

LESSON 27 . . . Avoiding Spiritual Defilement (Matthew 14:34-15:20)



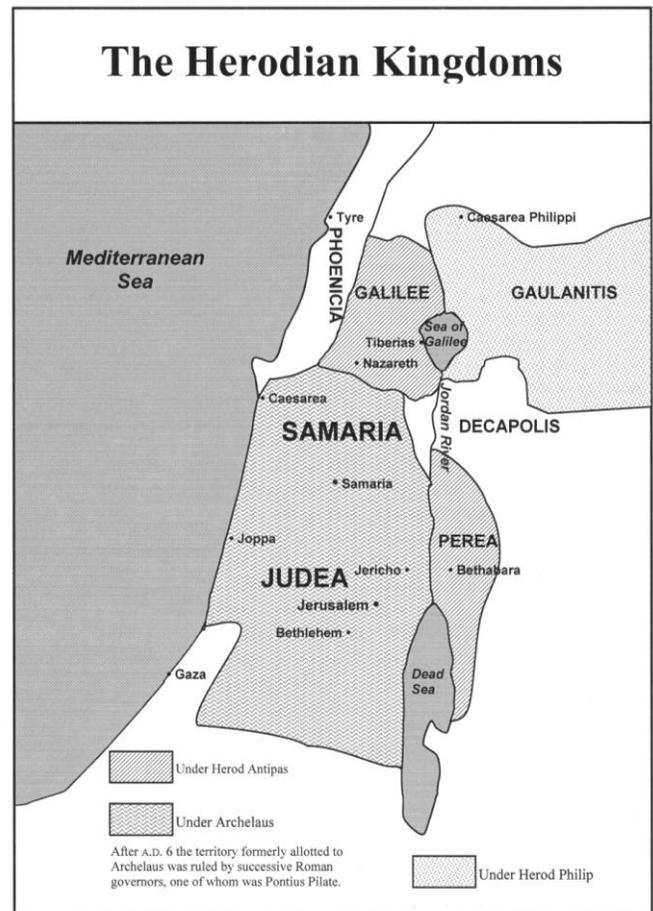
After Jesus calms the storm on the Sea of Galilee, the boat immediately and miraculously arrives at the shore, which is three and a half miles away (Jn 6:21). They are now north of Tiberias, in the land of Gennesaret (Guh-ness'-uh-ret), which is another name for the Sea of Galilee (Lk 5:1, see map). When the people of the region recognize Jesus, they bring Him all their sick. They even beg Him to allow them to touch the fringe of His robe, and everyone who touches His garment is healed (14:34-36). The verses that follow contain **two** principles for avoiding spiritual defilement. First is . . .

NOTES

Revere truth over tradition (15:1-9).

Pharisees and scribes come from Jerusalem to confront Jesus. They ask Him why His “*disciples break the tradition of the elders*” by not washing their hands when they eat (15:1-2). They are referring to ceremonial washing, not washing for hygienic purposes. This *tradition*, which was not part of the Law, required that water be poured on both hands with the fingers pointing upward. Then, the process would be repeated with the fingers pointing downward. This is the kind of tradition Paul writes about in Galatians 1:14. What does he write about himself in that verse?

The Pharisees and scribes revere these traditions and give them precedence over God’s Word. Therefore, Jesus responds with a counterattack. He asks them, “*Why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition?*” Next, He quotes the fifth commandment, the first that relates to human relationships. He reminds them God has “*commanded, ‘Honor your father and your mother’*” (15:3-4a). This commandment doesn’t just apply to young children, but also to anyone whose parents are still living. The Hebrew word translated *honor* (KĀBĒD, kaw-bod’) in Exodus 20:12 includes speaking respectfully to parents and showing care for them as long as they live. The penalty for breaking this



command is severe (Ex 21:17). Jesus quotes it in the last phrase of verse four. Write it below:

The Pharisees and scribes know these commands well. However, Jesus reminds them they say it is ok for them to tell their parents they can't help because they have vowed to give to God what they would have given their parents (15:5-6a).

Honoring parents included financial support and care in old age, if necessary. To eliminate their financial obligation to parents, Jewish tradition permitted people to declare what they owned as "*Corban*," which means "*given to God*" (Mk 7:10-11). This was an irrevocable oath, so the money or property was exempt from God's command to honor parents. Then, they claimed their wealth could only be used for spiritual purposes, but they continued to benefit from it.

