

## Matthew 15:10-20 Sometimes the Truth will be Offensive

We are in Matthew 15:10-20. Back in Matthew 14:1 we saw that it was a historical marker, at that time Jesus was one year away from going to the cross and He was heading towards Jerusalem. Remember now, He is up north from Jerusalem, He is in Galilee and has been since back in Matthew chapter 4. He only went to Jerusalem for special feast times, which John in his gospel relates to us. But most of the Lord's activity and ministry was in Galilee, north of Jerusalem, several miles.

So, Jesus is on His way back to Jerusalem because He's going to die within a year. And while He's on His way back we have in verses 1-20 The Protesting of the Scribes and Pharisees.

The scribes and Pharisees are part of the religious makeup of the Jews, the religious makeup of Judaism. The Pharisees were the law keepers. In fact, they went beyond the law. Whatever the Scripture said they made up rules and regulations to keep, in order to keep those scriptures though the Scriptures did not say it at all. The scribes were the teachers of the law and experts, Jewish experts, as far as this Hebrew Scriptures were concerned. This delegation of leaders went up from Jerusalem toward Galilee and met Jesus and challenged Him there and even protested to Him there.

In verse 1 of Matthew chapter 15, it tells us, **The scribes and Pharisees came to Him saying, "Why do your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders?"** The traditions were those customs, religious customs, and religious doctrines that were made up by man just like what we have today. In fact, we are getting ready to enter into a season, have already entered into a season, the Christmas season, most of which is tradition. It is not scriptural other than the birth of Christ. So we are going to be participating in a lot of tradition, tradition of man, as this time draws near.

**"Why do you transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands whenever they should eat bread?"** The Pharisees had what is called *halakah*: those are extra rules and laws attached to the commands of Scripture. "Why do your disciples not wash their hands?" They are talking about ceremonial cleansing. What they would do is, they would make up these rules and doctrines of before you eat you have to hold your hands under water with the fingertips down and hands open and together and let all the water run down to the tips and then reverse your hands so the water runs back the other way down to the palms of the hands in order to cover all the skin; so that you would be ritually and religiously pure in order to eat. They even had *halakah* for your pots and pans, before you cooked, they had to be ceremonially clean before you could cook with them. This was not a command of God; it was a command of man for purification. So they want to know why do you violate the traditions by not keeping the *halakah*?

When Jesus answered in verse 3, He said, **"Why do you also transgress the commandment of God on account of your traditions?"** He went on to tell them about an example of in the command it says, "Honor your mother and your father," but you say - in order to get around this, because when your mother and father is in need, you take whatever finances

you have, or whatever physical possessions you have, and you give it as a gift to the church. This is a *korban*, a dedicated gift to the church. In turn, the church gives the gift back to you to use like you normally would, except now it does not belong to you, so you cannot help people with it. It costs you a little extra money for the church in order to do this favor for you, but when it comes time to help mother and father, you say, "Everything I have is a gift. I have nothing to help you with. I cannot honor you." **Everything is a gift for me with the things that you might profit. And he will never honor his mother and father.** Why? Because it is also said in the Scriptures that if you make a vow to the Lord and you make a dedication and a commitment, you cannot take it back. So, once you dedicate a gift, you can never help your mother and father, if everything you have has been donated and dedicated to God in the church.

Verse 7, He called them hypocrites. *Hypocrite* is an *actor*. Everyone who is religious or involved in religious practice is a hypocrite. **ὑποκρισεις** (*hupokriseis*) means to *answer according to the script*. And so, a religious person just answers according to the script and physically, humanly, goes through whatever rituals one must do to satisfy the rules and regulations. And so, He calls them *actors*. **Well did Isaiah prophesy concerning you: (Isaiah 29:13) "This people is drawing near to me with their mouth, and with their lips they honor Me; but their heart is far distant from Me. But vainly they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men."**

