

8/9/26

Sermon Title: The True Purity God Seeks

Preacher: Pastor Kim Soonbae

Scripture Passage: Matthew 15:1-20

15 Then some Pharisees and teachers of the law came to Jesus from Jerusalem and asked,

² “Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? They don’t wash their hands before they eat!”

³ Jesus replied, “And why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition?

⁴ For God said, ‘Honor your father and mother’ and ‘Anyone who curses their father or mother is to be put to death.’

⁵ But you say that if anyone declares that what might have been used to help their father or mother is ‘devoted to God,’

⁶ they are not to ‘honor their father or mother’ with it. Thus you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition.

⁷ You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you:

⁸ “‘These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.

⁹ They worship me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules.’”

¹⁰ Jesus called the crowd to him and said, “Listen and understand.

¹¹ What goes into someone’s mouth does not defile them, but what comes out of their mouth, that is what defiles them.”

¹² Then the disciples came to him and asked, “Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this?”

¹³ He replied, “Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be pulled up by the roots.

¹⁴ Leave them; they are blind guides. If the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit.”

¹⁵ Peter said, “Explain the parable to us.”

¹⁶ “Are you still so dull?” Jesus asked them.

¹⁷ “Don’t you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body?

¹⁸ But the things that come out of a person’s mouth come from the heart, and these defile them.

¹⁹ For out of the heart come evil thoughts—murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander.

²⁰ These are what defile a person; but eating with unwashed hands does not defile them.”

Jesus healed many sick people in the land of Gennesaret, and His fame spread throughout the region.

At that time, the Pharisees and the teachers of the law came to Jesus and challenged Him because His disciples did not wash their hands before eating. They accused the disciples of violating the tradition of the elders by failing to perform the ceremonial handwashing.

15 Then some Pharisees and teachers of the law came to Jesus from Jerusalem and asked,

² “Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? They don’t wash their hands before they eat!”

What began as a complaint about the disciples' practice soon developed into a theological debate concerning the relationship between God's commandments and the traditions of the elders.

The Pharisees and the teachers of the law who came to Jesus were essentially a religious delegation sent from the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem to Galilee.

As Jesus' popularity continued to grow because of the miracles He performed, they were dispatched under the pretense of investigating the nature of His miraculous works.

In reality, however, they had come with the intention of finding grounds to accuse Him.

The "elders" were religious leaders, such as rabbis and experts in the Law, who were officially recognized as having the authority to interpret the Scriptures.

Because the written Law often set forth general principles rather than detailed regulations for everyday life, the people depended on the interpretations of these learned elders for practical application.

As a result, after the Babylonian exile, prominent rabbis developed a detailed body of regulations based on ancient oral traditions to govern nearly every aspect of daily life.

This body of teaching became known as the tradition of the elders.

Between approximately 300 B.C. and A.D. 800, these oral traditions were collected, organized, and eventually written down in what became known as the Talmud.

The problem was that many Jews came to regard the tradition of the elders as having even greater authority than God's written Law.

Whenever the two appeared to conflict, they often gave priority to human tradition over God's commandments.

Among these traditions was the requirement of ceremonial handwashing before meals.

The regulations specified in remarkable detail the amount and quality of the water to be used, the manner in which it was to be poured, who could assist in the washing, the proper position of the hands, and many other ceremonial requirements.

These practices originally developed for reasons of ritual purity and practical hygiene in the dusty environment of Palestine, where people commonly ate with their hands.

Jesus' disciples, however, ignored these ceremonial regulations and ate without washing their hands.

For the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, who were already looking for an opportunity to accuse Jesus, this seemed like the perfect occasion to challenge Him.

Jesus, however, used the incident to declare the proper order of authority between God's Word and human tradition.

He made it unmistakably clear that God's commandments stand far above the traditions and interpretations of men.

Then, turning the accusation back upon the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, Jesus declared that it was they—not His disciples—who were violating the commandments of God.

³ Jesus replied, “And why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition?”

⁴ For God said, ‘Honor your father and mother’^[a] and ‘Anyone who curses their father or mother is to be put to death.’^[b]

⁵ But you say that if anyone declares that what might have been used to help their father or mother is ‘devoted to God,’

⁶ they are not to ‘honor their father or mother’ with it. Thus you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition.

