

Traditions vs. the Commandments of God (Matthew 15:1-9)

The chapter begins with the Pharisees and scribes traveling all the way from Jerusalem to confront Jesus about His disciples' failure to observe the tradition of ceremonial handwashing before eating. This was not about hygiene but about ritual purity, something the religious leaders valued above all else.

Jesus' Response: Prioritizing God's Commandments Over Man's Traditions

Jesus countered their accusation by exposing their hypocrisy. He pointed out how they used tradition to nullify God's commands, specifically regarding honoring parents. The Pharisees allowed people to declare their wealth as a religious offering ("Corban"), thereby excusing them from financially supporting their aging parents.

"These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men." (Matthew 15:8-9, NKJV)

Personal Application

1. Are there traditions in my life that hinder true obedience to God? Many times, religious rituals and cultural expectations can overshadow genuine faith and obedience.
2. Am I just giving God lip service? True worship isn't just about words but about aligning our hearts with God's will.

What Truly Defiles a Person? (Matthew 15:10-20)

Jesus then shifts the focus from external purity to internal purity. He teaches that what comes out of the mouth defiles a person, not what goes in. The disciples were concerned about how this teaching offended the Pharisees, but Jesus dismissed them as blind guides leading the blind.

"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 unwashed hands does not defile a man." (Matthew 15:19-20)

Personal Application

1. Do I focus more on external appearances than inner holiness? God looks at the heart.
2. What is coming out of my mouth? Our words reflect what's in our hearts—are they filled with kindness or bitterness, faith or doubt?
3. Am I too concerned with offending people rather than obeying God? Jesus wasn't afraid to challenge religious hypocrisy.

The Faith of the Canaanite Woman (Matthew 15:21-28)

Jesus then travels to Tyre and Sidon, Gentile territory, where a Canaanite woman pleads for Him to heal her demon-possessed daughter. At first, Jesus is silent. Then He states that He was sent only to

the lost sheep of Israel. Finally, He tells her that it wouldn't be right to give the children's bread (blessings for Israel) to the dogs (Gentiles). But she wisely responds:

"Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters' table." (Matthew 15:27)

Jesus commends her great faith and heals her daughter instantly.

Personal Application

1. Do I persist in prayer, even when God seems silent? The woman's faith was unwavering despite Jesus' initial silence.
2. Do I let rejection stop me from pursuing Jesus? She pressed on despite cultural and religious barriers.
3. Do I trust that even the "crumbs" from Jesus' table are enough? God's grace is abundant, even in what seems like small blessings.

Jesus Heals the Multitudes (Matthew 15:29-31)

Jesus returns to the Sea of Galilee, and people bring Him the lame, blind, mute, and others with severe ailments. He heals them all, and the crowd glorifies the God of Israel—a hint that many in the crowd were Gentiles.

Personal Application

1. Do I believe Jesus is still able to heal? He demonstrated His power and compassion to all who came to Him.
2. Am I bringing others to Jesus for healing—physically, emotionally, or spiritually?

The Feeding of the Four Thousand (Matthew 15:32-39)

After three days of teaching and healing, Jesus expresses compassion for the crowd, not wanting to send them away hungry. The disciples, despite having witnessed the feeding of the five thousand earlier (Matthew 14), still doubt how they can feed so many. Jesus takes seven loaves and a few fish, blesses them, and miraculously feeds four thousand men, plus women and children.

Personal Application

1. Do I forget God's past faithfulness in my present trials? The disciples had already seen Jesus multiply food before, yet they still doubted.
2. Do I trust Jesus with my needs? He provides not just for our spiritual needs but our physical ones too.
3. Do I recognize that Jesus' compassion extends beyond Israel? This feeding likely included many Gentiles, showing that the Gospel was for all people.

Final Thoughts

This chapter challenges us to move beyond empty religion and embrace true faith. It reminds us to prioritize God's commands over traditions, to guard our hearts rather than just our external actions, to persist in faith even when God seems silent, and to trust in His provision and healing power.

Reflection Questions:

- Is my worship genuine, or am I just going through religious motions?
- What is overflowing from my heart—faith or fear, gratitude or grumbling?
- Do I persist in seeking Jesus even when I feel ignored or unworthy?
- Am I trusting Jesus to meet my needs, or am I still trying to figure things out on my own?

May we walk in authentic faith, trusting in the power, provision, and compassion of our Savior.
Amen.