I ended off last week by saying to you most of what we have in the church, in the body of Christ today, are teachings and doctrines from tradition. Even though Scripture is read, the Scripture is not followed. Those of you that were here for the July meeting with The Manifesto, and those of you that will receive it will hear how the various theological doctrines, we had three books out that represented the three major movements in Christianity that have their doctrine. We have the Reformed Doctrine, we have the Fundamentalist Doctrine, and we have the Charismatic Doctrine, all lined up for you in books. All using the same Scripture, but all saying that the Scripture reads differently. Those volumes of books are called *secondary* pieces of information. It is not the Bible. Even though the Bible is read in some instances, the main following are the traditions from within these books, the theological traditions that the people believe. And they say, "This is what the Bible says," and so they read the tradition, they do not study the Bible. And so if you go straight to the text and just study the text, it is a lot different than a lot of the traditions. And the problem we have in our day with those of us that make up sermons and messages is that we read a portion of Scripture but our messages are based upon the traditional beliefs of the church that they are in, or personal convictions. That is all tradition.

Our religious practices, as I said earlier, we are getting into that season were each church and each denomination has a certain practice or schedule of events, of ceremonies and services within their church and denomination having to do with the birth of Christ. The majority of which are all tradition. Even the date of the birth of Christ is tradition. It was decreed by one of the emperors, not of Rome, but Constantine and the people that followed with him in about 360 A.D. they come up with the date, because of this solstice celebration, winter solstice celebration that they decided they would celebrate the birth of Christ on that date. He was not born on December 25th. He was born, so with that we study the birth of Christ. But there are some people that just outright follow the date and the ritual within their church as being approved of God and you must do it or else you will be in big trouble with God. So the Lord says, "Instead

of asking us why do we violate your traditions by our practices, why do you violate the command of God by your traditions?" And that got them all riled up.

For today in Matthew chapter 15 at verse 10. After telling them, the religious leaders, this challenge back at them, verse 10 says, **And when He called to the crowd, He said to them, "Hear and understand."** He is now speaking to the second group of people. Verses 1 through 9 He spoke to the leaders. In verses 10 and 11 He will speak to the general audience, the crowd of people. In verses 12 through 20 He will speak to the disciples. So now after leaving off with the leaders and offering them that challenge, He now speaks to the crowd.

**And He says to them, "Hear and understand."** Those are two commands in the Greek text. *Hear and understand* is a common idiom that means *pay attention very closely*, He is telling the crowds.

**"The thing entering into the mouth is not defiling the man, but the thing going out of the mouth, this is defiling the man."** And so He just makes a statement to them. It is not what you eat. It is not what you put into your mouth in religious ritual, but it is what comes out of your mouth that defiles a person. So defilement is a matter of on the inside, not the outside practice. What is on the inside? And He does not tell them. And by the way verse 11 is considered to be a parable, because Peter in verse 15 is going to say, "Explain this parable to us."

So now He leaves off from the crowd and now in verses 12 through 14 we study The Conflict of the Pharisees. The Pharisees are in conflict, but it is the disciples now. **Then when His disciples came to Him.** Now we have the third group, but we are told two pieces of information elsewhere that we need to know:

(1) First of all, in Mark 7:17 it says, "after Jesus spoke to the crowds that He went into the house with the disciples." So He is not speaking to the crowds now. He is not speaking in public. He is now speaking to the disciples privately.

(2) And Matthew 13:11 that we have studied before, when the disciples came and said, "Why do you speak in parables?" **Jesus answered and said unto them, "Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given."** So He purposely did not address the leaders with the parable. He just put it right back in their face, "You have violated the command of God by your traditions." Then He turns to the crowd and says, "It is not about purification - about how pure your hands are, or how pure the pots and pans are - that is not purification. What goes in your mouth has nothing to do with spiritual purification. It is what comes out of your mouth." We will see later on that He says it comes from your heart. That is where you need to be pure, not in your religious ritual.

So now the disciples come to Him and now the Lord is going to talk to the disciples privately because it is for them. It is not for the crowd in general. It is not for the leaders, the Pharisees. The Pharisees and leaders have left with the Lord putting it right back at them about their violation of the Word of God; probably making them even more upset than they were when they came to Him. **But the disciples came to Him, and they said to Him, "Did you know that**

**the Pharisees after hearing the saying, they were offended."** Interesting the word *saying*, this *saying* is the word *word* (λόγος, logos / λόγον, logon). **"After they heard this word of Yours,"** they became offended. **But when Jesus answered, He said, "Every plant which My heavenly Father did not plant, shall be rooted out."** Tough words, but an interesting text in order to understand the Lord's ways both for you and for me.

