

Matthew 15B

- We're in the middle of a teaching that Jesus delivers on the errors of legalism
 - Our scene is set in the Galilee, where Jesus has been confronted by the Pharisees over His failing to observe the rules of the Mishnah
 - And in this section of Matthew, Jesus is training His disciples on how to serve Him in the Kingdom Program
 - And one of the most important lessons they must learn is that the religious experts of the day were not experts at all
 - In fact, most Pharisees and other rabbis didn't even know God... they were wolves in sheep's clothing
 - This particular fight centered on rules of ritual washing
 - Pharisees required Jews to engage in elaborate washing routines before meals, which was a tradition handed down by the rabbis
 - These traditions were recorded in a book called the Mishnah, but they were not rules given by God
 - Nor did they promote greater holiness or obedience to God
 - They were a means to self-righteousness, so Jesus rightly ignored them and told His disciples to do the same
 - Let's pick up again in this dispute in v.10 as Jesus responded to the Pharisees' criticism

Matt. 15:10 After Jesus called the crowd to Him, He said to them, "Hear and understand.

Matt. 15:11 "It is not what enters into the mouth that defiles the man, but what proceeds out of the mouth, this defiles the man."

- Jesus gives the crowd a parable to explain the error in the Pharisees' teaching
 - Using dietary restrictions as His example, Jesus says that what enters our mouth cannot defile us
 - Instead, it's what comes out of our mouth that defiles us

- Obviously, what goes in the mouth refers to food, and what comes out of the mouth refers to speech
- But as I told you last week, Jesus was teaching on a much broader principle, on the very source of sin itself
 - And if we're going to prevail in the war against sin and self-righteousness, we first must understand our enemies
 - And Jesus says our enemy, sin, isn't something that happens to us
 - It's something that is a part of us, living inside us, looking for every opportunity to exert control over us
- As Jesus began to explain to the crowd about the true nature of our enemy, once again He spoke in code, as a parable
 - This was in keeping with His new pattern of obscuring His teaching from the ears of the crowds
 - In fact, look at v.15 and we see that Peter recognized that Jesus was speaking in code again because he asked for an explanation
 - And in the next passage Jesus is going to explain the parable in detail, so we will look at His explanation in a moment
- But before that, Jesus warns the disciples about how to handle men like the Pharisees
 - That begins in v.12 when the disciples come to Jesus over concerns about His teaching

[Matt. 15:12](#) Then the disciples came and said to Him, "Do You know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this statement?"

[Matt. 15:13](#) But He answered and said, "Every plant which My heavenly Father did not plant shall be uprooted.

[Matt. 15:14](#) "Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind. And if a blind man guides a blind man, both will fall into a pit."

- In the Gospel of Mark we learn this conversation took place in private after Jesus and the disciples moved into a nearby home
 - In v.12 they ask Jesus if He was aware that His words to the Pharisees had offended them

- Jesus had just said that the Pharisees violate the word of God by failing to honor their parents
- Such a public challenge of the Pharisees's honor was simply never done
 - Pharisees were the prosecutors, judge and jury in Israel...they could impose the death penalty on Jews for violating their rules
 - In fact, the last man to openly criticize a powerful leader was John the Baptist, and he ultimately lost his head for it
- So the disciples were understandably nervous over the things Jesus was saying to these men
 - The disciples assume Jesus didn't know He offended those men, because who would invite such danger?
 - And like all Jews, the disciples would have had a degree of respect for these men given their position in society
 - And of course, they feared the consequences of opposing them
 - Therefore, the logical assumption is that Jesus didn't realize He was offending, so they come asking Him to tone it down
 - Can't we identify with the disciples' feelings?
 - Our culture is deteriorating, but for now most people still expect respect for authority and civility toward one another in public
 - So when someone violates this social norm around us, it makes us feel very uncomfortable
 - Especially if we're closely associated with them, we shrink back
 - But there are times when that instinct to avoid conflict can be wrong and actually plays into the enemy's hands
 - Jesus knew these men would be offended, but He wasn't concerned, and He explains His lack of concern using another parable
 - In v.13 Jesus, speaking about these men, says that every plant the Father doesn't plant shall be uprooted
 - He's making reference back to the parable of the wheat and tares that He taught in Chapter 13

