

The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 27 October 2024. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced and see the context for yourself. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.

The Real Source of Evil

Matthew 15:10-20

When I was a kid, there was something that I often heard in the school hallways, and on the playground. Whenever some kid was breaking a rule, or was doing or saying something unkind to a classmate, there would always be some other kid nearby who would see what was going on, put his hand over his mouth, and say, “UUHHHHHM! I’m gonna tell on you, and *you’re* gonna get in *trou-ble!*” (They always said it in those exact same words, and in that exact same sing-songy way. It must have been a ritual that was passed down from generation to generation of schoolkids!) You know what, though? It was only a matter of time before that kid who had tattled on his classmate would do the exact same thing that he had accused the other kid of doing.

We can all be hypocrites, can’t we? Whether we be children or adults, we have all been hypocritical more times than we care to remember. Hypocrisy is universal; and the reason it’s universal is that we all have sinful hearts. Let’s face it: none of us can accuse others of doing what *we ourselves* have not done (whether inwardly, or outwardly). That’s why the Apostle Paul said, “***What then? Are we better than they? No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin.***”

You know, that question, “***What then? Are we better than they?***” reminds me of a question that a Russian author named Alexandr Solzhenitsyn asked years ago. As a young man during WWII, Solzhenitsyn had been drafted into the Red Army; and he was soon made the commander of a regiment. However, the atrocities that he and his soldiers committed against innocent German and Polish women, children, and elderly people tormented his conscience; and he began to doubt that communism was all that he had once thought it was. In 1945, he was arrested for making derogatory comments about the Soviet government; and during his ten-year term in the concentration camps, he saw the prison guards commit the most horrible cruelties imaginable. (He saw the worst of human nature in the prisoners, as well.) Years later, after his release from prison, Solzhenitsyn admitted that oftentimes, he would get very angry as he thought about how corrupt and evil the Soviet leaders were; but then, he would remember the atrocities that he himself, and his soldiers, had committed during the war; and he would ask himself, “***So, were we any better?***”ⁱ In his conscience, he knew that the answer was, “No; we weren’t!”

By the way, during Solzhenitsyn’s prison years, he spent time around Baptist believers; and he was deeply affected by their steadfast love for Christ. In time, he himself went from being an atheist to a theist. To my knowledge, Solzhenitsyn never became a true, born-again believer; but he *did* seem to have a good understanding of how corrupt our human nature is. He had seen, firsthand, just how wicked ordinary people can become; and he knew that trying to create a perfect, equal, utopian environment (as communism *claims* to do) cannot erase the evil in our hearts. It’s just *there!* In his book, *The Gulag Archipelago*, he wrote, “If only there were evil people somewhere, insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us, and destroy them! But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?”ⁱⁱ In other words, we all have evil hearts; and our own conscience tells us so. Thus, if we condemn evil in others, we must also condemn ourselves: and few people are willing to do that.

This morning, as we read **Matthew 15**, we will see what Jesus had to say about the content of our hearts. (And I'll give you a little spoiler: it's not pretty!) The title of this message is, *The Real Source of Evil*.

Read Matthew 15:10-20.

I. The disagreeable parable (vv. 10-12)

In our last message from **Matthew 15:1-9**, we saw that Jesus and His disciples had managed to upset the Pharisees once again. How did they do it? By sitting down and eating a meal without washing their hands! The tradition of the Pharisees was that every Jew must wash his hands before eating a meal; and if anyone failed to do so, that person was (in the *Pharisees'* eyes) breaking God's law. The Pharisees had put their own tradition on the same level as Scripture; and Jesus refused to submit to this phony authority. As they sat down to eat in their host's house, Jesus saw to it that the disciples did *not* wash their hands.

Now, couldn't Jesus have simply complied with the tradition, to avoid making waves? After all, this particular tradition didn't actually contradict any Scripture. Yet, Jesus went out of His way to break it, even though He knew that it would provoke the Pharisees. Why was Jesus so intent on making an issue of such a little matter? Because it *wasn't* a little matter! Putting man's word on the same level as God's Word is a serious affront to God! Any religious body that puts its own traditions on the same level as Scripture is calling *their* word *God's* Word; and this is serious business! The Lord's very last warning in the Bible was, "***If any man shall add unto these things*** (the words of Scripture), ***God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book.***"

The Pharisees were guilty of adding to God's Word; and for this, God's wrath was hovering over them, like Mount Vesuvius moments before it rained fire on the people of Pompeii. You see, the real problem was not simply that they had usurped the authority of Scripture. That was merely an outgrowth of their *real, root* problem. Their *root* problem was that their hearts were dark and corrupt, because they didn't know God.

