



“Clean Hearts”
Isaiah 29:13-19; Matthew 15:3-20
September 21, 2008

Introduction: Handwashing, if only I could get Belle to do it more and the babies less.

Hearts that are Far Away

In this text, Jesus quotes from Isaiah 29, suggesting that there is a disconnect between what the religious establishment believes and says. Jesus tells them, *“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.”* Jesus is giving them a sobering critique, for they are only talking of being holy, but their words do not reflect what is really in their hearts, or who they really are. Jesus discusses the Scriptural command found, for example, in Exodus 20:12, where, God tells us *“Honor your father and mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you.”* Jesus mentions here a religious practice called Corban, where people ignored their call to provide for their parents by giving money offerings to the temple. This religious tradition clearly contradicted God's command. We cannot look for ways to disobey, rather we should always look for ways to obey God. If our hearts are not focused on God, on being willing to obey and worship Him, then our hearts are far away.

Leaving Certain Plants Alone

Before getting into what makes us clean, we will look at what Jesus says about plants and blind guides. Jesus says, *“Every plant that my Heavenly Father has not planted will be pulled up by the roots. Leave them; they are blind guides. If a blind man leads a blind man, both will fall into a pit.”* Israel had often been referred to as a plant, and God as the planter. For example, in Isaiah 61:3, Isaiah says, *“They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of His splendor.”* As His plant, we exist to bring glory and honor to Him. However, if we misuse His word or twist His word for our own ends, we fail to do so. It is certainly tempting to want to discipline those who have gone astray. Scripture is clear however, that this is God's territory, for as He tells us in Deuteronomy 32:35, *“It is mine to avenge; I will repay. In due time their foot will slip; their day of disaster is near and their doom rushes upon them.”* Jesus is telling them not to worry about the Pharisees, that God will take care of them. So too for us. There are some pastors I think that should not be in the ministry, but I must let the Lord deal with them. God tells us to let Him handle those who pretend to serve Him. God is big enough to defend Himself and does not need our help in that regard. Those who are blind know they are blind. Those who follow the blind know they are following the blind and still do so. Neither has any excuse.

Clean Hearts

Jesus makes a clear distinction for His disciples of where cleanness flows from. He says, *“Listen and understand. What goes into person's mouth does not make them unclean, but what comes out of his mouth, that is what makes him unclean...Are you so still dull? Don't you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body? But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a person unclean.”* Just to clarify, Jesus is not saying here that we should not wash our hands or do basic sanitary cleaning. Jesus is saying, however, that we should focus more intently on how clean we are in our souls, rather than acting or looking clean or holy. It is actually far easier to act clean, than to be clean in your heart and soul, in the deepest recesses of who you are. In Jeremiah 17:9-10, God tells us, *“The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? I the Lord search the heart and examine the mind, to reward a person according to their conduct, according to what they deserve.”*

It should not be surprising then that we find passages such as James 3:6, that deals with our tongues and how we speak. James tells us, *“The tongue is also a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.”* I am sure everyone here knows what it is like to put their foot or feet in their mouth, to speak before thinking or without thinking. Jesus is saying that our tongue reflects what is in our heart and soul, the good and the bad. Jesus makes a list here of the evil that flows out of our hearts and souls. They are all linked by some overarching principles: selfishness, lack of care and concern for others; a lack of self control and a disregard for God, a lack of concern for what God wills and wants.