

Lesson 27

A Little Leaven

Introduction:

The storm on the lake subsided when Jesus got in the boat with His disciples but a different kind of storm was already brewing when they landed. The multitudes were seeking Jesus so He made Himself available to them. Using the feeding of 5000 men with five loaves and two fish as His basis, Jesus launched into a discussion about working for food.

The essence of the discussion was two-fold: The work that God wants people to do is to believe in His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ and the food they are to eat is His body and blood. The discussion set off a firestorm of controversy. Many of the disciples believed that Jesus was telling them to participate in cannibalism, so they quit following Him. Then the scribes and Pharisees cornered Jesus when they observed His disciples eating bread before washing their hands.

Reading The Scripture:

Matthew 15:1-20, 16:5-12, Mark 7:1-23, 8:13-21

Defilement Comes From the Heart

Matthew 15:1-20 and Mark 7:1-23

(Gospels forged together into one seamless story, in collaboration with New American Standard Bible, authored by Michael Gibson, Founder of Spirit & Truth, dba Key 2 Changes: "Follow Me: A Message from God", a Journey with Jesus)

And the Pharisees and some of the scribes gathered together around Him when they had come from Jerusalem, and had seen that some of His disciples were eating their bread with impure hands, that is, unwashed. (For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they carefully wash their hands, thus observing the traditions of the elders; and when they come from the market place, they do not eat unless they cleanse themselves; and there are many other things which they have received in order to observe, such as the washing of cups and pitchers and copper pots.) And the Pharisees and the scribes asked Him, "Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat their bread with impure hands?" And He said to them, "Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, '**THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME. 'BUT IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE PRECEPTS OF MEN.'**" Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men." He was also saying to them, "You nicely set aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition. For Moses said, '**HONOR YOUR FATHER AND YOUR MOTHER'**'; and, '**HE WHO SPEAKS EVIL OF FATHER OR MOTHER, LET HIM BE PUT TO DEATH'**'; but you say, 'If a man says to his father or his mother, anything of mine you might have been helped by is Corban (that is to say, given to God),' you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or his mother; thus invalidating the word of God by your tradition which you have handed down; and you do many things such as that." And after He called the multitude to Him again, He began saying to them, "Listen to Me, all of you, and understand: there is nothing outside the man which going into him can defile him; but the things which proceed out of the man are what defile the man. If any man has ears to hear, let him hear." Then the disciples came and said to Him, "Do You know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this statement?" But He answered and said, "Every plant which My heavenly Father did not plant shall be rooted up. Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind. And if a blind man guides a blind man, both will fall into a pit." And Peter answered and said to Him, "Explain the parable to us." And He said, "Are you still lacking in understanding also? Do you not understand that everything that goes into the mouth passes into

the stomach, and is eliminated? But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders. These are the things which defile the man; but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile the man."

Isaiah 29:13. 'THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME. 'BUT IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE PRECEPTS OF MEN.'

Exodus 20:12. 'HONOR YOUR FATHER AND YOUR MOTHER.'

Exodus 21:17. 'HE WHO SPEAKS EVIL OF FATHER OR MOTHER, LET HIM BE PUT TO DEATH.'

Leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees

Matthew 16:5-12 and Mark 8:13-21

(Gospels forged together into one seamless story, in collaboration with New American Standard Bible, authored by Michael Gibson, Founder of Spirit & Truth, dba Key 2 Changes: "Follow Me: A Message from God", a Journey with Jesus)

And leaving them, He again embarked and went away to the other side. And they had forgotten to take bread; and did not have more than one loaf in the boat with them. And Jesus said to them, "Watch out and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees." And they began to discuss among themselves, saying, "It is because we took no bread." But Jesus, aware of this, said, "You men of little faith, why do you discuss among yourselves that you have no bread? Do you not yet see or understand? Do you have a hardened heart? **HAVING EYES, DO YOU NOT SEE? AND HAVING EARS, DO YOU NOT HEAR?** And do you not remember, when I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces you picked up?" They said to Him, "Twelve." "And when I broke the seven for the four thousand, how many large baskets full of broken pieces did you pick up?" And they said to Him, "Seven." "How is it that you do not understand that I did not speak to you concerning bread? But beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees." Then they understood that He did not say to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

Jeremiah 5:21. HAVING EYES, DO YOU NOT SEE? AND HAVING EARS, DO YOU NOT HEAR?

