

Matthew 15:1 ¶ Then came to Jesus scribes and Pharisees, which were of Jerusalem, saying,
Matthew 15:2 Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? for they wash not their hands when they eat bread.

Yet again we read of the scribes and Pharisees finding fault with Jesus and His disciples. This time the offense concerns the ritual washing of hands before eating; the disciples were not following tradition. At least they got one thing right—the transgression was against “tradition” not God’s law.

Mark adds a bit more information: *Mark 7:3–4 “For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, except they wash their hands oft, eat not, holding the tradition of the elders. And when they come from the market, except they wash, they eat not. And many other things there be, which they have received to hold, as the washing of cups, and pots, brasen vessels, and of tables.”*

The Jewish New Testament Commentary again adds insight: “Mark’s explanation of *n’tilat-yadayim*, ritual handwashing, in these verses corresponds to the details set forth in Mishna tractate *Yadayim*. In the marketplace one may touch ceremonially impure things; the impurity is removed by rinsing up to the wrist. Orthodox Jews today observe *n’tilat-yadayim* before meals. The rationale for it has nothing to do with hygiene but is based on the idea that ‘a man’s home is his Temple,’ with the dining table his altar, the food his sacrifice and himself the *cohen* (priest). Since the *Tanakh* requires *cohanim* to be ceremonially pure before offering sacrifices on the Temple altar, the Oral *Torah* requires the same before eating a meal.”

Matthew 15:3 But he answered and said unto them, Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?

Matthew 15:4 For God commanded, saying, Honour thy father and mother: and, He that curseth father or mother, let him die the death.

Matthew 15:5 But ye say, Whosoever shall say to his father or his mother, It is a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me;

Matthew 15:6 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.

Jesus turns the tables by noting that the scribes and Pharisees are breaking the commandment of God by following their tradition. Example—God commanded that one should “Honor thy father and mother.” In fact, anyone who cursed father or mother was to be put to death.

Exodus 20:12 “Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee.”

Exodus 21:17 “And he that curseth his father, or his mother, shall surely be put to death.”

Jesus then points out that they followed tradition that effectually circumvented God’s command. If they designated their money or belongings to the service of God, they did not have to provide the needed support to their father or mother—

dishonoring them. Ellicott provides more insight in his commentary by explaining that this "...practice became an easy method of evading natural obligations. It might be pleaded in bar of the claims of nearest relationship, and yet all the while the man might retain the usufruct of his property, and defer the fulfillment of his vow to the last hour of life. It would seem, indeed, that this casuistry went still further, and that the consecration might be only relative, as stopping the claims of this or that person, and expiring when they passed away."

Obedying God's command supersedes tradition; they were breaking the law in spite of what their tradition allowed. Jesus is affirming that it is God's will for children to help provide for their parents' needs in accordance with their resources.

Matthew 15:7 Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, Matthew 15:8 This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with *their* lips; but their heart is far from me. Matthew 15:9 But in vain they do worship me, teaching *for* doctrines the commandments of men.

Jesus quoted from the prophet Isaiah to describe these religious leaders. Yes, Isaiah was speaking to the people of his day, but prophecy often proves to have more than one application or fulfillment.

Isaiah 29:13 "Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men...."

Jesus calls a spade a spade; he calls these "religious leaders" hypocrites. They were pretending to honor God and obey His commands, but they were actually holding the traditions of men in higher esteem than the commands of God. Their professed worship of God was empty; they were professing in word and deed a piety they did not possess. They were perverting the word of God by teaching the commandments of men as doctrine or instruction from God.

This is a warning loud and clear for the Christian today. God knows what is in our hearts. No matter what we may profess or how we may act to impress people, God knows our motives. God knows whether our worship is sincere or for show. God is aware of every way His word is perverted to accommodate the desires of men.

Matthew 15:10 ¶ And he called the multitude, and said unto them, Hear, and understand: Matthew 15:11 Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man.

Jesus now turns from addressing the scribes and Pharisees to addressing the crowds gathered around them. He basically calls out to the people and tells them to pay attention because what He is about to say is important.

