

What Defiles a Man

Lesson # 41: (Mt. 15:1-20; Mk. 7:1-23; DA 323)

In this lesson we will study Jesus' parable about what defiles a man. Jesus said to the multitude: "Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man." (Mt. 15:11) What did Jesus mean by this enigmatic statement? Was Jesus saying that it matters not what we eat or that it is not necessary to practice sound principles of hygiene? Scripture indicates that even the disciples failed to understand what Jesus meant. For this reason the apostle Peter, the spokesman of the disciples, entreated Jesus: "Declare unto us this parable." (Mt. 15:15). Let's seek to understand the profound spiritual lessons Jesus sought to teach through this parable.

Place and Audiences

1. Who entered into controversy with Jesus concerning the ceremonial washing of hands? "Then came together unto him the _____, and certain of the _____, which came from Jerusalem." (Mk. 7:1)

Note: This was most likely an official delegation from the Sanhedrin, dispatched for the specific purpose of undermining the confidence of the people in the ministry of Jesus.

2. To whom did Jesus speak a parable after His conflict with the Pharisees and scribes? "And when he called all the _____ unto him, he said unto them, Hearken unto me every one of you, and _____." (Mk. 7:14)

Note: Jesus thought it very important to explain to the multitude what He had said about ceremonial defilement lest the Scribes and Pharisees twist His words and turn the populace against Him.

3. To whom did Jesus explain the meaning of His parable? "And when he was entered into the house from the people, his _____ asked him concerning the _____." (Mk. 7:17)

4. In what region was Jesus when he spoke this parable? "And straightway he constrained his disciples to get into the ship, and to go to the other side before _____, while he sent away the people." (Mk. 6:45)

Note: According to Mark 6:45 Jesus sent His disciples in a boat to Bethsaida. But according to John 6:17 they traveled to Capernaum. Is there a contradiction? Not necessarily. The word Bethsaida means "fishertown". It is highly probable that the name of the city was actually Capernaum while the nick name of the city was "the fisher town." Even today we do the same thing when we call New York City the "Big Apple" or Chicago "the windy city".

Tradition Versus Scripture

1. What controversy arose between Jesus and the Scribes and Pharisees? “And when they saw some of his disciples eat bread with _____, that is to say, with _____ hands, they found fault.” (Mk. 7:2)

Note: The word “defiled” (*koinos*) here should be more properly translated “common” or “ritually unclean”. At issue here is not whether we should wash our hands before we eat. Both Jesus and the Pharisees would have agreed that hygiene is vitally important before food consumption. At issue here is whether it was necessary to follow the rigorous and ridiculous ceremonial traditions of the elders before, during and after meals. You can read some of these absurd rules and regulations in the resource material at the end of this lesson.

2. In the estimation of the Scribes and Pharisees, which source of truth had been disobeyed by the disciples of Jesus? “For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, except they wash their hands oft, eat not, holding the _____ of the _____.” (Mk. 7:3)

Note: The conflict here is not over **what types** of food are proper or improper but rather over the manner in which hands should be ritually washed before food is consumed. Jesus is here condemning the deadly sin of ritualism.

3. What terminology did Jesus employ to describe the rabbinical concept of tradition? “_____ tradition of the _____. . . . which they have _____ to hold. . . . Making the word of God of none effect through you tradition, which ye have _____” (Mk. 7:2, 4, 13)

Note: This terminology is extremely important. The words “received, hand down, hold, delivered, tradition” are all technical terms which describe a particular rabbinical concept of the transmission of truth. The Jewish rabbis taught that there were many truths, not recorded in the writings of Moses, which were of equal authority to Scripture (in actual practice, of superior authority). In their view, these had been transmitted from generation to generation by an unbroken succession of elders. This view sounds strikingly similar to the Roman Catholic view of Apostolic Succession, the *Magisterium* and the Deposit of the Faith.

4. Was this the only practice required by the tradition of the elders? Jesus said: “and _____ other such _____ things ye do.” (Mk. 7:8)

Note: Jesus is here indicating that the issue of ceremonially washing hands before breaking bread was only the tip of the iceberg. The whole of Jewish life was made unbearable by the stringent rules and regulations of the Scribes and Pharisees. For example, the Sabbath commandment was strangled by 613 rules added by human tradition. Keeping these rules, made the joyful observance of the Sabbath an impossibility!

5. How did Jesus respond to the accusation of the Scribes and Pharisees? “Well hath Esaias prophesied of you _____, as it is written, This people honoureth me with their _____, but their _____ is far from me.” (Mk. 7:6)

Note: There is a difference between “lip religion” and “heart religion.” There is a distinction between religiosity and true religion. As we shall see in our next section, true religion must spring from the heart or else it is false religion.

6. According to Jesus, what happens when the commandments of men replace the commandments of God? “Howbeit in _____ to they _____ me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.” (Mk. 7:7)

Note: It is crucially important to realize that replacing the commandments of God with the traditions of men leads to vain worship.