The Commands:

1. Listen to Me, all of you, and understand.
2. If any man has ears to hear, let him hear.
3. Let them alone.
4. Watch out and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

Group Discussion:

1. Name a tradition we practice in this church?
2. What is the origin of the tradition?
3. Who authorized it?
4. Why do we hold to it?

The Lesson:

Tradition is important. It is a way to **hand down** information, beliefs and customs by word of mouth or by example from one generation to another without **written** instruction. Every society on earth utilizes tradition. It helps people relate to one another and maintain an ordered way of life. When the scribes and Pharisees criticized Jesus' disciples for eating before washing their hands they were appealing to a long-standing tradition. Many of us had parents who held to the same tradition.

Jesus used the tradition of washing hands before eating as an opportunity to teach about **defilement** or in other words “things that make people unclean.” Within the topic there are three lessons to be learned. They are so important that Jesus commanded the people to hear and understand what He was saying.

The first lesson is that whatever one eats does not make him **unclean**. This was hard for the Jewish audience to hear and understand as they practiced the strict dietary laws (kashrut) of the Law of Moses. Jesus did not abolish the Jewish kosher laws as some are inclined to believe. He merely stated that what people ate did not make them unclean because what went into the mouth was processed in the stomach with the body utilizing what was good and eliminating the waste.

The Apostle Peter was directly confronted with this issue several years later when He saw a vision concerning the Gentiles. That reference is Acts 10:9-15.

On the next day, as they were on their way and approaching the city, Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour to pray. But he became hungry and was desiring to eat; but while they were making preparations, he fell into a trance; and he saw the sky opened up, and an object like a great sheet coming down, lowered by four corners to the ground, and there were in it all kinds of four-footed animals and crawling creatures of the earth and birds of the air. A voice came to him, “Get up, Peter, kill and eat!” But Peter said, “By no means, Lord, for I have never eaten anything unholy and unclean.” Again a voice came to him a second time, “What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy.” This happened three times, and immediately the object was taken up into the sky.

Peter obeyed the vision. He went to the Gentiles and preached the gospel. It wasn't until the Holy Spirit fell upon them and they began speaking in tongues and exalting God that Peter could fully accept them. And even then he lapsed back into his old beliefs until the Apostle Paul confronted him face to face. (Galatians 2:11-21)

In the second lesson Jesus insisted that what is **spoken** comes from the heart and makes a person unclean. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murderers, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness and slander. Words reveal what is in the heart and the Scriptures give many admonitions concerning what a person should speak. Here are just a few:

Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit.

But no one can tame the tongue; it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison. With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God; from the same mouth come both blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be this way.

Even a fool, when he keeps silent, is considered wise; when he closes his lips, he is considered prudent.

But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.

When Peter heard the Gentiles speaking in tongues and exalting God, he realized God had given them a new heart. This was a confirmation of Jesus' teaching that what is spoken comes from the heart. Therefore, these people were to be considered clean by God.

The last lesson dealt with teaching human tradition as equal to or greater than God's commands. Jesus clearly showed the scribes and Pharisees they were valuing the oral law, consisting of the Mishna, Gemara and other works above Scripture (Torah). *"But in vain do they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men. Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men."* Since they were also teaching others to do the same Jesus commanded His disciples to leave them alone.

Some time later Jesus reminded the disciples to beware of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees. He likened their **teaching to leaven**. As **leaven** permeates every part of the substance in which it is placed, so too does **teaching**. What people are taught affects them for a lifetime.

Both the Pharisees and Sadducees¹ placed their oral traditions above God's word. And in doing so they were defiled, unclean and impure. Remember, Jesus just got through telling His disciples that what comes out of a person's mouth defiles him. And by their words they were showing they valued their tradition above God's word, therefore their hearts were unclean.

It is one thing for an individual to be unclean but quite another when he infects another through teaching. In his epistle, James the brother of Jesus, supports this idea when he says, *"My brethren, be not many masters,² knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation. For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body."*

Group Discussion:

5. Name a church tradition that is **contrary** to Scripture?
6. What is the origin of the tradition?
7. Who authorized it?
8. Why do people hold to it?

The Point Of The Lesson:

Consider carefully the words you speak.

Application:

Reflect on the traditions that you hold and teach others. Do they violate God's word?

¹ As a group, the Pharisees generally added to God's word. For example of this was they added many prohibitions to working on the Sabbath. One of these was that it was unlawful to start a fire on the Sabbath. The Sadducees tended to subtract from God's word. One example of this was that they did not believe in the resurrection of the dead.

² Instructor or teacher.