Now, put yourself in the disciples' shoes. Here they were, getting ready to enjoy a pleasant meal in someone's home (probably in an outer courtyard, where neighbours and townspeople could drop in, and join the conversation); and all of a sudden, they find themselves in the midst of an unpleasant debate. Yet, rather than letting this issue die, so that they could eat in peace, Jesus took it to the next level. He pointed out that the tradition of the elders often negated God's Law. Then, He called the Pharisees "***hypocrites,***" and condemned them for drawing nigh to God with their lips, when, in reality, their hearts were far from Him. At this point, the disciples must have been cringing, and wishing that they could slide under the table. Under their breath, they were probably saying, "Lord, don't do it! Please don't go there!" (But...He went there!) By this time, a crowd was gathering around the courtyard, to see what the big debate was all about: and Jesus called everyone to come near, so that they could hear exactly what He was about to say. With half the town now hanging on His every word, He said, "***Hear, and understand: Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man.***" In other words, food that has been handled by unwashed hands can't defile you, because it's just food! The kind of defilement we *need* to be worried about is *spiritual* defilement; and the source of spiritual defilement is not on the *outside*. Spiritual defilement bubbles up from the wellspring of our sinful *hearts*,

and comes *out* through our mouths, in the form of *words*. Our words aren't *always* bad; but that's because we are good at hiding what's really inside. What *is* inside is "***deadly poison.***"

Read James 3:1-14.

The intellectual and political leaders of our modern world say that man is "basically good," and that it is only a bad *environment* that makes people go bad. Therefore, they say, we can fix society's problems by providing a good environment for people (good education, housing, jobs, etc.). Yet, the ugly reality is staring us in the face! No matter how much money our government throws at education, infrastructure, and economic boosters, crime keeps getting worse and worse. Murder, drug abuse, "mental health" issues, suicide, and sexual crimes are increasing exponentially. Why? Because defilement comes from *within*, not without. The Bible says that mankind is naturally crooked, and totally depraved. This doesn't mean that every person is as wicked as he can possibly be: but it *does* mean that we are all *capable* of the most heinous evil imaginable, because our hearts are naturally bent to evil. Sin has corrupted and tainted every part of our being, so that it is impossible for us to please God.

You see, our fleshly nature is so deceitful, that we often don't even *think* that we are sinning—when, in fact, we are wallowing in sin! (For example, an angry person often blows up in anger, all the while insisting that he does not have an anger problem!) Our fleshly nature not only perverts our inner affections, but it blinds our minds. It suppresses the truth of who *we* are; of who *God* is; of how sinful our hearts really are; and of the fact that we are accountable to God. Our sin nature causes our minds to be "***reprobate.***"

Read Romans 1:18-32.

What does it mean to have a "***reprobate mind***"? Usually, when we hear the word "reprobate," we think of a sexual pervert. However, that's not what the word actually means. The word "***reprobate***" is translated from the word *adokimos*, which simply means "unapproved." It also means "castaway," or "worthless." Now, think of that. God says that men's *minds* are naturally "***reprobate.***" God originally created the mind to be the instrument that would lead our entire being (including our emotions, will, spirit, and body) to serve *Him*. Yet, when Adam chose to sin against God, everything went fundamentally wrong. Because our minds are now depraved by the sin nature, our minds now lead us to *rebel* against God; and therefore, we have become "worthless" and "unprofitable" to Him. That is why **Romans 3:1-12** says, "***As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.***"

In this short, yet profound parable about "that which comes out of the mouth," Jesus revealed the spiritual powerlessness of the Pharisees' "handwashing" tradition. At the same time, He also revealed where *real* defilement comes from: it comes from *within*. Now, how were the *disciples* responding to Jesus' parable? Let's read **verse 12** again, and see. (**Read Matthew 15:12.**) Why were the disciples so concerned about what the Pharisees thought? Were they afraid that they would experience a whole new level of social ostracism because of this ugly incident? Were they afraid that the Pharisees would now have additional "fuel" to accuse Jesus of being a law-breaker, and thus to discredit the belief that He is the Messiah? Were

they afraid that their very lives might even be in danger? Probably all of the above! On the other hand, perhaps they figured that if Jesus would talk nicely to the Pharisees, and try to be more conciliatory, they might even be able to win them over to *their* side—which would be a huge boost to their cause. If this *were* what they were thinking, Jesus was about to put that thought to rest! This brings us to our second point.