Jesus illustrated His point by giving a specific example of how the Pharisees and the teachers of the law had violated God's commandments through the tradition of the elders.

He chose the commandment concerning honoring one's parents.

The command to honor one's father and mother is the Fifth Commandment of the Ten Commandments.

It is the first commandment with a promise and stands at the head of those commandments governing human relationships.

Under the Mosaic Law, anyone who cursed his father or mother was subject to the death penalty.

(Exodus 20:12) Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you.

(Ephesians 6:2) Honor your father and mother"—which is the first commandment with a promise—

(Ephesians 6:3) so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.

(Leviticus 20:9) Anyone who curses their father or mother is to be put to death.

Yet Jesus pointed out that they had cleverly circumvented this commandment through a human tradition known as the Corban practice.

They were using the tradition of the elders to nullify God's command to care for their parents.

The Corban practice allowed a person to dedicate his possessions to God by declaring them "Corban," meaning "devoted to God."

Once such a vow was made, those possessions were considered unavailable for any other purpose.

Originally, this practice was intended as a sincere act of devotion, expressing one's desire to honor God by dedicating possessions to Him.

Over time, however, many Jews abused the system as a convenient way to avoid their responsibility to support their aging parents.

They exploited a loophole in the tradition.

A person could declare his property "Corban" without actually surrendering it to the temple immediately, continuing to benefit from it personally while claiming that it could no longer be used to help his parents.

In this way, they avoided their God-given obligation under the appearance of religious devotion.

This practice revealed both the selfish greed of the people and the corrupt cooperation of their religious leaders.

It was not merely a passive violation of God's Word; it actively undermined and nullified God's original intent.

Failing to wash one's hands before eating may have violated the tradition of the elders, but refusing to honor one's parents violated the very commandment of God—a commandment that stands far above any human tradition.

Therefore, Jesus rebuked the Pharisees and the teachers of the law as hypocrites. This is the first recorded occasion in Matthew's Gospel where Jesus explicitly denounces them as people whose outward appearance of piety concealed hearts that were far from God.

⁷ You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you:

⁸ “These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.

⁹ They worship me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules.”

Jesus rebuked the Judaism of His day for its excessive emphasis on ritualism and external formalism.

The religious leaders—the Pharisees and the teachers of the law—had become closely aligned with the Roman authorities.

In their determination to preserve their status and influence, they had lost sight of the true spirit of God's Law while clinging to the outward appearance of religion.

Jesus quoted the prophet Isaiah's condemnation of Israel's hypocrisy to expose these religious leaders who had come from Jerusalem, the center of Judaism.

Although they meticulously observed complicated rituals and strict religious regulations, their hearts were far from God.

Their worship was nothing more than outward performance.

They honored God with their lips, but their hearts had already drifted far away from Him.

Jesus denounced this kind of hypocritical faith.

After concluding His debate with the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, Jesus called the crowd to Himself.

Because of the social and religious status of these leaders, the people had watched the confrontation from a distance and were astonished by Jesus' bold words.

Wanting to prevent the crowd from being misled by the teachings of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, Jesus explained the true essence of both religion and morality: inner purity.

He taught that inward cleansing is far more important than the outward, ceremonial purity emphasized by the tradition of the elders.

Jesus declared that the real issue is not whether a person washes his hands before eating, but whether his heart is clean before God.

External rituals cannot make a person righteous.

What truly matters is the inward purity that comes from a heart devoted to God.

¹⁰ Jesus called the crowd to him and said, "Listen and understand.

¹¹ What goes into someone's mouth does not defile them, but what comes out of their mouth, that is what defiles them."

What enters the mouth refers to food, while what comes out of the mouth represents the inner condition of a person's heart expressed through words and actions.

Eating without washing one's hands may result in physical or ceremonial uncleanness, but the sinful words and actions that flow from within reveal a far more serious problem—the spiritual uncleanness of the heart.

Jesus' teaching greatly offended the Pharisees because it challenged the very foundation of their religious system.

Yet Jesus remained unmoved.

He declared that every false teaching rooted in human traditions rather than in the Word of God would ultimately be uprooted.

