

The Source of Evil 3-6-05

Matthew 15:10-20 (NIV)

¹⁰ Jesus called the crowd to him and said, "Listen and understand. ¹¹ What goes into a man's mouth does not make him 'unclean,' but what comes out of his mouth, that is what makes him 'unclean.'" ¹² Then the disciples came to him and asked, "Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this?" ¹³ He replied, "Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be pulled up by the roots. ¹⁴ Leave them; they are blind guides. If a blind man leads a blind man, both will fall into a pit." ¹⁵ Peter said, "Explain the parable to us." ¹⁶ "Are you still so dull?" Jesus asked them. ¹⁷ "Don't you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body?" ¹⁸ But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man 'unclean.' ¹⁹ For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. ²⁰ These are what make a man 'unclean'; but eating with unwashed hands does not make him 'unclean.'"

Since it has been three weeks since we talked about the preceding passage, I want to take the time to refresh your memories of what took place. The religious leaders had attacked the disciples about their neglect of following their tradition of washing hands before eating bread. It was one of many rituals that the scribes made up that had taken precedence over the word of God. (Matthew 15:6b-9) The idea behind it was that in touching something ritually unclean and then touching your food, the uncleanness entered your body via the food. These religious elite had put so much emphasis on their rituals that they acted like the "ritual police", making sure that everyone conformed to their rules. It was their way of maintaining influence and power over the public. They were jealous of Jesus' popularity with the common people and angry with His neglect of their man-made traditions.

After Jesus rebuked them for using their rules to ignore God's word, and telling them that their religion was worthless, He addressed the crowd. No doubt, they were confused by Jesus' harshness toward the Pharisees. They saw these religious leaders as the holiest of men who devoted their life to God. (Matthew 19:25) If they weren't right about these rituals, then where could the people turn for truth?

The religious leaders were trying to cast doubt among the people as to Jesus' authority and righteousness. It probably had some affect. Whenever a man of God confronts traditionally accepted ways, he will be ridiculed as ignorant and deceived for not following the long acknowledged rituals of those who preceded him. (John 7:12) Martin Luther was attacked for standing up for truth and against the misuse of church authority. He was teaching a truth that is on nearly every page of the New Testament, and yet he was persecuted for not going along with accepted ways.

¹⁰ Jesus called the crowd to him and said, Listen and understand. He knew the difficulty the people had in accepting the fact that their respected leaders were wrong, so He encouraged them to listen to His teaching and understand what was being taught. (Job 32:9) Let us listen to the words of Jesus and understand how they apply to us in our situations today.

Commented [notes1]: Thus you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition. ⁷ You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you: ⁸ "These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. ⁹ They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men." Matthew 15:6-9 (NIV)

Commented [notes2]: ²⁵ When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished and asked, "Who then can be saved?" Matthew 19:25 (NIV)

Commented [notes3]: ¹² Among the crowds there was widespread whispering about him. Some said, "He is a good man." Others replied, "No, he deceives the people." John 7:12 (NIV)

Commented [notes4]: ⁹ Great men are not always wise: neither do the aged understand judgment. Job 32:9 (KJV)

¹¹ *What goes into a man's mouth does not make him 'unclean,' but what comes out of his mouth, that is what makes him 'unclean.'*

Touching something that is defiled for ritual purposes does not go into you and make you spiritually defiled. "Unclean" did not mean unsanitary, but defiled before God, unholy, impure, and unrighteous. The Law of God taught that when you touched certain things, you became religiously defiled and had to go through a ritual cleansing before you could worship or touch others. (Leviticus 5:2) There are some powerful analogies that were being taught through this. Sin does contaminate others. If my mouth is speaking vile things, your ears will hear my speech, and if you take those thoughts and meditate on them, sin has spread from me to you. My impurity of heart is passed on to you. We need our hearts cleansed so we do not spread our sin to others, and that was the picture that ritual defilement and ritual cleansing portrayed.

