

Jesus Taught About the Heart of Man

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to be obedient to the Word of God and not be deceived by the traditions that others have added to the Word of God. In our topic today, we are going to see that Jesus went on to explain much more about the condition of the hearts of many people.

The Pharisees and scribes were very focused on their traditions. However, their hearts were far from God. In Matthew 15:10-11, Jesus said, “When He had called the multitude to *Himself*, He said to them, ‘Hear and understand: Not what goes into the mouth defiles a man; but what comes out of the mouth, this defiles a man.’” Jesus wanted the multitudes to understand one of the changes that He would bring about through the establishment of a New Covenant. The Old Covenant given to Israel, when they were in the wilderness, contained both the Ten Commandments and also ceremonial laws about things like foods that were unclean. The purpose of these ceremonial laws was to keep the Jews a separate people from which Jesus could come. Now that Jesus had come, He was going to shed His blood as the blood of a New Covenant.

Ceremonial law was given to the Jews. Christians still followed those ceremonial laws after the death and resurrection of Jesus so that their message about the death and resurrection of Jesus would not be hindered because they no longer kept the ceremonial law. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 9:19-20, “For though I am free from all *men*, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more; and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those *who are* under the law, as under the law, that I might win those *who are* under the law.” Paul understood the freedom that he had in Christ, but he also said in 1 Corinthians 10:23-24, “All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful; all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify. Let no one seek his own, but each one the other’s *well-being*.”

Acts 21:20-21 says, “And when they heard *it*, they glorified the Lord. And they said to him, ‘You see, brother, how many myriads of Jews there are who have believed, and they are all zealous for the law; but they have been informed about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise *their* children nor to walk according to the customs.’” Here, we see that all of the Jewish Christians were zealous for the ceremonial law and continued to practice the things contained in the ceremonial law. They even asked Paul to take a Jewish vow in the following verses. At the same time, they did not try to impose the ceremonial law on the Gentiles. Acts 21:25 goes on to say, “But concerning the Gentiles who believe, we have written *and* decided that they should observe no such thing, except that they should keep themselves from *things* offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality.” These four things all come from the first nine chapters of Genesis and are universal principles for all people. Sexual immorality is a violation of Genesis 2:24; idolatry was first demonstrated by Cain, in Genesis 4:3; and the principle regarding blood and things strangled is given in Genesis 9:4, where we read, “But you shall not eat flesh with its life,

that is, its blood.”

Jesus said that what comes out of the mouth is what defiles a man. This is due to the fact that what a person speaks shows what is in his heart. Matthew 15:12-14 says, “Then His disciples came and said to Him, ‘Do You know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this saying?’ But He answered and said, ‘Every plant which My heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted. Let them alone. They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch.’” The Pharisees were very offended by what Jesus said for at least two reasons. First, the Pharisees knew that Jesus was rejecting their traditions. Second, they had not repented of their sin of unbelief, so they lacked spiritual life. They were practicing the same idolatry that Cain had practiced by depending on their own works to try and gain salvation.

Jesus went on to explain two key lessons to His disciples. First, Jesus said, “Every plant which My heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted.” Jesus gave a parable in Mark 4:26-29 that says, “And He said, ‘The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground, and should sleep by night and rise by day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he himself does not know how. For the earth yields crops by itself: first the blade, then the head, after that the full grain in the head. But when the grain ripens, immediately he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come.’” In an earlier parable in that chapter, Jesus had given the parable of the sower and the various kinds of soils (hearts) where the seed lands. Then, Mark 4:14 says, “‘The sower sows the word.’” Most of the Pharisees were like the seed that landed on the wayside. Mark 4:15 says, “‘And these are the ones by the wayside where the word is sown. When they hear, Satan comes immediately and takes away the word that was sown in their hearts.’” The Pharisees heard the Word of God and Satan immediately replaced it with their traditions.

Second, Jesus told His disciples to let the Pharisees alone. Then, Jesus described what the Pharisees and their teachings were like when He said, “They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch.” The Pharisees lacked spiritual life and so they did not have spiritual understanding. Jesus had said earlier in Matthew 13:13, “‘Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.’” In 1 Corinthians 2:14, we read, “But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned.” That is why Jesus called the Pharisees “blind leaders”.

However, most of the Jews, at that time, were also spiritually blind. Luke 2:38 says, “And coming in that instant she gave thanks to the Lord, and spoke of Him to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem.” Anna knew those who were looking for Christ to come and pay the penalty for sin, so that mankind could be redeemed. That meant that the number of people looking for redemption was only a small percentage of the people. Jesus said that when blind leaders lead the blind, both groups will fall into the ditch. By this statement, Jesus reminded us that spiritually blind leaders will lead their spiritually blind followers to eternal judgment.

We see that Jesus was then asked a question. Matthew 15:15-20 says, “Then Peter answered and said to Him, ‘Explain this parable to us.’ So Jesus said, ‘Are you also still without understanding?’

Do you not yet understand that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and is eliminated? But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. These are *the things* which defile a man, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man.” Peter had heard what Jesus had said but he did not understand what Jesus meant, so he asked Jesus to explain the parable to the disciples.

The people recognized the Pharisees as religious leaders because of the emphasis that the Pharisees placed on the importance of following religious traditions. However, they lacked spiritual life because they were depending on their own works, instead of repenting of their sin of unbelief and coming to God in faith. Jesus wanted to make certain that Peter and the other disciples clearly understood the difference between religious traditions and true repentance and faith. We see that Peter did come to a very clear understanding and showed that understanding as he preached in the book of Acts. In Acts 3:19, Peter said, “Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord.” Matthew showed his understanding by quoting Jesus in Matthew 4:17, where we read, “From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.’” Paul shared the same message in Acts 17:30, where we read, “Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent.”

Jesus went on to point out that anything eaten went into the stomach and was eliminated, but the words that come out of the mouth of a person describe what is going on in the heart of a person. Then, Jesus gave a list of sins that begin in the heart. This has been true of those who do not believe ever since Adam and Eve sinned. Genesis 6:5 says, “Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man *was* great in the earth, and *that* every intent of the thoughts of his heart *was* only evil continually.” Peter described what false teachers will be like in the last times by saying in 2 Peter 2:14, “Having eyes full of adultery and that cannot cease from sin, enticing unstable souls. They have a heart trained in covetous practices, and are accursed children.” Jesus said that these are the things which defile a person, because these things come from the heart.

In contrast, Jesus said that hands that have not been washed cannot defile a person. In this way, Jesus made it clear that the traditions of the Pharisees were false, because they taught as traditions things that did not agree with the Word of God. Paul, who was a Pharisee as a young man, later wrote in Galatians 1:14, “And I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers.” Paul advanced in Judaism as he persecuted the followers of Christ. However, when he turned to Christ, his former friends tried to kill him. Acts 9:29 says, “And he spoke boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus and disputed against the Hellenists, but they attempted to kill him.” We want to help our physical and spiritual children understand that they need to be prepared for opposition and persecution as they live faithfully for Christ. May the Lord richly bless you as you prepare your children to be faithful to Christ, even when they face persecution.