



#### **Part 4: It's Always the Heart**

Matthew 15:1-20

**Following Jesus involves bringing our deepest self to Jesus allowing him to cleanse and recalibrate our hearts (loves and trust structures).**

#### **I. Jesus and Secular Culture**

Remember when your mom caught you coming for dinner with dirty hands ...

At first glance, our scripture today may not seem like it's much help to us. After all, what do Old Testament purity laws have to do with us anyway?

Jesus makes a shocking allegation against the religious leaders of his day; the kind of allegation that incited these powerful men to plot his death.

“These people honor me with their lips, but their **hearts** are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.” Matthew 15:8-9 [Isaiah 29:13]

Before we do a deeper dive into our scripture, it's clear that Jesus sees the heart as central to all true faith or religion. However we understand the heart in Scripture, it's clear from the Old Testament all the way through the New Testament that the heart is central to the Gospel. One might be tempted to think that Jesus would be pleased with all the talk in secular culture about the heart. After all, it's considered unquestioned secular orthodoxy that true authenticity requires that we “follow our heart.”

91% of Americans affirm that “the best way to find yourself is by looking within yourself.” Apple cofounder, Steve Jobs, publicly declared: “There is no reason not to follow your heart.”

Q – Are Jesus and Steve Jobs saying the same thing?

## II. Jesus and Human Tradition

### A. The Context

The Pharisees were zealous to guard the purity of God's covenant people, because the purity or holiness of God's people was what marked them as belonging to Him. The Old Testament Torah set forth a series of commands, which were designed to make the people "holy" so they could participate in the life and worship of the people of God.

"I am the Lord, who brought you up out of Egypt to be your God; therefore, be holy, because I am holy." Leviticus 11:45

In their zeal, the Pharisees added their oral laws to make sure the written laws in the Torah were not violated. These oral laws were called "the tradition of the elders," and this is the source of the controversy with Jesus.

Ex. The 4<sup>th</sup> Commandment to keep the Sabbath holy: the added oral laws to make sure the Sabbath was not violated serving as a "fence" around the law.

There are two Old Testament laws in this debate. The first is the law requiring the priests to wash their hands before entering the tabernacle or temple (Exodus 30:19; 40:13). The Pharisees had extended this law to everyone to wash their hands before they ate. Jesus does not directly respond to their question.

The second law is the 5<sup>th</sup> commandment to honor your father and mother. The Pharisees had created an oral law or tradition that allowed the person to make a gift to the Temple in place of what they should have given to support their parents.

### B. Jesus' Indictment

"And why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition?...Thus you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition. You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you: **These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.** They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men." Matthew 15:3, 6-9 [Isaiah 29:13]

Two big ideas before we apply this to ourselves:

- According to Jesus, the written Word of God is of higher authority than the traditions of people, and when we make our traditions more important, we empty the Word of God of its true authority.
- God's Word doesn't start with our outward religious or moral conduct. Instead, it puts the emphasis on our hearts – our motivational center that directs our loves and trusts.

“Listen and understand. What goes into a man’s mouth does not make him unclean...But the things that come out of the mouth come from the **heart**, and these make a man unclean. For out of the heart come...” Matthew 15:10, 18-19

“The **heart** is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?” Jeremiah 17:9

“One who trusts his own **heart** is a fool, but he who walks in wisdom is kept safe.” Proverbs 28:26

“What the heart trusts, the mind justifies, the emotions desire, and the will carries out. Everything follows the heart.” – Tim Keller

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### **III. Jesus and Misplaced Loves**

There is in the fallen human heart a desire to reduce God to a formula. We easily twist what is supposed to be relationship of fidelity and devoted love into a contract (per sermon on taking up our cross). There is a contractual or impersonal way of relating to God that is expressed as both religious moralism and worldliness.

#### **A. The Infidelity of Religious Moralism (Matthew 15:8-9)**

The Pharisees were zealous for their religion and the honor of God, but they missed the whole point of the Gospel. They zealously pursued a legalistic morality while keeping the Living God at arm’s length. They viewed their relationship with the Lord more as a contract of employment than as a marriage covenant.

Q – Where was their love and trust structures really directed? Towards themselves and their legalistic self-righteousness.

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Sadly, they pursued holiness without genuine love for the Lord or others.

#### **B. The Infidelity of Worldliness (1 John 2:15-17)**

Legalism is probably not our greatest challenge in the modern American Church. Instead, we have too often followed the counsel of Steve Jobs and our culture: “There is no reason not to follow your heart.”

In the name of fighting legalism and moralism, we have too often assimilated the thought patterns and values of our secular culture. We imagine that if we feel it or think it, it must be the Holy Spirit (regardless of what God’s Word clearly says).

Rejecting what we perceive to be legalism, sadly we may pursue love without holiness.

#### **IV. Jesus' Gift of a Clean Heart**

"If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever entrusts themselves to me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him." John 7:37-38

"But when the kindness and love of God appeared, he saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. **He saved us through the washing and rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit**, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior..." Titus 3:4-6

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"For above all else, the Christian life is a love affair of the heart. It cannot be lived primarily as a set of principles or ethics. It cannot be managed with steps and programs. It cannot be lived exclusively as a moral code leading to righteousness...The truth of the gospel is intended to free us to love God and others with our whole heart. When we ignore this heart aspect of our faith and try to live out our religion solely as correct doctrine or ethics, our passion is crippled, or perverted, and the divorce of our soul from the heart purposes of God toward us is deepened." – John Eldredge & Brent Curtis, *The Sacred Romance*

"Create in me a **clean heart**, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me...Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit to sustain me...The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart, O God you will not despise." Psalm 51:10, 12, 17

The Table is a covenant renewal ceremony...

#### **Discussion Questions:**

1. Compare Steve Job's view of the heart with Jesus' view of the heart in Matthew 15: 10-11, 16-20. What differences do you see?
2. What has been your understanding of the heart? Who or what has influenced your thinking? Have you been more in sync with Steve Jobs or Jesus?
3. According to Jesus, what mistakes did the Pharisees make?
4. The main point of the sermon is: "Following Jesus involves bringing our deepest self to Jesus allowing him to cleanse and recalibrate our hearts (loves and trusts structures). Can you describe a way Jesus has done this or is doing it now?"
5. As you consider your "trust structures" – those things you look to most deeply to secure you, what do you discern?
6. Are you more tempted towards legalism or worldliness? Why?
7. Read Psalm 51: 10, 12 & 17; John 7:37-38; and Titus 3:4-6. How may these scriptures encourage and guide you as you follow Jesus?