Commented [notes5]: ² Or if a soul touch any unclean thing, whether it be a carcase of an unclean beast, or a carcase of unclean cattle, or the carcase of unclean creeping things, and if it be hidden from him; he also shall be unclean, and guilty.
Leviticus 5:2 (KJV)

The Jew was considered defiled when he touched a dead person. The dead represents those have no spiritual life. We can allow our lives to be infected with sin by associating with the spiritually dead. There were unclean animals and unclean diseases. These seemed to be laws that helped to keep down the spread of contagious diseases, but they also picture the need for us, as the people of God, to keep ourselves from things that would defile our soul. (James 1:27) They were practical laws with spiritual applications. The religious leaders emphasized and expanded the practical laws and neglected the spiritual applications.

Commented [notes6]: ²⁷ Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.
James 1:27 (NIV)

In verse 11, Jesus explained to the people that spiritual defilement was something that came from inside not outside. He was telling us that the defilement is not what I eat, but what I say. The Pharisees, in condemning the disciples for not following their unscriptural tradition, were defiling the crowd that was listening. The uncleanness was their words that distorted the truth. It is not what you eat but what you say that corrupts and separates you from God.

Now that was a bold and shocking statement to people who had been taught all their lives a certain tradition. They had thought those works of not touching this or that and carefully washing their hands made them special. Now Jesus is telling them that the words they speak are the defiling thing. We all know the struggle of keeping our mouth pure. (James 3:2) Right?

Commented [notes7]: We all stumble in many ways. If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check.
James 3:2 (NIV)

We can do the same thing. We can go to church and Bible study and even take our daily time reading the Bible, and yet let loose with speech that does not honor God. People that hear our words say, "I thought they were supposed to be a Christian." Do you see the defilement? (James 3:6) The world does not care if you do your ritual service. They want to see if it affects your life. Ritual does not mean anything to them if it does not change your life. If you have a Christian bumper sticker and deal as shrewdly and impersonally as the next person, the defilement says your ritual does not mean a thing. It is in Jesus' words, "Vain worship." (Matthew 15:9)

Commented [notes8]: ⁶ The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.
James 3:6 (NIV)

¹² *Then the disciples came to him and asked, "Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this?"*

I am not sure if they were referring to Jesus saying their worship was vain or that defilement comes out of the mouth. It could have been either or both. Both

Commented [notes9]: ⁹ They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men."
Matthew 15:9 (NIV)

statements certainly should have wounded their pride. The disciples were concerned that these important religious officials would go away with a bad impression. They felt the need to try to impress them, or at least, not anger them. Jesus was more concerned about the people not being misled.

¹³ He replied, "Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be pulled up by the roots. ¹⁴ Leave them; they are blind guides. If a blind man leads a blind man, both will fall into a pit."

Here is Jesus' break with the religious system of His day. It was so corrupted, so misled, that He called them blind leaders. They could not see the truth. Those who would follow them will be led into the ditch the leaders are headed into. God did not appoint or anoint them. Remember, these true stories are illustrations of the parables in chapter 13. This one would correspond to the parable of the weeds. The Father planted good seed. The enemy sowed darnel. They looked righteous, but they were poisonous. The only way to tell the difference was the fruit. (Matthew 13:30) The fruit of these religious leaders was condemnation and meaningless ritual. Jesus was saying that there was no need to try to please them. If they were offended by the truth, so be it. (John 3:18-19)

We will find that from this time forward Jesus tried to avoid these religious elite. He will head from here to Tyre and Sidon and from there to the Decapolis, Greek regions. Before long, He will be in Philip's region on the other side of the upper Jordan. Most of the last year of His ministry will be working with Gentiles and teaching the disciples to carry on. The religious leaders Jesus was avoiding were the first to attack the disciples after Jesus had ascended. (Acts 4:1-3)

¹⁵ Peter said, "Explain the parable to us."

Good ol' Peter. Open mouth; insert foot. It was not a parable. It was as simple and plain as could be. It is because it was so different from the way they had been taught to think that they could not readily accept it. The word of God teaches how to think straight. (2 Corinthians 10:5) Every culture, in some way or another, teaches those who grow up in it to think in ways that are ungodly. We could list a number of misperceptions that our own culture teaches: possessions and money bring happiness; all roads lead to God; your soul mate is out there who will make you complete; a loving God would never allow you to endure pain; God helps those who help themselves. We could go on and on. Our thinking must be transformed by the Word of God and directed by His Spirit if we are to think correctly. Otherwise, we will be like Peter, "Uh, Lord, what do you mean? I don't get it!" The natural man does not understand the things of the Spirit. (1 Corinthians 2:14)

¹⁶ "Are you still so dull?" Jesus asked them. ¹⁷ "Don't you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body?" ¹⁸ But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man 'unclean.'

