

WESTERN WISDOM BIBLE STUDY

Christ Jesus Rebukes the Pharisees

Then Pharisees and scribes from Jerusalem came to Jesus, saying, "Why do your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? They do not wash their hands when they take their food."



He replied, "And why do you transgress the command of God with your traditions? God enjoined, *Honour your father and mother, and, He who curses*

his father or mother is to suffer death. But you say, whoever tells his father or mother, 'This money might have been at your service but it is dedicated to God,' need not honour his father or mother. So you have repealed the law of God to suit your own tradition. You hypocrites! Isaiah made a grand prophecy about you when he said, *This people honours me with their lips, but their heart is far away from me: vain is their worship of me, for the doctrines they teach are but human precepts.*"

Then he called the crowd and said to them, "Listen, understand this: it is not what enters a man's mouth that defiles him, what defiles a man is what comes out of his mouth."

Then the disciples came up and said to him, "Do you know that the Pharisees have taken offence at what they hear you say?"

He replied, "Any plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be rooted up. Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind, and if one blind man leads another, both of them will fall into a pit."

Peter answered, "Explain this parable to us at any rate."

He said, "And are you totally ignorant? Do you not see how all that enters the mouth passes through the belly and is then thrown out into the drain, while what comes out of the mouth comes from the heart—and that is what defiles a man. For out of the heart come evil designs, murder, adultery, sexual vice, stealing, false witness, and slander. That is what defiles a man; a man is not defiled by eating with unwashed hands."

—Matthew 15:1-20 (Moffatt Translation).

"The Pharisees," we are told by A.

Powell Davies in his fascinating book, *The Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, "were the popular party . . . It is true that the Pharisees were often haughty and uncharitable, but it is also true that they took a deeply ethical view of religion." There were great rabbis, Hillel, for example, who belonged to the Pharisaic sect, and reached "a level close to that of Jesus in their moral teachings."

Nevertheless, to most students of the Bible the name Pharisee has come to be practically synonymous with hypocrite, no doubt because of the instances cited in the Gospels in which members of this sect demonstrated so thoroughly their hypocritical attitude. That such an attitude was a serious vice was made very clear by the Teacher from Galilee, and someone has well said of hypocrisy that: "If Satan ever laughs, it must be at hypocrites; they are the greatest dupes he has."

Christ Jesus came to bring a new order of things—a new era in which there would be no pretensions, no hypocrisy, no "lip service" only, no "teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." Bluntly He tells the Pharisees and the scribes (the professional copyists of the scriptures and of the same party as the Pharisees) of their hypocritical attitude in accusing the disciples of transgressing tradition when they themselves had erred far more by making the commandment of God of none effect in their man-made tradition. Having allowed their own customs and traditions to become too basic in their way of life, these Pharisees had lost whatever inner divine guidance they might have had.

Then the Great Teacher tells the crowd of people that "what defiles a man is what comes out of his mouth."