

WHERE DOES SIN COME FROM?

Matthew 15:10-20

Intro: Last Sunday night we considered together the first nine verses of this chapter. It tells about a time of contention that the Lord had with the Jewish scribes and Pharisees. They were critical of the Lord's disciples because the disciples did not wash their hands in the way prescribed by the traditions of the elders. In responding to them, the Lord charged them with making additions to the Law which actually negated part of the Law. And then the Lord told them what was really wrong with them. They were guilty of a sin that had been present in Israel for a long time, a sin which Isaiah had condemned them for in his prophecy some 700 years before the Lord came to earth. We find the Lord quoting it in verse 8. (Read vv. 7-9.)

The problem was that their worship was outward. They were careful to do what was required of them outwardly, but it was all just form and ceremony. They did not know what it was to worship the Lord with their hearts. The Lord did not recognize it as worship at all because what they were doing was not what He required of them, but they were simply following "the commandments of men." This means that we can never truly worship God unless:

- 1) We worship according to the Word.
- 2) We worship from the heart.

And we can see from what the Lord said that no worship can actually come from the heart unless it is in obedience to the Word of God. A true believer will not want to do things his way, but he will want to find out God's way. It is usually man's way to start from the outside, and hope that this will make things different inside. God's way is just the opposite; He starts on the inside, in the heart, and then the outward changes in character and behavior are soon evident.

The first verse of my text for tonight tells us that after the Lord had His say with the scribes and Pharisees, He turned to the multitudes, the people who were under the control of the scribes and Pharisees. The Lord knew that the scribes and Pharisees were not about to change, and so He sought to enlighten the people. He wanted to pursue this vital point with them.

First thing that we have is what we might call,

I. THE LORD'S PROPHETIC ANNOUNCEMENT (Matt. 15:10, 11).

We often forget when we speak of our Lord as a Prophet, Priest, and King, that the Lord really was a Prophet, the greatest of all prophets. While prophets often were able to

preach things that God had not revealed before, the main purpose of the prophet was to preach what had been revealed, and to bring the people back to the Word of God. And there never was a time when that need was any greater than when the Lord came to earth. As I mentioned last week, man's religious traditions and the Word of God had been so mixed up together, and man's traditions had become so important, that the people really didn't know the difference between the two.

We are in a time very much like that ourselves. Things are going on in the professing church today which have no basis whatsoever in the Word of God. And we have people in positions of leadership who do not even know the Gospel, nor do they claim to be saved. So there is a great need to bring people back to Scripture to see what it really is that God wants us to know, to believe, to become, and to do.

And so the Lord said something that must have been like a bolt of lightning to anyone who was really listening to Him. It was just exactly the opposite of what they had been taught. When the scribes and Pharisees actually were demanding that the disciples wash their hands in the manner prescribed by the elder, the Lord charged them with SIN! They were transgressing, nullifying God's Word, by their tradition. So what the scribes and Pharisees were demanding was not keeping the people from sin; it was actually causing them to sin more!

So the Lord said, "Hear, and understand." And then He proceeded to say what is recorded for us in verse 11. (Read.)

This was teaching that the people had not heard before, unless they had been listening to John the Baptist or one of the apostles.

There were probably two reasons why the people generally had fallen for the teaching of the scribes and Pharisees:

- 1) The first was, they knew something about what the OT taught about clean and unclean foods. The people were required to abide by the dietary laws given, for example, in Lev. 11, but nowhere did the Lord ever tell the people that they would be holy if they ate the right kinds of food. There were spiritual lessons to be learned. Those laws were meant to remind the people that God makes a difference between the clean and the unclean spiritually. And that what He demanded was that His people be holy, not just observe various ceremonies and eating requirements.
- 2) The second was, they had forgotten, if they had ever been taught, what the OT Scriptures teach about sin coming from the heart. For example, listen to Gen. 6:5, the

condition which caused the Lord to destroy life on the earth by the flood. Here it is:

And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

And then if you want to go to the prophecy of Jeremiah just before the captivity, listen to what he had to say: The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked, who can know it?

There are other passages we could turn to that have to do with the heart, but just one would be enough to prove what man's need is.

So you can wash your hands all you want to, and do it just like the scribes and Pharisees said that you should do it, and even eat the right kind of food, clean food, but with all of that the heart would not be changed. And so our Lord said that we need to be much more concerned about what comes out of our mouths than we are about what we put into them.

In these days when people are so health conscious, it would be good to hear this once in a while.

What was the first reaction of the disciples to what the Lord said?

II. THE SCRIBES AND PHARISEES WERE OFFENDED (Matt. 15:12).

Now this might seem to be a minor thing to us, but it was a major and most serious thing in those days. The scribes and Pharisees were in a position, as we know now, where they could make it very difficult for the Lord, not only with the Jewish people, but also with the Roman government. The Romans had enough to take care of without having to handle another dissenter.