What a question! "Are you still so dull?" Yes Lord. We hear You, but we are slow learners. Help us understand and retain what You are telling us as You transform the way we think. Help us to see spiritually." It seems like Jesus is always amazed at how slow we are to grow spiritually and perceive what He is teaching us.

Commented [notes10]: ³⁰ Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn." Matthew 13:30 (NIV)

Commented [notes11]: ¹⁸ Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. ¹⁹ This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. John 3:18-19 (NIV)

Commented [notes12]: ¹ The priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to Peter and John while they were speaking to the people. ² They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. ³ They seized Peter and John, and because it was evening, they put them in jail until the next day. Acts 4:1-3 (NIV)

Commented [notes13]: ⁵ We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. 2 Corinthians 10:5 (NIV)

Commented [notes14]: ¹⁴ The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned. 1 Corinthians 2:14 (NIV)

It is this simple, what you eat ends up at the sewer plant. I know that some people say you are what you eat. Sorry, Jesus does not agree. He says that you are what you are in your heart. We have so many options! We can choose Atkins, or South Beach, or Microbiotic diets because we have overindulged in a sumptuous variety of food in the first place, when most of the world is just happy to have a little rice everyday. When I was in India, living on three meals of curry every day, I realized how spoiled we are. We are so food conscious; it is often a vice. But Jesus was not talking about that. He was addressing the issue of foods or conditions that supposedly contaminated the soul through the process of eating. (Romans 14:17)

Commented [notes15]: ¹⁷ For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, Romans 14:17 (NIV)

What comes out of your mouth originates in your heart. The heart of man is where the real pollution comes from. We inherited our sinful heart from Adam, and so the words that originate there are often selfish and ugly. (Matthew 12:35) Jesus was saying that sin comes from within first and foremost. You cannot get it like cooties, by touching something that has it on it.

Commented [notes16]: ³⁵ The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him. Matthew 12:35 (NIV)

¹⁹ For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. ²⁰ These are what make a man 'unclean'; but eating with unwashed hands does not make him 'unclean.'"

In case they did not get the point, Jesus listed some specifics that make us defiled before God. Every one of these things originates in our own heart. Let us take a look at each one.

Evil thoughts: Our minds were meant to be filled with things that glorify God, but because our hearts are evil, our thought life is often a battleground of good and evil. (Matthew 9:4) Only by the power of the Spirit of God can Jesus reign in our thought life, as we yield our hearts to the life of Christ in us. A heart that allows the mind to dwell on evil thoughts causes a person to be separated from God.

Commented [notes17]: ⁴ Knowing their thoughts, Jesus said, "Why do you entertain evil thoughts in your hearts? Matthew 9:4 (NIV)

Murder is something we cannot see ourselves ever being guilty of, and yet, Jesus said that if you retain anger against someone, or insult them, then you are just as guilty before God. (Matthew 5:21-22) Where does that anger and insult come from? It comes out of a heart that demands others treat me in a certain way. This heart of mine demands what it thinks are rights, but are really my selfish and prideful preferences. When that selfishness is ignored or walked on, out my heart comes a murderous attitude. That attitude declares that my life is more important than yours is. It ignores the fact that we are both made in the image of God. (James 3:9-10)

Commented [notes18]: ²¹ "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' ²² But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca,' is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell. Matthew 5:21-22 (NIV)

Adultery and Sexual Immorality: Just as in the case of murder, Jesus said that if you merely look on a woman to lust after her you have already committed adultery in your heart. (Matthew 5:27-28) Adultery and Sexual Immorality is taking a gift from God and turning it into an idol. It is believing that the physical can satisfy the soul. It is ignoring the boundaries that God has placed on us for our good and declaring that we know better than God does. In many cases, it is the blatant disregard for the will of God and the dignity of others.