II. The doomed plants (vv. 13-14)

(Read Matthew 15:13-14.) It's plain to see that the disciples were worried about Jesus' confrontation with the Pharisees. As soon as they had the chance to speak with Jesus privately, they said, "**Knowest thou not that the Pharisees were offended?**" In other words, "Lord, don't you realise whom we're dealing with, here? You *do* realise how much power the Pharisees have, right?" But Jesus wasn't the least bit concerned. In answer to their question, He said, "**Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up.**" Obviously, the "plants" that He was talking about were the Pharisees.

Now, when we think of the word "plant," we usually think of "anything that grows out of the ground." However, the Greek word for "**plant**" (the word *phuteia*) doesn't refer to grass, or to a wildflower, or anything that happens to grow on its own; it refers to something that is *purposely planted* and *cultivated* by someone. Who, then, "planted" the Pharisees? It certainly wasn't God: it was God's enemy, the devil! Jesus had illustrated this truth in the parable of the wheat and the tares. Though the Pharisees outwardly *looked* like "wheat," they were actually poisonous "tares." Though they *appeared* like God's children, they were only fake *imitations* of God's children. They were *Satan's* children; and Satan had planted these men in their position of religious power in order to oppose Jesus, and to choke out the truth of the Gospel. Let's take a look at the parable of the wheat and the tares again.

Read Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43.

In this parable, the farmer (who represents Christ) instructed his servants (who represent God's angels) to let the tares and wheat grow together until the time of harvest (which represents the end of this age, when the angels will separate the righteous from the wicked). Until then, they were to let the tares alone. Well, in the same way, Jesus is now telling His disciples, "The Pharisees will not receive the truth; so let them alone. These men will continue to deceive themselves, and others, with their false traditions. They will continue to grope in spiritual darkness, all the while thinking that they are leading men *out* of darkness. But they are *all* spiritually blind; and one day, all of them will fall into the ditch, and be destroyed. So don't try to court them, or woo them to 'our side,' by making the Gospel more acceptable to them. They will *not* submit to the Gospel of the Kingdom; so let them alone."

Brethren, this warning wasn't just for the disciples; it is for us, too. The message is clear: "Don't try to make lost people into wheat, when they are tares!" No amount of "Christianising" will make lost folks into Christians. They may come to church for some motive of their own, and they may learn all the Christian lingo and protocol; but if they do not repent of their sin, and place their faith in Christ, and experience the miracle of salvation, they are still tares, and not wheat. The moment we try to make Christianity more *acceptable* to the lost, so that they will join us, we compromise the Gospel, and produce false converts.

The danger of compromising the Gospel in order to “win” certain people is nothing new. Why? Because the Gospel has *never* been attractive to the worldly mind; and therefore, it is tempting for us to try to “help God out” by making the Gospel more attractive to the lost! The message that “Christ died for my sins, because *I* am spiritually dead, and need to be made alive” is *not* attractive to self-righteous sinners. The command to “Die to self, and follow Christ” does not appeal to those who want to rule their own lives: instead, it drives them away. No doubt, the disciples often wondered why Jesus kept saying things that drove people away. There were probably times when they thought, “Couldn’t the Master have toned down His speech just a little bit? Did He really have to use such shocking words? Did He really have to say, *‘He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him’*”? Couldn’t He have let that particular sin issue alone? Couldn’t He have sounded a little less demanding? Did He really have to say, *‘He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me’*? Did He really have to say that *‘The Son of man hath not where to lay his head’*? That guy might have joined us if Jesus hadn’t scared him away by telling him, right up front, that he might not have a bed to sleep in tonight! Did He really have to tell that man to *‘Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God’*? Couldn’t He have met him halfway, and allowed him to follow Him *parttime*, whenever it didn’t conflict with family matters? Did He really have to tell that rich young ruler to sell all that he had, and give to the poor, and to come and follow Him? Doesn’t He know that he turned that young man away? He could have been a real asset to us!” Judas Iscariot probably thought such things *all the time*, since he himself was a lost man; but even the other eleven (who *were* saved men) had moments of doubt, too. That is why Jesus warned them to “Let the Pharisees alone!” Jesus wasn’t saying that the Pharisees *couldn’t* be saved. (We know that this isn’t so, because after Christ’s resurrection, there *were* some of the Pharisees who finally believed.) Jesus was simply saying, “Don’t compromise the Gospel in order to ‘win’ people who refuse to repent!”

