“Jesus’ Teaching on the Law”

Matthew 15:1-11, 18-20 May 18, 2014

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Introduction:

Much to the chagrin of man, the world does not revolve around him. Nor is it built on his ideologies or word. The world and all that are in it were created by the original Word of God. God spoke and things began to be and to exist. He called forth and authored the beginning of all.

What God says and does takes precedence over everything else. No other can compare in His power, might or authority. What He says goes. What He says is final. What He says is law.

Man has, since the beginning of time, tried to overstep what God has already said, leading him in a downward spiral of degradation. God’s law; His word will always stand as the final truth to all and will never, despite his best efforts, be usurped by man.

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

Almost since the beginning of time man has passed on information, stories, music and rules about ones culture through the form of oral traditions. One generation
is responsible for passing it on to the next so that the backbone of said culture would not go extinct; so that the ways of the people would not vanish.

Moses received God’s law, The Ten Commandments, spoken by God and written on stone as a testimony before the people forever. The Ten Commandments are rules to live by and to govern oneself in a manner that is pleasing to God; they are guidelines in which to measure one’s life.

It is said that through time there was also a set of oral traditions that defined the Jewish lifestyle and culture. This came to be known as the Mishnah and was finally written down to preserve their way of life. In today’s lesson, the “scribes and Pharisees” opposition to Jesus had nothing to do with God’s written law, rather they expressed concern over “the tradition of the elders;” things that came down through the years via oral tradition.

The issue for them revolved around the fact that Jesus’ “disciples” are charged, saying, “For they wash not their hands when they eat bread.” Now, before you say gross and reach for your private bottle of sanitizing lotion, let’s remember the issue is not about cleanliness here, the issue for all involved is to whether or not the “disciples” are keeping “the tradition of the elders.” These traditions, had become just as important as following God’s law (if not more so to some) and were made to seem like they were a law in and of itself. It wasn’t and Jesus was about to set the record straight on such matters.

Matthew 15:3-6 “But he answered and said unto them, Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition? For God commanded, saying, Honour thy father and mother: and, He that curseth father or mother, let him die the death. But ye say, Whosoever shall say to his father or mother, It is a gift, by whatsoever thou mightiest be profited by me; 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 didn’t immediately deal with their supposed accusation against His disciples at this point (He will address it later); rather, He countered their accusation with one of His own.
In concerning the matter of their traditions, one particularly bothered Jesus because it directly gave people permission to disobey God’s written law. This was greed at its worse when one develops ways not to help family members in distress and needs.

Doing a quick overview of the Ten Commandments it has been noted that the first four commands of the ten are directly related to God (see Exodus 20:1-11) while the last six deal with human relation and interactions with one another. The ironic thing about today’s lesson is the Fifth Commandment, “Honour thy father and thy mother,” is the first of the final six, meaning this is the first commandment that God issued as law in dealing with human relationships. This shows how important this particular commandment was to God.

That really hits home on why this is so important to Jesus. Over time a tradition named “Corban” meaning a “gift” was developed. The things dedicated as Corban were supposedly dedicated to God and could not be used or given to another (even though it has been said that such gifts were often kept in the possession of the one offering it). Many were using this “gift” as a means of gain and in doing so justified themselves in disobeying and breaking the first commandment dealing with how to treat one another.

They considered this tradition more important than God’s written law making “the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition.” They operated under the assumption that the concession they made for Corban was more important than following the fifth commandment. Setting aside God’s word they elevated what man said versus what God said. In the parallel version found in Mark 7, Jesus said, “Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition,” (Mark 7:9). Jesus’ language is harsh in Mark and with good reason. They are accused of rejecting what God said; meaning they have cast it off as nothing, and in so doing, have out and out refused Him.

This was unacceptable to Jesus (as it should be). God wants us to keep HIS commandments above all else. 1 John 5:3 says, “For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous.” This is how our love is demonstrated to God through the keeping of His commandments
(see also John 14:15, 21, 23). And, as noted, His commandments are not “grievous” meaning burdensome, but the traditions of the elders, now that’s a different story.