7. What happens with the commandments of God when human tradition is placed above them? “Full well ye _____ the commandment of God, that ye may keep your _____ tradition.” (Mk. 7:9)

8. What two things stand in contrast in this passage? “Making the _____ of God of none effect through your _____.” (Mk. 7:13)

9. Which commandment did Jesus use to exemplify his point? “For Moses said, _____ thy father and thy mother, and whoso _____ father or mother, let him die the death.” (Mk. 7:10)

10. **Thought Question:** How did the tradition of *corban* (the word means “dedicated”) annul the power of the fifth commandment? (Read verses 11-13) _____

Note: One author very well remarks: “The parents were not permitted to touch anything thus ‘dedicated,’ yet the undutiful son was permitted to make use of it as long as he lived. He avoided his filial duty by a profession of superior piety.” (The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, volume 5, p. 624).

11. What other example did Jesus give to illustrate the absurd and contradictory casuistry of the Scribes and Pharisees? “Woe unto you, ye blind guides, which say, Whosoever shall swear by the _____, it is nothing, but whosoever shall swear by the _____ of the temple, he is a debtor! Ye fools, and blind, for what is _____, the gold, or the temple that sanctifieth the gold?” (Mt. 23:16-17)

12. **Thought Question:** Can you think of another commandment of God's law which has been rejected by Christendom in order to follow human tradition? Draw a parallel between what Jesus said about the fifth commandment and what He would say today about the fourth commandment. _____

Heart Religion

1. What two types of religion did Jesus contrast in this episode? "This people honoureth me with their _____, but their _____ is far from me." (Mk. 7:6)
2. According to Jesus, from where do words flow? "For out of the abundance of the _____ the mouth speaketh." (Mt. 12:34)
3. According to Jesus, where does the sin of adultery originate? "Whosoever _____ on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her _____ in his _____." (Mt. 5:28)
4. When Jesus comes again, what kind of heart must His people have? "Blessed are the _____ in heart for they shall _____ God." (Mt. 5:8)
5. What great truth did Jesus utter about a person's philosophy of money? "For where your _____ is, there will your _____ be also." (Mt. 6:21)
6. What great problem characterized the Scribes and Pharisees? "Ye blind guides, which strain at a _____, and swallow a _____. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye make clean the _____ of the cup and of the platter, but _____ they are full of extortion and excess." (Mt. 23:24-25)
7. What did Jesus say to the crowd in Mark 7:15? "There is _____ from without a man, that entering into him can _____ him. But the things which come _____ of him, those are they that defile the man."

Note: Jesus could not possibly have meant that there is nothing which we ingest which can defile us, because there are many things which do cause great physical harm. Jesus is saved from a great scientific inaccuracy when we realize that He is speaking about ceremonial ablutions before eating and not about the particular foods we consume.

8. What did Jesus mean when He stated that man is defiled by what comes out of him? “But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the _____; and they defile the man. For out of the _____ proceed evil thoughts, _____, adulteries, fornications, _____, false witness, blasphemies.” (Mt. 15:18-19)

Note: Each one of these sins is a transgression of the ten commandments. When the heart is wrong, the actions will be wrong as well. Our only hope for a change of lifestyle is found in a heart transplant! God offers to take remove our heart of stone and give us a heart of flesh (Ezekiel 26:26-27). He then promises to write His law upon our hearts (Jeremiah 31:31-34)

9. What do our words reveal? “The words are an indication of that which is in the _____. ‘Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.’” (DA 323)
10. How can our own words defile us? “But the words are more than an _____ of character; they have power to _____ on the character. Men are _____ by their own words.” (DA 323)
11. Why is it dangerous to utter that which we do not really believe? “Often under a momentary _____, prompted by Satan, they give utterance to jealousy or evil surmising, expressing that which they do not really _____; but the expression _____ on the thoughts. They are _____ by their words, and come to believe that true which was spoken at Satan's instigation.” (DA 323)
12. Why is it dangerous to express words of criticism? “It is dangerous to utter a word of _____, dangerous to question and _____ divine light. The habit of careless and irreverent criticism _____ upon the character, in fostering irreverence and unbelief.” (DA 323)
13. What does Ellen White tell us about the famous skeptic, David Hume? “It is said that Hume, the skeptic, was in early life a conscientious _____ in the Word of God. Being connected with a debating society, he was appointed to present the arguments in favor of _____. He studied with earnestness and perseverance, and his keen and active mind became _____ with the sophistry of skepticism. Erelong he came to _____ its delusive teachings, and his whole afterlife bore the dark impress of infidelity. (Child Guidance, p. 196)

Clean and Unclean Foods

1. How do we know that Jesus was not abolishing the distinction between clean and unclean foods? “But to eat with _____ hands defileth not a man.” (Mt. 15:20)

Note: There are at least three powerful reasons why we know that Jesus was not abrogating the dietary laws of the Old Testament: 1) Matthew 15:20 clearly explains the issue at hand:

It was the manner of eating, not the foods eaten. **2)** Peter did not understand that Jesus had abrogated the health laws as can be seen in Acts 10:12-14. **3)** The dietary laws of Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14 were not traditions of the elders but rather the written law of Moses. The issue in Mark 7 was clearly concerning the oral law of the elders and not the written law of Moses.

2. What wise counsel was given by the apostle Paul regarding eating and drinking? “Whether therefore ye _____, or _____, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the _____ of God.” (I Cor. 10:31)