The teaching, my paraphrase: It's not what goes into your body that defiles you; it's what comes out of the mouth that defiles you. It's not whether or not you have eaten without washing your hands; it's how you reverence God and His word with your own words and actions. In other words, it's what is on the inside that counts. I am reminded of God's words to Samuel.

1 Samuel 16:7 "...for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart."

Reminder—In context Jesus is addressing the traditions of men vs. the commandments of God and the hypocrisy of the religious leaders. Application outside the context can result in false teaching.

Matthew 15:12 Then came his disciples, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the Pharisees were offended, after they heard this saying?

Matthew 15:13 But he answered and said, Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up.

Matthew 15:14 Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch.

The response of the disciples is almost laughable. They basically said—Don't you realize that what you said offended the Pharisees?

Though absurd to me, Jesus treated their question with dignity. He painted a word picture to make his point. He compared the religious leaders to plants and declared that unhealthy plants would be rooted up. In other words, their future was one of destruction.

Jesus also told them to leave them alone because they were blind men leading blind men and both would eventually end up destroyed. In other words, the religious leaders that were recognized for their knowledge of God's word didn't really understand it. Those that chose to believe the religious leaders instead of Jesus would follow them to destruction.

I cannot help but make a comparison to the false teachers so prominent today who are leading so many away from the truth of God's word under the guise of a fake spirituality.

Matthew 15:15 Then answered Peter and said unto him, Declare unto us this parable.

Matthew 15:16 And Jesus said, Are ye also yet without understanding?

Matthew 15:17 Do not ye yet understand, that whatsoever entereth in at the mouth goeth into the belly, and is cast out into the draught?

Matthew 15:18 But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man.

Matthew 15:19 For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies:

Matthew 15:20 These are *the things* which defile a man: but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man.

We know from Mark that Jesus and His disciples were alone when Peter spoke out and asked for further clarification..

Mark 7:17 "And when he was entered into the house from the people, his disciples asked him concerning the parable."

It seems that he thought the Lord was using a parable instead of plain speaking. It also seems from His answer that Jesus was a bit discouraged that Peter didn't get it. Patiently He reiterates the truth a bit more graphically. What you eat goes into the belly and back out again when you eliminate. The things that you speak come from your heart; they are what make a man unclean. It is the heart that gives birth to evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornication, thefts, false witness, and blasphemies. These are the things that truly defile a man. Eating with unwashed hands does nothing to defile a man.

The Greek for evil "thoughts" is a reference to reasoning and applies directly to the teachings of the scribes and Pharisees. The Greek for "fornication" also includes idolatry. "Blasphemy" is speaking evil of God.

Matthew 15:21 ¶ Then Jesus went thence, and departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon.

Matthew 15:22 And, behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, *thou* Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil.

Matthew 15:23 But he answered her not a word. And his disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us.

Matthew 15:24 But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

At this point Jesus departed for the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, Phoenician cities that were located in the land of today's Lebanon. Mark tells us that He had hoped to avoid notice.

Mark 7:24 "And from thence he arose, and went into the borders of Tyre and Sidon, and entered into an house, and would have no man know it: but he could not be hid."

Evidently His works were known in that region, since a woman of Canaan, a Gentile, came to Jesus asking Him to deliver her daughter that was possessed by a devil. The woman must have persisted in her request since the disciples asked Him to send her away because she was bothering them.

Interesting to note is that she addressed Jesus as "Lord, thou Son of David." I believe she purposely addressed Him so as to show that she recognized Him as the Messiah in direct contrast to so many in Israel. She pleaded with Him to show her mercy/compassion. Though He did not answer her at first, Jesus eventually declared that He had only been sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

Matthew 15:25 Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me.

Matthew 15:26 But he answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs.

Matthew 15:27 And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table.

Matthew 15:28 Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour.

The woman did not let the words of Jesus deter her. She really wanted help for her daughter. The Greek for the word "worshipped" in vs. 25 indicates that the woman fell down at His feet in an act of reverence and adoration for Him. What a contrast from the scribes and Pharisees who were of His own people!