Also, Deuteronomy 4:2 tells us, “Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you.” The funny thing is this is how the whole Bible ends (see Revelation 22:18-19). Psalm 119:142 sums it up with this dynamic statement, “Thy law is the truth.” As the young people say nowadays, “Nuff said!”

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

This is a matter of lip service versus heart service. God wants your inner man devoted to Him rather than surface professions of faith. Why do you think God so approved of David despite his many, many faults? He did so because David’s heart was for God. Act 13:22 says, “I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after mine own heart. . .” David worshiped God and was devoted to God from the heart. His inner man was tied to God.

In total opposition, the scribes and Pharisees that Jesus is addressing were “hypocrites.” They were phony. Their attitudes were fake in their love for God. They weren’t in a play but boy did they put on a show. They were more impressed with outward appearances and showmanship instead of the audience of One to whom they were supposed to be living for. They say this but go and do that; go figure!?

The sad thing is this too was something that was prophesied ahead of time by Isaiah the prophet. Quoting Isaiah 29:13 Jesus said, “This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.” Isaiah prophesied a time when lip service would take
precedence over true devotion from the heart, making their worship to God “vain,” ineffective, useless and empty. The last thing that any of us should want is to come to God with empty worship. We should want and need our worship to be full of all of Him!

“Teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.” It was prophesied and the scribes and the Pharisees, through the traditions passed down from generation to generation, are doing just this. They have elevated man’s teachings to be equal to, or in some instances, to be above/authority over God’s. Isaiah will later go on to say, “The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever.” (Isaiah 40:8). Everything in this world including the “commandments of men” will pass away, but God’s Word will always remain (see Psalm 119:89; Matthew 24:35; Luke 21:33).

Matthew 15:10-11, 18-20 “And he called the multitude, and said unto them, Hear, and understand: Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man. But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the 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 unwashen hands defileth not a man.”

After charging the scribes and the Pharisees with the hypocrisy of their words and deeds, Jesus sought to teach people the truth of the law. With that intent, “He called the multitude, and said unto them, Hear, and understand.” A lot of people can physically hear the words that are coming forth without perceiving or understanding the meaning of it. Jesus wanted those in the “multitude” not to just “hear” but He wanted to open their understanding; He wanted them to know what God’s Word was saying. Psalm 119:144 says, “The righteousness of thy testimonies is everlasting: give me understanding, and I shall live,” (emphasis mine). With knowledge and understanding of the Word comes a life that can live for Him!

“Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man. But those things which proceed out of
the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man.” The scribes and the Pharisees were more obsessed with rituals that guarded what went into the “mouth” then they were with issues coming from the “heart.” Proverbs 4:23 admonishes us to, “Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.” This is like a chain linking one to the other. In the heart are the “issues of life” (as noted in Proverbs) and “those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart” (as noted by today’s lesson).

While man’s focus was on what was going into the body, Jesus’ focus was on what was coming out, because what was coming out was sure tell-tale sign of what was dwelling on the inside. He said of these things, “They defile the man.”

How so? Jesus taught, “For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies,” all of which are denounced in God’s law. The parallel in Mark 7:23 reads like this: “All these evil things come from within, and defile the man.”

This is why God pays attention to the heart. In Jeremiah 17:10 God says, “I the LORD search the heart . . .” All the more reason people should give such diligent heed to the care of the heart as the psalmist did when he said, “Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee,” (Psalm 119:11). God’s Word will triumph over the issues that plague the heart of man if he keeps it there.

“These are the things which defile a man: but to eat with unwashed hands defileth not a man.” According to the tradition of man, in order to keep the inside clean and uncontaminated one had to wash their hands before eating. Jesus’ teaching was “to eat with unwashed hands defileth not a man.” The greater concern was for the previous things noted; the sinfulness inside because “These are the things which defile a man.”

Conclusion:

Jesus noted the observance of God’s Word triumphs over the traditions of man.