Matt 13 He now teaches the crowds by parables so verse 11 is a parable. "It is not what enters into the mouth that defiles the man, but what proceeds out of the mouth, this defiles the man." This contradicted the traditions of the Pharisees. They thought they were clean internally and wholly acceptable to God because they did not eat unclean food. Jesus denied this. In 15:12 Jesus' disciples thought He had crossed a line. They said to Him, "Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this statement?" They viewed the Pharisees as the religious leaders of the nation but in 15:13 Jesus said that they were not planted among them by the Father as religious leaders but they were planted by the evil one. In 15:14 He says "Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind. And if a blind man guides a blind man, both will fall into a pit." It was treacherous to deal with these blind guides though most of the nation was blind and followed them. In 15:15 Peter, as the spokesman for the group, said "Explain the parable to us." In 15:16 Jesus rebuked them saying, "Are you still lacking in understanding also?" It was understandable that the crowds not understand but it was not understandable that His disciples not understand. In 15:17 He tries to bring them back to reality, "Do you not understand that everything that goes into the mouth" goes out the other end? The things that go in can neither make one clean or unclean. Rather in 15:18, "the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man." Jesus' point was that man is by nature sinful and that is why he has sinful thoughts. The Pharisees were only concerned with externals. They did not see the necessity of some resolution to their sinful nature. 15:19 explains, "For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders." These things all originate in the sinful heart of man. Therefore, man is a sinner by nature. In 15:20 He concludes, "These are the things which defile the man; but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile the man." Jesus clearly had broken with the Pharisees and urged His disciples to do the same.

What is this pericope about? Why did Matthew include it? First, he included it to show that the leadership continued to oppose the King. This time the King's works have reached Jerusalem and aroused them to send top scribes and Pharisees to investigate. Second, he included it to make a theological break with the scribes and the Pharisees. Their system of doctrine was traditions rooted in the precepts of men. They did not follow the word of God. Jesus therefore was declaring Himself to be the true expositor of the word of God. They should follow Him. Third, he included it to show that man's basic problem was that he was a sinner by nature and so what he ate could not change man's basic nature.¹⁵ What one ate was supremely irrelevant. Man needed an answer for his defiled nature. This answer is found only in the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

In conclusion, what can we learn? First, we need to learn that man's approved religious establishment, leaders, pastors, teachers, etc...are not always approved by God. If their theology is opposed to Scripture then we need to make a break with them. They are blind leaders of the blind and it is treacherous to follow them. They will lead

you into a pit and you will both fall in. If you have questions regarding them you need to talk to me. I'm theologically qualified and knowledgeable about the various spiritual movements and doctrines that pollute our world. I'm here to shepherd your souls. Second, tradition will blind you from truth. Tradition often grows up around truth and hiding truth. We need to be very wary regarding tradition because tradition has a way of appealing to our emotional senses and drawing us away from sound doctrine to the point that we have invalidated sound doctrine. It is a way of adding to the word of God that is explicitly condemned in Scripture. Third, a sound doctrine of man and sin such that we understand that man is a sinner by nature and it is out of the sinful nature that all kinds of personal sin issues forth. Man is not fundamentally good but fundamentally evil. It is healthy to be skeptical and pessimistic with regard not only to men in general but with regard to ourselves and our capabilities. As we learned last week, the only sure footing is walking by faith, keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus Christ.

¹ Stanley Toussaint, *Behold the King*, p 192.

² Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Mt 15:2.

³ Edersheim quoted by J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*, p 240.

⁴ Shepard cited by J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*, p 240.

⁵ Shepard cited by J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*, p 240.

⁶ Stanley Toussaint, *Behold the King*, p 193.

⁷ Smith cited by J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*, p 242.

⁸ J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*, p 243.

⁹ J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*, p 243.

¹⁰ Stanley Toussaint, *Behold the King*, p 193.

¹¹ Stanley Toussaint, *Behold the King*, p 194.

¹² Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Mt 15:15.

¹³ J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*, p 243.

¹⁴ Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Mt 15:17.

¹⁵ Although there is one sense in which what we eat can change our basic nature. In John 6 Jesus may have had this in the background when He said, "Eat My body, Drink My blood." Of course, by this Jesus meant to partake of Him by faith in Him. Those who hold to some form of cannibalism, such as the Roman Catholic Church in Transubstantiation, do not have spiritual eyes to see the significance of this passage.