- In that parable, the Father sowed good seed in the field while the enemy sowed bad seed
 - The good seed were believers, Jesus said, while the bad seed were unbelievers
 - At the harvest, the good plants were placed in the barn while the bad plants were burned
 - Which meant believers entered the Kingdom while unbelievers were uprooted at the end of age and cast into Hell
- So in speaking of the Pharisees, Jesus says they are due to be uprooted
 - So clearly Jesus is calling these men unbelievers, and that's not surprising, because their lack of faith was obvious
 - But the next thing Jesus says about them is what's important
- In v.14 Jesus commands His disciples to let them alone, or we could say "ignore them"
 - Is Jesus suggesting that unbelievers are to be ignored or even rejected because they are unbelieving?
 - Not at all...after all, reaching unbelievers is the focus of the Kingdom Program
 - Jesus is speaking specifically about unbelievers who claim to be spiritual teachers
 - When unbelievers portray themselves as experts in God and godliness, Jesus says we ignore these imposters
 - Unbelievers can never be your spiritual leaders or teachers, because they are speaking of things that they themselves cannot understand
 - Spiritual truth is only available to those who possess the Holy Spirit, because the Spirit is our teacher

1Cor. 2:12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God,

1Cor. 2:14 But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.

- Those who are “natural” lack the spiritual capacity to understand spiritual truth because they don’t have the Teacher themselves
 - Therefore, we must ignore them, paying no attention to what they say
 - Nor do we worry what they think or how they will respond to us when we speak spiritual truth that contradicts them
 - We simply ignore them
- Jesus describes an unbeliever who tries to lead others to God as a blind person leading the blind
 - Blind people who go on a journey will eventually fall into a pit, and when the guide falls, so do those who blindly follow him
 - That’s a not-so-subtle reference to stumbling into Hell, which is the fate of all unbelievers
 - The Bible calls such blind guides “false teachers”
 - A false teacher isn’t someone who merely teaches falsely...a false teacher is a teacher who IS false, meaning not a believer
 - In 2 Timothy 3:5 Paul describes false teachers as those who hold to a form of godliness although they deny its power, Jesus
 - They are always learning, Paul says, but never coming to a knowledge of the truth
 - They can appear very wise and knowledgeable, but despite all that learning, they never come to the truth
 - Like the Pharisees who had memorized the entire Old Testament yet understood nothing of God
 - Which is why Jesus says ignore them, and Paul says in 2 Tim. 3 that we should avoid such men as these...
 - Have nothing to do with anyone who claims they can guide you into the truth while demonstrating that they lack it themselves
- And how do we know if someone is a False Teacher?
 - When we evaluate our teachers and leaders, we must consider more than what they say, we need to consider who they are

- And in fact who they are is even more important, because words are cheap and easily faked
- But how we live day in and day out is a much tougher standard to fake
- And in fact it's impossible to live a truly godly life without Christ's sanctifying power residing inside us
- So we look for the fruit of the Spirit in the life of a person claiming to offer us spiritual truth
 - Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control;
 - Of course, perfection isn't the standard for these things, for if we only received perfect teachers, we wouldn't have any teachers
- But we should expect to see evidence of godliness and grace and love increasing in a person's life over time
 - If that's true (and assuming their teaching is sound), then we accept that person and their teaching
 - We learn from them and we respect their authority in our lives
 - But if a teacher's life consistently departs from Scripture in major ways, then we need to be careful not to follow
 - Because where that person goes, we go with them
- This is what the Bible means when it tells us to judge a tree by its fruit... we evaluate our teachers by more than what they say
 - If we follow this standard, we may be surprised to discover that some of our teachers don't even know the Lord himself or herself
 - Such people are a danger, so avoid them
- And more than that, we should not fear them, and neither should we hesitate to speak the truth in the face of their lies even if it upsets them
 - The enemy, Satan, the father of lies, has two basic weapons at his disposal for his war against the church
 - Satan spreads lies and he suppresses the truth

- These tactics are two sides of the same coin, because if he can achieve either one he's winning
- If he can get someone to buy his lies, then they stop looking for the truth
- And if he can suppress the truth, those who seek for it can't discover it – or so Satan hopes
- Satan has used both tactics through his influence on the Pharisees
 - Pharisees were constantly inventing false theology, substituting their traditions for the doctrines of God, as Jesus said
 - So that by the time of Jesus, Israel only knew their false teaching, and they had no idea what was truly Scripture any more
- The enemy used their Mishnah as a smokescreen and he still does that today
 - The enemy invents new religions every day because he loves to confuse us with choices
 - The more false religions, the better, because there is only one way to Heaven
- Moreover, Satan tempts true churches to establish meaningless rules in the hope of triggering self-righteousness
 - Remember the old saying? "I don't drink, dance or chew, or date girls that do..."
 - That's a great example of sneaking false teaching into the church in the hope of tempting self-righteousness
- That attitude says I'm more righteous because I have my little rules
 - And I won't accept fellowship with anyone else who doesn't follow my little rules too
 - This tactic blinds unbelievers, and it divides and confuses Christians
 - It provokes pride and self-righteousness and it pushes grace and love out the door
- But even when the truth does break through, the enemy works to suppress it