Jesus says, for the sake of tradition, they have revoked God's Word, and He calls them "*hypocrites*." He adds that Isaiah prophesied correctly about them (15:6b-7). Then, quoting from Isaiah 29:13, what does Jesus say in verse eight?

What Isaiah said about people of his own day applies to hypocrites of all times. The Greek word translated *hypocrites* originally meant actors or people who hide behind masks.

When we claim to honor God but our hearts are far from Him, we are *hypocrites* and there is nothing Jesus despises more. His harshest words are always directed toward *hypocrites*. Many people today are like the Pharisees and scribes, who knew a lot about God and His Word, but they didn't know God.

Jesus continues by again paraphrasing from Isaiah 29:13: "*In vain do they worship me*" (15:9a). In John 4:24, Jesus describes the only way God wants to be worshipped. Personalize, and write it below:

Worshipping God "*in spirit*" means worship is not external; it is internal—from the heart. Worship is not ceremonies and rituals. To worship God "*in*

truth” is to worship Him in a way that is consistent with His Word, which **is truth** (Jn 17:17).

Next, Jesus sums up why religious leaders want Him dead. He exposes and sums up their hypocrisy in the last phrase of Matthew 15:9 by again paraphrasing from Isaiah 29:13. Write it below:

Traditions are not necessarily bad. But, when traditions are honored above the Word of God, they are an offense to God and a barrier to worship and fellowship with God. Therefore, to avoid spiritual defilement, **revere truth over tradition** and . . .

Recognize the origin of defilement (15:10-20).

Next, Jesus calls the people to Him and tells them to listen and understand. He then says: “. . . *it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but what comes out of the mouth; this defiles a person*” (15:10-11). The Pharisees and scribes think eating without ceremonially washing their hands defiles them. But, Jesus explains defilement is not an exterior matter, such as only eating certain foods or washing hands a certain way. People are defiled by who they are on the inside.

Why does what comes out of our mouths defile us? Because our words reveal the condition of our hearts! The Pharisees and scribes know God’s Word, so they should have known what God says to Samuel when he almost anoints the wrong person to replace Saul as king. What does God say in the last three phrases of 1 Samuel 16:7?

The disciples then come to Jesus and ask Him if He realizes He has “*offended*” the Pharisees and scribes. Jesus is certainly aware He has *offended* them, but it is necessary to reveal the truth. Jesus tells His disciples, “*Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be rooted up*” (15:12-13). Jesus is comparing the Pharisees and scribes to plants God has not planted. They are like weeds that will be uprooted. Then, Jesus says, “*Let them alone*” (15:14a), which means they shouldn’t listen to them. How does Jesus explain His words in the rest of verse 14?



The Pharisees and scribes are *blind* to the true meaning of God’s Word. The *pit* was a hole, or cistern, dug in a field to provide water for animals. A blind man walking through such a field would fall into the *pit*. Calling the Pharisees *blind guides* means they are in the same spiritual condition as the blind they claim to lead (Rom. 2:19).

Peter speaks up and asks Jesus to explain His parable about defilement in verse 11 (15:15). In disappointment, Jesus asks if they are “*still without understanding?*” Then, He asks, “*Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth passes into the stomach and is expelled?*” (15:16-17). This means food going into the body can’t defile a person because it passes through the *stomach and is expelled*. What does Mark parenthetically add in Mark 7:19b?

Jesus explains that what comes out of our mouths comes from the heart and is what defiles us (15:18). All sin begins in our hearts and shows up in our words. Defilement is not a matter of what we eat, but a matter of the heart. Jesus continues: “*For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander.*”²⁰ *These are what defile a person. But to eat with unwashed hands does not defile anyone*” (15:19-20). Are you guilty of any of these sins? Don’t be too quick to answer because our hearts are *deceitful and desperately sick* (Jer. 17:9a-b).

Medicine, education, money, or a more sophisticated culture will not change a single heart. The United States is proof of that! There is no power on earth that can change your heart. Only Christ can do that. It requires a spiritual metamorphosis, a change from the inside out—literally a change of heart. Referring to the coming Messiah, what does God say through the prophet Ezekiel in Ezekiel 36:26a?

The things that defile us do not come from unwashed hands but from an unwashed heart. Defilement is the result of sinful thoughts in the heart leading to sinful actions. To avoid being a hypocrite, pray Psalm 26:2 on a regular basis. Write it below:

The origin of defilement is the heart. To avoid spiritual defilement: **revere truth over tradition** and **recognize the origin of defilement**.