Jesus then told her that it wasn't right to take the children's bread and give it to the "puppies"—a Greek word with reference to pets, not the derogatory word. She agreed with what He said; she knew that He was the Jewish Messiah and she was but a Gentile. So she compared herself to the puppies noting that they were allowed to eat the crumbs that fell from the table. Jesus recognized that she was a woman of great faith and declared that she would be rewarded; her daughter would be made whole—and she was, that very hour!

Mark adds another significant fact.

Mark 7:27 "But Jesus said unto her, Let the children first be filled: for it is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it unto the dogs."

He notes that Jesus said that the children (the Jews) were to be fed first, implying that the Gentiles were to be included in His provision. That statement provided the basis for her to continue to plead her case.

Matthew 15:29 ¶ And Jesus departed from thence, and came nigh unto the sea of Galilee; and went up into a mountain, and sat down there.

Matthew 15:30 And great multitudes came unto him, having with them *those that were lame, blind, dumb, maimed, and many others, and cast them down at Jesus' feet; and he healed them:*

Matthew 15:31 Insomuch that the multitude wondered, when they saw the dumb to speak, the maimed to be whole, the lame to walk, and the blind to see: and they glorified the God of Israel.

After His encounter with the Canaanite woman, Jesus left the area and headed for the area around the Sea of Galilee. He then headed up a mountain and sat down. The multitudes were somehow made aware of His presence and soon gathered around Him bringing those that needed healing—the lame, blind, mute, maimed or deformed and many others. Mark singles out the healing of a deaf man with a speech impediment.

Mark 7:32–36 "And they bring unto him one that was deaf, and had an impediment in his speech; and they beseech him to put his hand upon him. And he took him aside from

the multitude, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spit, and touched his tongue; And looking up to heaven, he sighed, and saith unto him, Ephphatha, that is, Be opened. And straightway his ears were opened, and the string of his tongue was loosed, and he spake plain. And he charged them that they should tell no man: but the more he charged them, so much the more a great deal they published it...."

These miracles of healing amazed those who witnessed them and prompted them to glorify the God of Israel.

There were a couple of words in Mark's record that caught my attention—"He sighed." The Greek makes reference to grief and a groan. I think that is a response to the terrible impact the curse of sin has had throughout creation. Though He is relieving some of the effects of that curse for individuals, Jesus knows that to completely destroy that curse and redeem creation will require His death on the cross.

Matthew 15:32 Then Jesus called his disciples *unto him*, and said, **I have compassion on the multitude, because they continue with me now three days, and have nothing to eat: and I will not send them away fasting, lest they faint in the way.**

Matthew 15:33 And his disciples say unto him, Whence should we have so much bread in the wilderness, as to fill so great a multitude?

It seems that the multitudes were so great that Jesus was still working miracles three days later. As He had done at a previous time, He expressed His concern about their need for food. Many had traveled quite a way to see Him and faced a long trip home. The disciples responded as they had that previous time—expressing lack of resources.

Matthew 15:34 And Jesus saith unto them, How many loaves have ye? And they said, Seven, and a few little fishes.

Matthew 15:35 And he commanded the multitude to sit down on the ground.

Matthew 15:36 And he took the seven loaves and the fishes, and gave thanks, and brake *them*, and gave to his disciples, and the disciples to the multitude.

Matthew 15:37 And they did all eat, and were filled: and they took up of the broken *meat* that was left seven baskets full.

Matthew 15:38 And they that did eat were four thousand men, beside women and children.

It's like déjà vu! (Remember the feeding of the 5,000 recorded in the previous chapter.)

Jesus asked the disciples how many loaves were available. Maybe they had learned a bit because they were ready with an answer—seven and a few fishes. Jesus commanded the multitude to sit down on the ground. He took the loaves and fishes and gave thanks to the Father. Once again he broke them into pieces and gave them to the disciples who gave to the multitude. Again, everyone ate until they were satisfied. This time there were only seven baskets of leftovers after feeding 4,000 men plus women and children.

Matthew 15:39 And he sent away the multitude, and took ship, and came into the coasts of Magdala.

Finally, Jesus sent the multitudes away and once again boarded a ship and headed to the coasts of Magdala. Easton's Dictionary points out that this is the birthplace of Mary Magdalene that was located about 3 miles northwest of Tiberias.