I have said to you before, many times, that we make decisions based on two things: (1) what or whom we love the most or (2) what or whom we fear the most. Whenever we make decisions we take into consideration, "Well I know this is what the Lord would probably have me do, but he or she will be very upset with me if I obey the Lord instead of pleasing them." Or what we fear the most. We fear rejection. We fear the repercussions of other people and so we make decisions based on what is going to be better for us in our decision-making.

But the biggest thing to fear is offending people. And that is what Jesus did here. The disciples come and said, "Don't you know that when they heard your saying that they were offended?" And Jesus said, "That which is not planted of My Father must be rooted up," or *rooted out*, literally, as it reads.

We think that if we offend someone that it is not love. And we hear it so often when people say,

"A God of love will never offend anybody."

"A God of love will never lead me to hurt people's feelings."

"A God of love would never hurt people's feelings."

So we compromise and we take the easy road, the road that we think is love. But in reality, there are many instances in which our obedience to Christ or the understanding that we have in Scripture is going to make people upset. They are going to be offended by our loyalty and obedience to Christ. Did you know that is part of what it means to have a testimony? Some people will receive what you have to say, and other people will reject it. Well the rejecting part is part of a testimony for representing Christ. It is not trying to smooth things out and compromise, make everybody feel good or feel happy. So there is a general philosophy that if we love people, we are not going to offend them or hurt their feelings.

After all, Jesus said in Matthew 18:6-7, **Jesus said, "But whosoever should offend one of these little ones (speaking of children) which believe in Me it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck and he was drowned in the depths of the sea,"** then [if] you would offend one of these little ones. Then He says in general, Matthew 18:7, **"Woe to the world because of offenses."** The word *woe* means *destruction*. "Woe to the world." There will be offenses all over the place, **"For it is necessary that offenses should come, but woe to that man through whom the offense comes."** Everyone will be responsible for how they offend other people. Offenses will come but woe to that one who offends people and it turns out to be for disaster.

The word *offend* in Greek - in our text when the disciples said, "They were offended" - the word *offend* is **σκάνδαλον** (skandalon). It is where we get our English words *scandalize* and *scandal* from. In Greek, in general it means *to put a hindrance in front of someone, something to stumble over*. So for me to offend someone in Christ means that I have put a stumbling block there to keep them from coming to the truth in Christ. If I teach the wrong doctrine, if I teach people wrongly and they follow the wrong doctrine and the wrong religious practices, that is an offense, and I will be responsible for that.

But there is a second kind of offense, which Jesus is relating here, when people are going down the wrong way. They are going down the wrong path. They are believing the wrong thing. And Jesus says, "All I did was put a hindrance there." Put something there for them to stumble over while they are making their way down the wrong path. Gave them something to think about, something to challenge them with. And in that sense, that offense is purely acceptable and in fact, the Lord does it all the time.

So here in our text, Jesus offended the religious leaders and the text indicates that He meant to do it. He did it on purpose. He offended them because they were following their traditions and their commandments of traditions, instead of the Scriptures themselves.

The reason He offended them was given to us in verse 13, "**That which is not planted of My Father must be rooted up.**" So if we teach the truth of God's word, some people are going to be offended, if you teach the truth. It is because they are going down the wrong way. They are believing the wrong thing. They are following tradition. They are following traditional doctrine, teachings that have been handed down for years and they have said, "Yeah I agree with that, so that is what I am going to follow," but it violates the Scriptures so they are going to be offended.

To some people the truth of the gospel will be a seed of light and they will receive it. James says, "**Receive the implanted word which is able to save your souls.**" But other people with the same truth and the same light are going to be uprooted by the Lord by that which is false. See, we do not like to cause trouble. We do not like people to get upset. We like love and unity amongst all the people. All you have to do is say you believe in Jesus Christ, so everything is fine. But the Lord has put us in a situation where how we live and how we represent Christ to others is going to do two things. It is going to either build them up and be a blessing to them or it is going to cause an uprooting. Our desire should be we do not want people to follow that which is false and be sensitive to the fact the Lord might use us to upset them. Uprooting is not fun. It is like - I equate it, I am a conceptual person, a conceptual learner - it is the difference between going to the dentist and having your teeth cleaned, and going to the dentist and having your tooth pulled. Having your tooth pulled you do not really look forward to that. And with some people to represent the truth in Christ, it would be like pulling their tooth. The Lord is going to be uprooting that which is not true and that which is not of Him.