Read James 2:1-9.

Brethren, may we never be guilty of being “respecters of persons” in order to get bigger numbers, and bigger offerings. If we do this, we won’t be a church anymore: we will be a “do-gooder” club. The Gospel must be received by faith and repentance; and only the “poor in spirit” may apply! Those who will not humble themselves as little children, and be converted into God’s wheat, will remain as tares; and they *will* be rooted up, and cast into the oven!

III. The defiled products of the heart (vv. 15-20)

Jesus had warned the disciples to let the Pharisees alone; and the warning had been duly noted. However, the disciples still wanted to know exactly what the parable about “that which cometh out of the mouth” meant. And so, Peter (who was usually the spokesman), asked, *“Declare unto us this parable.”* Little did they know the ugly portrait of the human heart that Jesus was about to give them! **(Read Matthew 15:15-20 again.)**

My friends, *this* is what is in our hearts! Our hearts are already thoroughly defiled; and these works of the flesh *will* eventually express themselves outwardly. By the way, this is just a

small list of the works of the flesh. In **Mark 7**, Mark gives us a bigger list; and in **Galatians 5**, Paul gives us an even *more* extensive list. Let's take a look at them.

Read Mark 7:18-23.

Read Galatians 5:17-21.

In this **Galatians** passage, Paul mentions seventeen "*works of the flesh.*" The first work of the flesh which Paul mentions is "*adultery.*" (This was one of the first ones that Jesus mentioned, too.) You know, many people in our world view adultery as a "private issue," which isn't anyone's business. However, it *is* someone's business. It's *God's* business. Whether it be mental lust, or an actual physical affair, He hates it. The next work of the flesh that Paul mentions is "*fornication*" (sexual activity *before* marriage). The world sees even less wrong with this sin than they do with adultery. The world says, "So *what* if you sleep together now and then, or live together without being married? It's no big deal!" But God says that "*whoremongers*" ("fornicators") *and adulterers God will judge.*"

The next sins that are listed are "*uncleanness*" and "*lasciviousness.*" "*Uncleanness*" means moral impurity of all kinds; and "*lasciviousness*" means wantonness and lust. These sins are not merely outward, but *inward*. Then, there is the sin of "*idolatry.*" Idolatry is not merely bowing down to a stone statue; it is elevating anything above God, and worshipping it in your heart (such as money, pleasure, or even family). "*Witchcraft*" is the next sin; and it is a heinous one. Witchcraft is complete, utter rebellion against God. In witch's covens, the members purposely break every commandment of God that they can possibly break. Yet, as horrible as witchcraft is, God sees *all* rebellion against Him in the same light as witchcraft! In **1 Samuel 15**, God says that "*Rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry.*" When God tells you *not* to do something, and you choose to do it anyway, God sees your rebellion in the same way that He sees idolatry and witchcraft!

The next "works of the flesh" are very interrelated to each other. "*Hatred,*" "*variance,*" "*emulations,*" "*wrath,*" "*strife,*" "*seditions,*" "*heresies,*" "*envyings,*" and "*murders*" are like peas from the same pod. God sees anger in the same light as murder! How about "*variance*"? What is that? Basically, it means "quarrelling," or "contention." For those who pride themselves that they have never committed a "really bad" sin such as adultery, how about *this* one? Have you ever angrily quarrelled? If so, God puts your quarrelling right alongside murder, because it stems from the same root of anger and hatred! How about "*emulations*"? This means "jealousies." Jealousy is coveting something that belongs to someone else; and it is much the same thing as "*envyings.*" It, too, comes from the same pod that "hatred," "variations," and "murder" come from.

