

What Defiles a Man?

Matthew 15:1-20 - Examined

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Some scribes and Pharisees came from Jerusalem to Yeshua and asked Him a very specific question. It would seem that they may have been sent from their superiors to seek the answer to this specific question. It is a very important question. Even more importantly for us today is the answer that Yeshua gave to this question. Let us prayerfully examine this portion of Scripture.

Matithyah (Matthew) 15:1-2

1 Then there come to Yeshua from Jerusalem Pharisees and scribes, saying,

2 "Why do your talmidim transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread."

In rabbinic tradition there are very explicit and detailed rules and regulations on washing the hands. From how to wash the hands, to when to wash the hands, to all the blessings prescribed while so engaged. In their eyes, not to follow these carefully laid out regulations was to commit sin and cause for disassociation.

It had been witnessed by many people, including scribes and Pharisees on numerous occasions, that Yeshua's talmidim did not follow the prescribed halakah for the washing of hands. The question was not why they were eating with dirty hands, but why they did not wash their hands according to the accepted halakah of the rabbis. It is to this question of halakah that Yeshua speaks. It is important for us even today as we return to Torah, for many would desire to put us under bondage to rabbinic halakah when Yeshua actually spoke against such things.

Matithyah (Matthew) 15:3

And He answered and said to them, "Why do you also transgress the commandment of Elohim because of your tradition?"

Even though more than likely these scribes and Pharisees were seeking another occasion in which they might accuse Yeshua as they had done on numerous other occasions, Yeshua cut right to the heart of this matter concerning the washing of hands. He turned their question right back upon them, asking them why it was that they violated the commandment of Elohim in order to keep their manmade traditions.

One can readily imagine the self-righteous anger that must have welled up within these men whose self-importance was always right in the forefront of what they were doing and saying.

Whenever a tradition, rule, regulation, halakah, or what-have-you, of man causes one to violate the Torah of YHWH, then it is wrong and sinful and should be discarded. The Torah of YHWH was given to us to allow for us freedom and liberty in keeping it as He leads us to keep it. It would have been entirely within the realm and scope of YHWH to give us a Torah with great detail in exactly how to do each and every thing. But He didn't. Why? It was because the Torah is to be our tutor to teach us to be able to hear and obey His Voice. Man's rules and regulations do not teach us to hear and obey His Voice; they have an overwhelming tendency to hinder a person from hearing and obeying His Voice.

Now don't get me wrong; traditions are not wrong per se. There are many fine traditions. However, regardless of how great and wonderful a tradition is, it is simply not enforceable! Only the Torah of YHWH is enforceable. Anything that adds to His Torah or takes away from it, is simply not enforceable on His people. His people can choose to follow it as they see fit on an individual basis. May YHWH give us great discernment as to what is His Torah and what is manmade! Then may we act accordingly to His glory and honor!

Matithyah (Matthew) 15:4

"For Elohim said, 'Honor your father and your mother; and, he that speaks evil of father or mother, let him die the death.'"

When a person obeys YHWH's Torah, then he is esteeming YHWH. However, when a person obeys a manmade rule, then he is esteeming the man who made that rule. In this case Yeshua is pointing out that we are to honor our father and mother for this is a commandment of YHWH. We are to obey this commandment under penalty of death. But notice in these next verses what manmade rules were instituted to replace and bring to naught the commandment of YHWH.

Matithyah (Matthew) 15:5-6

5 "But you say, 'Whosoever shall say to his father or his mother, "That which you might have been helped by of mine is given to Elohim;"

6 he shall not honor his father or mother.' And you have made void the word of Elohim because of your tradition."

Please note that what had come to pass was that someone could say these words and not actually do it just to simply keep something away from helping his parents. It was shameful to say the least, but it was common practice particularly among the religious leaders, the Pharisees and Sadducees.

Notice Yeshua chastises them saying that when they elevate their manmade traditions above the commandments of YHWH, then they are actually voiding the Torah. This is not a good place to live, carefully following the traditions of men, but bringing to naught the commandment of YHWH.

But here is the kicker in this. These men would have sworn that their traditions were righteous and good and guarding the Torah and actually keeping the Torah. But that was simply not the case. Why? Because any time that man sticks his fingers into something like YHWH's Torah, more often than not something will change. Either something gets added or something gets taken away, and either way it is not good for it is sin. How does one guard against doing such a thing? By walking in His Spirit! And, by letting one's neighbor walk in His Spirit as well! This is something that the Pharisees, Sadducees and scribes could not do and were not willing to do.

Matithyah (Matthew) 15:7-9

7 "You hypocrites, well did Yeshayah prophesy of you, saying,

8 'This people honors me with their lips;

But their heart is far from Me.

9 But in vain do they worship Me,

Teaching as their doctrines the precepts of men."

When I look out across the spiritual landscape of the Messianic/Nazarene movement I wonder if we will ever truly understand what Yeshua is saying here. I wonder if we will ever get it.

One cannot follow the rules of men as doctrine and truly worship YHWH. It is way past time that we cast far from us the doctrines of men and come back to YHWH and fall on our faces before Him and beg Him to forgive us of worshipping the false gods of men. Even those who are coming back to the heavenly Father's house often get caught up in and sidetracked with the words and teachings of men. While men can help us to understand and train us and teach us, we are not to follow men. We are to follow YHWH and His Son Mashiach Yeshua. There is freedom in doing this. There is bondage in the doctrines of men.