So there are two ways to offend people. Like Jesus said, hindering people from coming to Christ by presenting and following tradition and traditional teachings, rather than the truth of God's Word. It is hindering people from coming to Christ, that is an offense, woe to that person.

But then there is the offense of people being told the truth of God's Word and causing them even to stumble over it, at the revealing and uprooting of that which is in them that is not true.

We see in verse 14 what He commands them to do. **"Leave them alone."** Literally *leave off from them*. That is what He did back in verses 1-9, He confronted them with the truth and then left them alone, let them wrestle with it themselves. **"They are blind leaders of the blind; and if the blind lead the blind both will fall into a ditch or a pit."** *Blind* is metaphorically used for *being ignorant of the truth*. If leaders are ignorant of the truth, they will lead others in ignorance, and both will fall into the to the pit.

Verses 15 through 20, The Comprehension of the Problem. **And when Peter answered he said unto Him, "Explain to us this parable."** The parable he is making reference to is back in verse 11, when He told the crowd, "That which goes into the mouth doesn't defile a person, but that which comes out." So now in private to his disciples, **He says, "Are you yourselves also still without understanding? Do you not perceive (a different Greek word than in verse 16) that everything going into the mouth goes into the stomach, and is cast out into the latrine (into the toilet)?"** We all understand that process of elimination of impurities.

In fact, in Mark 7:19 it says that when Jesus said this, he says, "Everything that goes into the mouth goes into the stomach because it does not go into the heart." Food does not go into the heart, the heart being the inner person where we have our motives and thoughts and emotions and feelings. But food passes through its impurity process.

**"But the things that go out of the mouth come out from the heart, and these are what defile a man."** Paul said in I Corinthians 8:8 that food has no effect of a spiritual standing before God. The physical, outward practices and rituals have no effect on spiritual standing with God. It is all what takes place in the heart.

**"For out of the heart comes out evil reasonings, murderers, adulteries, immoralities (fornication means sexual immorality outside of marriage), thefts, false testimonies, and blasphemies."** Come out from the heart.

Jeremiah says in Jeremiah 17:9 "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked who can know it?"

Verse 20, **"These are the things defiling the man. But to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man."** So it is the heart. He is telling the disciples, "This is the answer to the parable." That which goes into the mouth goes into the stomach and is eliminated. It has nothing to do with the inner person, the spirit of man, the heart of man. And the heart of man has no purification process. It is just impure. It is evil and it is from the heart that comes all of our evil reasonings and all of our evil practices and all of our sin. And the only answer to the purification of the heart is Christ - that a person be converted, that Jesus Christ come into a person's inner person, into his heart and that is the purification process. It is the only process given to us. There is no natural purification process for the heart, except in Jesus Christ.

Paul says in Romans 14:17, "**For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.**" It is not meat and drink. It is not outward religious practice. It is not physical. It is spiritual. It is a having a right heart and a right relationship with Christ, that is what purifies a person.

So we can know, that is why Jesus purposely and meant to offend the religious leaders, because their heart was not right. They had made up their own commandments to twist the Scriptures so the Scriptures would not be true, so they would not have to obey the Word of God. And that is what is going to happen. If we seek to learn the truth of Christ and we seek to follow the Lord and obey Him and be faithful to Him, people will be blessed, and people will be offended. And we are very fearful in our natural human state of offending people. But if they are not following the Lord as they should, if they are not following the truth in Christ, if they are not believing the truth about what God's Word says and we represent the truth, they will be offended. But Jesus says, "Leave them alone." If they got offended let God work on them. God is uprooting things from them so leave them. Let God do His work. But know this, sometimes offending people is the right thing to do, if it is done by the Spirit of God in representing the truth.

Let's close with prayer.