Commented [notes19]: ⁹ With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. ¹⁰ Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be. James 3:9-10 (NIV)

Commented [notes20]: ²⁷ "You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.'
²⁸ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. Matthew 5:27-28 (NIV)

Theft: To take what is entrusted to another for our own selfish pleasure. It is our heart declaring that God was mistaken when He entrusted that thing to another person. We are declaring that we are more important than others, even God. (Ephesians 4:28)

Commented [notes21]: ²⁸ He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need. Ephesians 4:28 (NIV)

False Testimony: To lie for our own gain at another's expense is another illustration of selfishness. Me first, regardless of truth and righteousness. (Colossians 3:9)

Commented [notes22]: ⁹ Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices Colossians 3:9 (NIV)

Slander: We touched on this three weeks ago. The Pharisees were slandering the disciples by saying they were intentionally ignoring what they believed to be the only right way. Slander is a seductive form of selfishness that puts others down merely to make us feel superior. A heart like this has no concern for the damage done to the one slandered. It merely seeks to exalt self over others. It is a declaration of our own self-righteousness. (Titus 3:2)

Commented [notes23]: ² to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and to show true humility toward all men. Titus 3:2 (NIV)

These are the things that separate a man from God, not a silly ritual like washing hands. Surely, when Jesus expressed it like this, Peter got the point. Sometimes we just need it spelled out like that, because we are so dull. **Our** heart condition produced all these things that Jesus condemned all of them! The world says your heart is basically good. Your Creator teaches you the truth. Your heart is wicked. Your church attendance will not change your heart. Compulsory Bible reading will not change your heart. There is no ritual in any religion that will change your heart. You need an encounter with the living God. (Psalms 51:10) You may have the encounter in a worship service or in His word, but not in the perfunctory performance of those rituals.

Commented [notes24]: ¹⁰ Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Psalms 51:10 (NIV)

Now this may shock you, but hear me out. Praying, "Jesus, come into my heart" will not make you right with God. By that, I mean that if you think that just praying a certain phrase was what God required to get you into heaven, you are thinking along the same lines as the religious leaders of Jesus' day. God demands justice for our rebellion.

(Ezekiel 18:4) The penalty for treason against our Creator, for sowing darkness and selfishness, for our ingratitude, for all that springs from our wicked heart, is death. The payment sin deserves is death. (Romans 6:23) The only way to have a change of heart, the only way to be right with God, and to put an end to all that evil that flows from our wicked hearts, is not by a ritual, not by any effort, but by accepting what Jesus did for us. He did what we could never do. He did what no ritual could ever accomplish. He took our penalty and offers us His righteousness. Salvation is a transformation of the heart, and it is realized when you place that old heart of yours on the cross with Jesus and receive His righteousness as a gift. It is an exchange you cannot see with your eyes, and so we say it is by faith. (Ephesians 2:8-9) But you will notice the difference in your desires. (2 Corinthians 5:17) You will find a hunger to know Him, to pray, to read His Word, and to worship with other believers. These desires will spring from your heart not duty.

Commented [notes25]: ⁴ For every living soul belongs to me, the father as well as the son--both alike belong to me. The soul who sins is the one who will die. Ezekiel 18:4 (NIV)

Commented [notes26]: ²³ For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 6:23 (NIV)

Have you merely been through a ritual, or by faith experienced a heart exchange? (Ezekiel 36:26) Have you taken your sinful heart to the cross and received His righteousness? If you are not experiencing this hunger, this change of desires, you can go to the cross right now. Jesus is waiting to make a transaction with you that you could never deserve. You do not need a priest or a ritual. Jesus is our priest. He wants to make this personal transaction with you. It is only because God loves you that He provided this way for you to come to Him. (John 3:16) Won't you respond to His love today?

Commented [notes27]: ⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God--⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast. Ephesians 2:8-9 (NIV)

Commented [notes28]: ¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! 2 Corinthians 5:17 (NIV)

Commented [notes29]: ²⁶ I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. Ezekiel 36:26 (NIV)

Commented [notes30]: ¹⁶ "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. John 3:16 (NIV)