What Yeshua put before us this day was to have true worship of the Father. Or, to worship YHWH in vain because of being caught up in the precepts of men as sound doctrine.

Matithyah (Matthew) 15:10-11

10 And He called to Him the multitude, and said to them, "Shema, and understand;

11 not that which enters into the mouth defiles the man; but that which proceeds out of the mouth, this defiles the man."

When will we learn that it is not the breaking of a manmade law that defiles us. It is the breaking of His Torah, which is a matter of the heart. It is this matter of the heart that comes forth out of a man's mouth, revealing what lies deep within his heart.

Matithyah (Matthew) 15:12

Then came the talmidim, and said to Him, "Do you know that the Pharisees were offended, when they heard this statement?"

It's funny how truth has a way of offending people. Have you ever noticed that? I am sure that you have. Perhaps you yourself have been offended by His truth on occasion. Perhaps this portion of Scripture is offensive to you. If so, then you need to do some very serious heart searching as to who you are serving. For one who serves YHWH our Elohim will submit to His truth in all its fullness. Will you?

Yeshua was fully aware that this had offended these men. However, even as offensive as this was for them to hear, they still needed to hear it. Furthermore, if they truly desired to follow YHWH, then they would submit to His truth and start keeping His Torah and stop elevating the traditions of men above YHWH's Torah as they had done in the past.

Matithyah (Matthew) 15:13-14

13 But He answered and said, "Every plant which My heavenly Father planted not, shall be rooted up. 14 Let them alone; they are blind guides. And if the blind guide the blind, both shall fall into the pit."

Yeshua teaches us that every person who is not of YHWH will one day be rooted up. In Matithyah 13:30, 42 Yeshua teaches that when this uprooting will occur, those so uprooted will be cast into the fire. Please note that the blind leading the blind will both fall into the pit. Not a pit, but *the* pit.

But perhaps most importantly for us, Yeshua teaches us that those who take the precepts of men and make them their doctrines, we are to leave alone. Those who elevate tradition over Torah are to be left to their own devices. May each one of us listen and heed these words of Mashiach!

Matithyah (Matthew) 15:15-16

15 And Kepha answered and said to Him, "Declare to us the parable." 16 And He said, "Are you also even yet without understanding?"

Kepha was still not quite getting it. It would seem that there are a lot of "Kephass" today who still don't quite get it. As people are coming out of the manmade religions of this present world and returning back to our heavenly Father's Torah, one of the things that is quite alluring is rabbinic Judaism. But to fall into that is simply exchanging one set of manmade rules for another set of manmade rules. What good has it done a person so caught up?

Again, please, there are many traditions within Judaism that are wonderful and full of meaning, much of which seems to be lost upon those who are doing them because of the lack of Mashiach in their lives. However, even as wonderful as many of these traditions are, they are simply not enforceable. We can choose to do them or not to do them as we choose and as we grow and mature in Mashiach. There may be a time and a place for these traditions in the maturation process of the believer in Mashiach Yeshua. However, one should never look down upon another who does not choose to keep or do these

traditions. They are not wrong to keep and do many of them as long as they do not violate Torah. But let us not condemn one another for keeping or not keeping these traditions. However, let us make sure that we do not elevate these traditions over His Torah, either!

Yeshua then explains the meaning of the parable.

Matityah (Matthew) 15:17-20

17 "Do you not perceive that whatsoever goes into the mouth passes into the belly, and is eliminated?

18 But the things which proceed out of the mouth come forth out of the heart; and they defile the man.

19 For out of the heart come forth evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders;

20 these are the things which defile the man; but to eat with unwashed hands defiles not the man."

It is much healthier for us to wash our hands regularly. This is physically good for us to do. However, spiritually speaking, it does not defile us to eat with hands that have not been ritually washed. In other words it is just as effective to wash one's hands with soap and water without the prescribed blessing as it is with the prescribed blessing.

But what good does it do a man to wash his hands according to custom if what is in his heart are things that are against Torah? None! Is it not better for us to work at washing our hearts? To be sure!

Yirmeyah (Jeremiah) 2:22

"For though you wash yourself with lye, and use much soap, yet your iniquity is marked before Me," says YHWH.

We should come to YHWH through Yeshua and ask Him to cleanse us and wash us, for when He does it, then we will surely be clean.

Yeshayah (Isaiah) 1:18

"Come now, and let us reason together," says YHWH; "though your sins are as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool."

May we also cry out along with the Psalmist seeking YHWH to cleanse us of all unrighteousness!

Tehillim (Psalm) 51:2

***Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity,
And cleanse me from my sin.***

Once He has washed us and cleansed us, let us be very careful not to return back to the mire and filth from out of which we have come before He cleansed us.

ABBA YHWH, thank you for cleansing us and washing us in the Blood of Yeshua our Mashiach. Make this cleansing sure and complete that we might walk in Your Spirit at all times, always helping others do the same; in the name of Yeshua our Mashiach.

Amein & Amein.