

## EVERYTHING FLOWS FROM THE HEART!

*Deuteronomy 4:1,2,6-9; Mark 7:1-8,14,15,21-23; James 1:22A*

**Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.**

We know Jesus as being “gentle, meek, and mild,” and who said things like this: “let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them.” [Matthew 19:14]

The only time his words were rather harsh was when he was confronted by the hypocrisy of the Pharisees.

When Jesus called Matthew to discipleship, he was sitting at the tax collector’s booth [Matt 9:9f], and Jesus even had dinner at his house, with a bunch of tax collectors and an assortment of other “sinners”, the Pharisees asked:

***“why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and ‘sinners’?”***

Jesus responded: [Matthew 9:12,13], ***“It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”***

And today Jesus again teaches what the core of the Gospel is, when he has a run-in with the Pharisees. [Mark 7:1-4]

***<sup>1</sup>The Pharisees and some of the teachers of the law who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus <sup>2</sup>and saw some of his disciples eating food with hands that were defiled, that is, unwashed. <sup>3</sup>(The Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they give their hands a ceremonial washing, holding to the tradition of the elders. <sup>4</sup>When they come from the marketplace they do not eat unless they wash. And they observe many other traditions, such as the washing of cups, pitchers and kettles.)***

Actually they had over **600** of these rules!

And what is really interesting is that these ‘experts’ in the law couldn’t see their hypocrisy by adding to the law they received from Moses, which Moses forbade! [Deuteronomy 4:2]

So the Pharisees and teachers of the law asked Jesus:

***“Why don’t your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders instead of eating their food with defiled hands?”***

To which Jesus replied:

***“Isaiah [29:13] was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written: “These people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules.”***

And if that wasn't clear enough that he meant the Pharisees and teachers of the law, he looks them straight in the eye and says: ***8”You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to human traditions.”***

In other words all these rules and regulations – the **traditions of the elders** – espoused by the Pharisees and teachers of the law, were not and never have been God's will! The Pharisees and teachers of the law, Jesus says in Matt 15:14, were like **blind** leading the **blind**.

***“Leave them; they are blind guides. If a blind man leads a blind man, both will fall into a pit.”***

Not much has changed to this day! So many today feel that being a Christian means **doing** things and **refraining** from things!

**And so Jesus explains what he is on about! He says that keeping some rules, regulations, and traditions, as good and proper as they may be, are just so much window dressing! THEY ACHIEVE ABSOLUTELY NOTHING!**

Paul understood this when he said of his own strict adherence to the traditions of the elders:

***“I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ. . . . <sup>10</sup>I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection.” [Philippians 3:8b,10]***

The problem, Jesus says, is the heart, the human condition, that is rotten and **<sup>19</sup>out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. <sup>20</sup>These are what defile a person.**

The heart has to be cleansed and purified! And this will definitely not happen with simple outward improvements. No following the **traditions of the elders** – these outward improvements and virtue-signalling, - will have any effect! The rottenness will still be there and will smell to the high heavens:

It's the heart, Jesus says, the **human condition** itself, that is the problem! And nothing can heal that condition! Nothing and no one, **except me! “Repent” – “Turn to me for healing.”** It's for this very reason that he came into the world, as he said [Matthew 9:12]:

***“It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick.”***

And Luke 5:32:

**"I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."**

Repentance, confessing our sinfulness – turning to Christ is the only solution! The cleansing of the sinful human condition is needed so that the fruit of the Spirit may sprout! [Galatians 5:19-26]

And this was something the Pharisees didn't understand, blinded as they were by their '**Traditions.**' This was foretold by Isaiah 1:3 3

**"The ox knows its master, the donkey its owner's manger, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand."**

This reminds me of our little Dachshund we call "Swannie." She knows when she's done wrong, and looks at you with eyes that look like she's pleading for mercy!

Jesus said he came to call sinners to repentance, that's why he associated with **the helpless, hopeless, sinners!**

This means every single one of us! No matter for how long, and how outwardly pious we may have been! As Paul [Romans 3:23] very clearly states:

**All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.**

To wash us clean, to give us new hearts [Psalm 51:10], is why Jesus died for us on the cross – so that through his blood we may be cleansed and healed and restored!

The Pharisees and teachers of the law wouldn't accept this, and relied on fulfilling the **traditions of the elders.** Even the disciples had difficulty coming to terms with this, finding it hard to shake the delusion that they were "**in**" because of who they were and what they did. That's why once Jesus said of them: "**you of little faith.**"

Contrast the lack of faith, and the doubting faith, of the inside crowd, with that of the tax collectors, the outcasts, the lepers, and other assorted sinners, who came flocking to Jesus!

They knew they didn't deserve anything, they simply asked for mercy and healing. And mercy, healing, and acceptance is what they received!

Before God, we are all helpless, hopeless, sinners! We all need God's grace!

And it is this grace he has poured out on us in **Holy Baptism**, and which God continues to offer us in **Word** and **Sacrament.**

God grant us wisdom and understanding to always seek, rely on, and take hold of this grace!. **Amen.**

**Now may the peace of God, which passes all human understanding,  
guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.**

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Sermon from Pastor John Simboras, 29 August 2021