

The Heart of Man

Matthew 15.1-20; Mark 7.1-23

Pharisees were hypocrites; they burdened others with regulations, then made loopholes for their own advantage. But worst of all, they focused on outside things, not what really mattered. With a parable drawn from human experience, Jesus calls us to be cleansed from the inside-out.

Pharisees – Then and Now

- *Pharisees tend to notice the shortcomings of others*
- *Pharisees ‘paper over’ their own moral failings*
- *Pharisees ‘talk the talk,’ but don’t ‘walk the walk’*
- *Pharisees focus on externals*

Jesus Exposes the Heart of Man

- *What defiles us: Not externals! (Not what goes in)*
- *Why this truth offends ‘Pharisees’ (Mt. 15.12)*
- *God’s verdict on those who focus on externals (Mt. 15.13-14)*
- *Focusing on my heart: Facing my need, pursuing holiness*



1. Matt. 15.1-20 and Mk. 7.1-23 are parallel accounts of an encounter between Jesus and the Pharisees. It is important to understand what upset the Pharisees here. What does Mt.15.2 say the problem was? Matthew’s Jewish readers understood what he was talking about, but Mark’s Gentile readers (like us) needed it explained. Now read Mark 7.2-5. The ‘traditions of the elders’ were rules imposed on common folk to control their lives. Jews had to *ceremonially wash* before eating. Can you think of any modern examples of these kind of rules being imposed on people (in cults or churches)? Have you ever experienced this in your Christian life?
2. As is so often the case, the ‘moral police’ don’t practice what they preach! The Pharisees didn’t! They made up rules to burden others, then made loopholes to get around obeying God’s law themselves! Read Matt. 15.3-9 and Mark 7.6-13. To duck the responsibility of caring for aging parents, a son could declare his possessions to be “Corban,” meaning “devoted to God,” thus exempting him from obeying God’s law which said to “honor your father and mother”! Do we still do this today? Can you think of situations in which we self-righteously excuse ourselves from obeying God’s commands?
3. The big problem the Pharisees had – and we all battle with it – is the desire to *appear* good; we want others to look at us and view us as morally virtuous. We may do this in dozens of ways – through politics, social justice, religion, material wealth, fame, popularity, etc. Jesus dispels all of these pursuits with a little parable (Matthew 15.11; Mark 7.15). Why were the Pharisees “offended” by this, and why did Jesus respond the way He did (see Matt. 15.12-14)?
4. In both Matthew 15 (15-20) and Mark 7 (17-23) Jesus explains this parable. Put this in your own words. Read 1 Sam. 16.7; Eccl. 9.3; Jer. 17.9. Do you see how focusing on externals can actually cause us to overlook our own sinful hearts? Read Matt. 5.8, 28; 6.21; 9.4; 12.34; 13.19; 15.8. Jesus also exposed our tendency to judge others (see Matt. 7.1-5). What should we focus on in our lives? In the lives of others?