- That's what we see happening here...Jesus gives the crowd the truth, so the enemy comes against Him and the disciples
 - Using the threat of persecution, the enemy intimidates the disciples into trying to silence Jesus
 - The enemy used fear to get the disciples to do his bidding
- Threats of persecution or public rejection is the enemy's favorite tool of suppression
 - Around the world, Satan uses governments to suppress the truth by intimidating believers into silence
 - And even in religiously tolerant cultures, he brings pressure against the true Christian to stay silent at work or school
 - And if the Christian remains silent, where does the truth come from?
 - Jesus said if we don't speak the truth, the rocks will cry out, but if that happened, it would be to our shame
- Certainly, we need to be savvy about how best to witness under those circumstances...we don't want to invite persecution
 - But neither do we want to do the enemy's bidding by remaining silent and suppressing the truth
 - Jesus tells us to ignore the unbelievers who contend with you over the truth...we don't have to fear them
 - Just serve Christ faithfully and trust Him in the outcome
- So after Jesus exposes the Pharisees as unbelievers, Peter speaks up to ask Jesus to explain the earlier parable

Matt. 15:15 Peter said to Him, "Explain the parable to us."

Matt. 15:16 Jesus said, "Are you still lacking in understanding also?"

Matt. 15:17 "Do you not understand that everything that goes into the mouth passes into the stomach, and is eliminated?"

Matt. 15:18 "But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man.

Matt. 15:19 "For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders.

[Matt. 15:20](#) “These are the things which defile the man; but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile the man.”

- In Mark’s Gospel, we’re told only that the disciples asked this question but Matthew said that it was Peter specifically who asked
 - This is a moment of humor in the Gospels, because we know Peter was the source for Mark’s Gospel
 - So it seems Peter didn’t want to people to know he was the one who asked this question
 - And that makes sense, because we know from Acts that Peter struggled more than most disciples to embrace this truth
- In fact, notice that before explaining the parable, Jesus chastises Peter for not understanding it already
 - Then Jesus moves to explaining what the parable meant
 - And as I said earlier, Jesus is explaining that sin is not a physical problem, meaning it’s not the result of what we do
 - Sin is a spiritual problem...it’s a part of who we are by nature
- Jesus explains simply that food has no effect on our spirit...it just passes through our body one way or another
 - But what comes out of us – meaning the things we think, say and do – are a reflection of our inner being, our spirit
 - And those actions defile us because they are the markers of sin
- But notice, Jesus says these things come from within our heart, which is the Bible’s way of describing our spiritual nature
 - If you commit a theft, you sin, but that sinful action didn’t start at the moment you began to act
 - Jesus says it had an earlier beginning...in your heart
 - That is before you acted to steal, you thought about taking that action
 - The act of stealing was merely the last link in a chain of sin that started in your heart when you first decided to take that action

- I summed it up last week by saying human beings aren't sinners because we sinned...we sin because we are sinners
 - Sin is present in us from before we take our first breath
 - And it's our sin nature that leads us to act sinfully
 - David describes his own beginnings this way:

Psa. 51:2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity

And cleanse me from my sin.

Psa. 51:3 For I know my transgressions,

And my sin is ever before me.

Psa. 51:4 Against You, You only, I have sinned

And done what is evil in Your sight,
So that You are justified when You speak
And blameless when You judge.

Psa. 51:5 Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity,

And in sin my mother conceived me.

- David says his sin was ever before him, meaning there was never a day in his life when sin wasn't present in him
 - David acted sinfully when he slept with Bathsheba and killed her husband in battle, but that was hardly David's first sin
 - David sinned when he lusted for Bathsheba
 - And even before that, David confessed he was sinful from birth, having been conceived in sin
 - David means that as he was formed in his mother's womb, sin passed from his parents and into him
 - David was constantly aware of sin's presence in his life because he never knew a time when it wasn't present working against him
 - Paul says it this way:

Rom. 7:18 For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not.

Rom. 7:19 For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want.

[Rom. 7:20](#) But if I am doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me.

[Rom. 7:21](#) I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good.