Human traditions that contradict God's truth cannot endure.

Furthermore, Jesus warned that those who persist in hypocrisy and reject God's truth will ultimately face judgment and destruction.

Their outward displays of religion may deceive people for a time, but they cannot stand before the righteous judgment of God.

¹² Then the disciples came to him and asked, “Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this?”

¹³ He replied, “Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be pulled up by the roots.

¹⁴ Leave them; they are blind guides.^[d] If the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit.”

Jesus declared that the Pharisees and the teachers of the law were not plants that His heavenly Father had planted.

Therefore, on the day of judgment, they would be uprooted from the place of the righteous and face destruction.

When Jesus said, “Leave them,” His words conveyed complete abandonment and divine rejection.

They had persistently rejected God's truth, and Jesus instructed His disciples not to follow their example or be influenced by their teaching.

Jesus regarded the Pharisees and the teachers of the law as spiritually blind. Because they lacked spiritual discernment, they could not recognize the truth and inevitably walked the path of deception that leads to destruction. Therefore, those who chose to follow these blind guides would also fall into the same pit of judgment.

Even the disciples still did not fully understand Jesus' statement: "It is not what enters the mouth that defiles a person, but what comes out of the mouth." They had not yet broken free from the religious assumptions they had held since childhood.

They continued to confuse ceremonial purity with spiritual purity. Having been raised to regard the tradition of the elders almost as equal in authority to the Word of God, they found it difficult to grasp the true meaning of Jesus' teaching.

Not until after Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension, when the Holy Spirit enlightened their hearts, did they fully understand these spiritual truths.

Finally, Peter, true to his impulsive nature, spoke on behalf of the disciples and asked Jesus to explain the meaning of this teaching.

¹⁵ Peter said, "Explain the parable to us."

¹⁶ "Are you still so dull?" Jesus asked them.

¹⁷ "Don't you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body?"

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Jesus patiently explained His teaching in a way that His spiritually dull disciples could understand.

He said that whatever enters the mouth as food passes through the digestive system and is eventually eliminated from the body.

Therefore, food cannot spiritually defile a person.

In contrast, whatever comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart—the source of a person's thoughts, desires, and emotions.

Jesus taught that evil thoughts, murder, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, and slander all originate from the human heart, and these are what truly defile a person.

His words assume the biblical truth that the human heart is sinful by nature.

However, Jesus was not denying the value of all outward practices or external forms.

Rather, He was emphasizing that true religion must address the condition of the heart, not merely outward behavior or ceremonial observance.

Throughout His ministry, Jesus consistently taught that inner transformation is more important than outward appearance, and that the substance of genuine faith is far more important than religious formality.

This theme runs consistently throughout all of His teaching.

Beloved members of Church of Godly Dreams,

The Pharisees and scribes appeared to be godly before people, but before God they were hypocrites.

They valued human traditions more than God's commandments.

Although they outwardly kept religious forms, they had abandoned the heart and will of God.

However, God looks at our inner heart rather than our outward appearance.
People look at the outside, but God looks at the heart.
The people God seeks are not those who merely observe religious rituals perfectly,
but those who love God and live with a pure heart before Him.

At this time, let us all examine our own faith.
Is it possible that our faith has lost its true essence and only outward forms
remain?
Let us examine whether we praise God with our lips while our hearts love the
things of the world more than God.
Let us also examine whether we are hiding hatred, jealousy, pride, and greed
deep within our hearts while pretending outwardly that everything is fine.

The Lord desires to cleanse our hearts before our hands.
He looks not only at our outward actions but also at our thoughts and motives.

“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.”
May David’s prayer become our prayer today.
Human religious traditions cannot wash away our sins.
But the blood of Jesus Christ, shed on the cross, cleanses us from all our sins.

May we be renewed daily through the Word of God and the Holy Spirit, becoming
believers who worship God with sincere faith rather than with a hypocritical faith.
May we not merely honor God with our lips, but glorify Him through our entire
lives.
May our hearts be cleansed, our words become holy, and our lives reveal the
fragrance of Jesus Christ to the world around us.
May we become blessed people who live this way, in the name of our Lord Jesus
Christ.