But just looking for the moment at the situation, of course they were offended. This was completely contrary to what they were teaching, and their whole position over the people of Israel as teachers was being threatened. Think of what happens today when somebody goes into a liberal church and starts talking about salvation, and Christ, and the new birth. They won't tolerate it. But the important point here is that the disciples needed to learn what they were up against. We might feel that because God's Word is truth, people will accept it with open hearts. But that is not the case. And so the disciples needed to learn that we stand by the truth regardless of who may try to oppose us.

How did the Lord answer the disciples? He gave them:

III. A LESSON IN THEOLOGY (Matt. 15:13, 14).

The Lord took this opportunity to give His disciples a taste of the doctrine of election. And He wanted His disciples to see that the Father is in charge of His own work, not the scribes and Pharisees. But also that it is an old policy of the Devil to mix in unbelievers with believers in an attempt to destroy the work of God.

The Lord may have been referring to the first three verses of Isaiah 61. (Read.)

These scribes and Pharisees were not planted where they were by the Father, but by the Devil. And the time would come, maybe not until the final judgment, when they would be rooted out.

But then look at what the Lord said: "Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch."

I want you to notice something very interesting in this passage. The Lord never organized a campaign to clean up Judaism -- NEVER! And along the same line, the Lord never organized a campaign to clean up the Roman government. That should tell us something about the church today as well as about politics. We need to be concerned about the false teaching that is going on in churches, and the corruption that is in the government, but we are not to be activists for reform either in the church or in the government. The Lord will take care of all of that in His own time. He will purify His church, and He is going to establish a kingdom of righteousness. But that is not our business now. Our business is the simply job of telling people that they have something far more important to be concerned about than what they eat; they need to be concerned about what comes out of their mouths and out of their hearts because that is where the real problem of people is to be found.

But let us go on with our text.

At this point the disciples asked the Lord for an explanation of the parable that He had given them. And it seems from what the Lord said that they were thinking more about the Lord's words in verse 11 instead of verses 13 and 14.

And this is the explanation:

IV. OUR LORD'S PARABLE EXPLAINED (Matt. 15:15-20).

The Lord marveled at their lack of understanding. But perhaps we should not be surprised because the teaching of the scribes and Pharisees is the kind of teaching the disciples had been raised on. It is a very humanistic approach to human troubles.

We are hearing a lot about gangs today, and the gang problem is undoubtedly one of the most serious problems we have ever faced. But what kinds of solutions are being offered? We are told that their background is to blame -- and undoubtedly that is a contributing factor. And we are told about their poverty -- and that can contribute to gang activity, too. We offer them rewards of various kinds. We know that we have to get inside of them some way to make changes in them, but all human solutions are to start from the outside, and work in!

This is not God's way! God starts with the heart because that is where all of this sin comes from. Man is a sinner by nature, and that makes him a sinner by choice. And you can never change him by reformation, not permanently change him. Oh, there have been people who have been reformed, but you see even reformation falls far short of what every person needs. We not only need to make people socially acceptable, but the problem of the human heart needs to be resolved in such a way that we become acceptable to God -- and social action groups are not even thinking about that. Our sin comes out of our heart, and there is only One Who can change our hearts, and that is GOD! That is why He sent His Son into the world. We were born wrong when we were born into this world, and we need to be born again. We are creatures of God under the curse of sin, and we need to be made "new creatures"!

God has so made our bodies that the body knows how to get rid of the waste of our bodies which could kill us if we couldn't get rid of it. But no food, no bodily exercise, no rules and regulations, can cleanse the heart. It takes Christ to make our hearts so clean that we are made fully acceptable to God. That is what justification is. And once we are justified through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, then the wonderful work of sanctification begins, and we are on our way to glory.

Read verse 19 to see what comes out of the heart. That looks like an abbreviated form of our newspapers, doesn't it? We have forgotten God. We reject His Word. We say that there really isn't anything that we can call sin. And so what is happening? Blind leaders are leading blind people, and they are all falling into the ditch.

Concl: Isn't it about time that we listen to the Word of

God? I don't expect to see any great movement in that direction, but we are in the world to spread this message, a simple message, but, oh, so important! It is that people are defiled before each other and especially before God by what comes out of our hearts. It is our hearts that need to be changed. When that happens, a Saul of Tarsus becomes an Apostle Paul. You can't possibly explain the complete reversal that took place in Saul's life except that God touched his heart and made him a new creature in Christ.

There probably never has been a worse civilization morally, or immorally, than the Roman culture. And yet right in the capital city of Rome God planted a group of believers, how many there were we don't know. But they were there, not to lead a revolt, but to proclaim a message. That message would not be tolerated by the Judaism of the day, and so the Lord started His Church. And He has preserved it, and has been building it, from that day to this. But to that church in Rome, and to anyone in the city, high or low, who would listen to the message, this is what Paul said: (Quote Rom. 1:14-16, "I am debtor...")

Only Christ and the Gospel can possibly save our nation. We are probably closer to self-destruction than anyone realizes. And yet we go on with the same failing philosophy that has led us where we are today. Our voices are not great, but possibly some, by the grace of God, will hear and understand and believe. So let us not try to look for some new method to change people. The old is faultless. God has never failed to change those who have trusted in Christ. Only he can change what comes out of us to make us what we need to be to be assured of the remedy that we need.