- Pauls says evil (sin) is ever present in us leading us to do wrong things, things that we know in our spirit to be wrong
 - Yet despite knowing that something is sinful, nevertheless we still chose to do it at times
 - And Paul says that force inside us is evidence to us that evil dwells within us, causing us to choose sin
 - We are still culpable for our sin, because our sin nature is still part of us and we are still responsible for how we respond to it
- But that's why we need Jesus...we not only need someone to pay for our sin, we need a longterm solution to the source of our sin
 - And Jesus solves both...He paid the penalty for our life of sin on the cross removing our condemnation
 - And He promises to resurrect us into a new, sinless body so when this body dies, we'll be free from the effects of sin forever
- That's why our Savior had to be born of a virgin, so that He would not inherit Adam's sinful nature and perpetuate the problem
 - Adam was not Jesus' father...the Holy Spirit conceived Jesus
 - So by not having an earthly father, Jesus wasn't conceived in sin, and that allowed God to break the chain of original sin
- The Bible calls Jesus our Second Adam because Jesus restarted the human race, spiritually speaking
 - Just as we were all born the first time in the sinful nature of Adam
 - So by faith in Jesus Christ, we may be born again in the perfect, sinless nature of Jesus
- So Jesus says righteousness isn't found in what we do...what we eat, say, think, or for that matter in what we *don't* do

- No set of rules has the power to create righteousness in us, because sin infects our very body
 - Trying to cure sin by following rules is like trying to get dry by moving to a different part of the swimming pool
 - No matter where you go in that pool, you are equally wet
 - And no matter how many rules you adopt for yourself, you are equally sinful apart from Christ
- That's why Paul says that righteousness is found apart from the Law
 - The Law is a set of rules, and those rules are good and holy, but they are also powerless to solve your sin problem
 - The only thing rule following does is expose just how sinful we truly are

[Rom. 3:20](#) because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin.

[Rom. 3:21](#) But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets,

[Rom. 3:22](#) even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction;

[Rom. 3:23](#) for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

- It's not what we put into our bodies that determines if we are sinful or not...it's what comes out of us that shows we are sinful
 - And that's why the solution to sin couldn't be found in something outside us like laws
 - Righteousness comes from changing the problem inside us, changing our spiritual nature by faith alone in Christ alone
- That's where the idea of Christian liberty comes from...that we have freedom from keeping the Law as a means of righteousness
 - Paul says it this way:

[Col. 2:16](#) Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day –

[Col. 2:17](#) things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.

- A shadow is a faint representation of a person, but when the actual person comes into view, we ignore their shadow
- Likewise, the rules of the Law were given to shadow or picture the greater righteousness of Jesus
- And now that God has revealed the way to true righteousness by faith in Jesus, He tells us we no longer need the shadows
 - Rules about food or drink, observing feasts or festivals, even keeping a Sabbath day...these were just pictures of Jesus
 - And now that we have Jesus, we let no one judge our behavior in these areas
- We are already righteous by faith alone, so we don't need other people's rules to tell us how to be righteous
 - We have a law written on our hearts that directs us to live righteously and produce spiritual fruit
 - For example, I don't need to keep the Law of Moses to know I shouldn't lie or steal or murder
 - Christ's spirit inside me is telling me not to lie, steal, or murder
- But even more than that, the Law of Christ written on my heart also directs me in ways that the Law of Moses never did
 - The Mosaic Law says nothing about lusting or cutting people off in traffic or being rude on the phone or a million other things
 - But the Law of Christ convicts me when I do those things
- So my faith in Jesus makes us 100% righteous in our spirit, and our righteous spirit works in us over time to reduce our sinful actions
 - The Bible calls this process sanctification, becoming more holy in our behavior
 - Again, it's from the inside out, not from the outside in
 - That's why Jesus says righteousness is not found in what we do with our hands...it's found in what happens in our heart

- Legalism, and the hypocrisy it produces, is deadly to a church community, especially a new one that's still forming
 - Legalism stunts spiritual growth...it confuses new believers and discourages mature believers
 - The Jews of Jesus' day couldn't recognize Jesus as their Messiah because the Pharisees had blinded them, the Bible says
 - And legalism divides the body, because rules naturally become litmus tests for righteousness
 - When someone refuses to adopt another person's rule for righteousness, then they are labeled apostates and pariahs
 - And that happened in Jesus' day also...when Jesus failed to keep the Pharisees' rules, it became cause for the religious leaders to label Jesus a heretic
 - And once that happened, people began to take sides
 - And most of them sided against their Lord
 - We are a church of the Bible, yes...but we are not a church of rules for the sake of righteousness
 - We are a church of grace...we receive the grace of Christ by faith
 - We study about the grace of Christ from His word
 - And we live in the light of that grace, not seeking our own righteousness by rule keeping nor judging others by our rules
 - We forgive one another when we fail, we recognize that we all have sin living inside us
 - And we grow in that grace and in our knowledge of Jesus Christ until the day we see Him face to face, when finally we will be like Him