Of course, "*wrath*" (explosive anger) is often present along with these sins, as well, because it springs from this same root of hatred. "*Strife,*" "*seditions,*" and "*heresies*" are the product of hatred, as well. "*Strife*" means "dividing into factions, or cliques," on the basis of pride and sinful passions. "*Sedition*" means "disunion"; and "*heresies*" means "divisive parties." We usually think of "heresy" as meaning "false doctrine": but "heresy" can also mean a party, or faction, which is based upon petty quarrels, cliques, and personality worship. Paul also mentions "*drunkenness*" and "*revellings*" as works of the flesh. As for drunkenness, God

clearly commands us not even to *look* on the wine when it “*moveth itself aright*” (when it has fermented into intoxicating drink). God also forbids “*revellings*” (in other words, carousal and riot). “*Thefts*” (stealing in any form, whether by dipping into the till, or by scamming someone in some fashion, or by not paying someone what you owe him, or by not giving your boss the work he deserves) is an abomination to the God who has promised to meet all your needs. (We don’t *have* to steal, because God promises to take care of us, if we will only trust Him.) “Bearing false witness,” or telling lies, is an affront to the God who cannot lie. “*Blasphemy*” (speaking against God, or using His name lightly, by saying “O my ---”) is an insult to His holiness. All these things bubble up from our sinful hearts, as naturally as water bubbles up from a spring. You didn’t have to sit your child down and teach him how to sin, did you? You didn’t have to say, “Now, Johnny, here’s how to tell lies. Pay close attention, now!” Now, we don’t have to be taught how to do these sins, because they are *in us*; and the Bible says that “*the wages of sin is death.*”

Now, maybe you’re thinking, “Pastor, this is getting really depressing. I’m seeing a portrait of myself that makes me cringe. And if ‘*the wages of sin is death,*’ then I’m doomed!” If this is what you are thinking, I have really good news for you: God has provided a **remedy** to your sin! **It’s called “a new heart.”** This “new heart” is made possible through “the new birth”; and the “new birth” was made possible by the sacrifice that Christ made for you on the cross!

Read Numbers 21:5-9.

Read John 3:1-16.

My friends, Jesus was “*lifted up*” on the cross so that He might suffer the judgment for our sins. That brass serpent that Moses lifted up on the pole was a symbol of *our sin*; yet, at the same time, it was also a prophetic picture of *Jesus*, who would one day be lifted up on the cross. Now, perhaps you’re thinking, “Wait a minute. If the serpent is a picture of *sin*, how could it also be a picture of *Jesus*, who is *sinless*?” Ah, my friend, in the answer to that question lies the whole mystery of the Gospel! You see, Jesus was “*made sin for us*” as He hung on the cross! All our sins were laid on *Him*; and He paid our judgment, in our place. And what is the result? The result is that if you will simply “look” to Jesus in faith, **you will live—eternally!** You will be cured of the deadly “bite” of sin, and will be made “alive” to God, and enter into an eternal relationship with Him! Not only that, but **God will give you a new heart!** The moment you believe on Jesus, God’s Holy Spirit comes to live inside you. Now, you can’t see Him with your *physical* eyes (just as you can’t see the wind); but you *can* see the *change* that He makes inside you. This is what Jesus described as being “**born again.**” It means that the Holy Spirit comes to live inside you; and He gives you a new heart, which is able to please God. Now, the *old, sinful* heart will continue to be with you, as long as you are still in this mortal body; but you will also have a *new* heart, which is created in righteousness and holiness; and as long as you submit yourself to Jesus to Jesus every day, He will give you the power, through this new nature, to do things that truly please Him. And the best part of all is that someday, you will receive a new, glorified, resurrected body, with *no* sin in it at all; and in this body, you will live forever in God’s perfect Heaven, in the presence of the Lord!

Conclusion: Six hundred years before Jesus’ birth, Ezekiel prophesied about the “new heart” that would be made possible through Christ’s death on the cross. He said, “**A new heart also will I give you, and a**

new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.” My friend, have *you* received this “new heart”? In other words, have you been “born again” into God’s family? If not, please look to Jesus with the eyes of faith, and believe that His sacrifice for you on the cross is all you need. Ask Him to forgive you of all your sin, and to come into your heart; *and He will!* Don’t be like the Pharisees, who trusted in their own righteousness. Their good works couldn’t save them; and they can’t save you, either. God can’t accept you with your *old* heart; but He *can* accept you with the *new* heart...*if* you will let Him give it to you!

Christian, this message is for you, too. You have the Holy Spirit living in you; and through Christ, you have all the power you need to overcome sin. Submit to Him, and let Him have full control of your heart!

ⁱ Alexander Solzhenitsyn, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aleksandr_Solzhenitsyn#cite_ref-isbn1-933859-57-1_26-0

ⁱⁱ William J. Federer, *Who Is the King in America?* (USA: Amerisearch, Inc., 2016), p. 22.