

15:1 *Came to Jesus*- Matthew records many people 'coming to Jesus'. A related word is found in Jn. 6:37: "All that the Father gives me shall come to Me; and he who *comes* to Me, I will in no way reject". Many 'came to Jesus' but only some really came. Again we see a warning against surface level Christianity- coming to Him externally, but not in essence.

*Of Jerusalem*- They came all the way to Galilee to try to trap the Lord in His words. And yet it was some of the Jerusalem priests (Acts 6:7) and Pharisees (Acts 15:5) who later accepted Christ. We would likely have ignored these troublemakers and given up on them as hard cases, to be endured but not converted. But the Lord's hope and vision for humanity was so wide- and in the end, even after His death, it paid off. This is a great challenge to us in our witness to all men, including the bitter, self-righteous religious leader types.

15:2 Often Paul sees similarities between the Pharisees' behaviour as recorded in the Gospels, and that of people he brushed against in his life (e.g. Mt. 15:2 = Gal. 1:14; Col. 2:8; Mt. 15:9 = Col. 2:22; Tit. 1:14; Mt. 16:6 = 1 Cor. 5:6,7; Gal. 5:9; Mt. 23:31,32 = 1 Thess. 2:15). We too are to translate the Gospels into our own life situations.

*The elders*- The word *presbeteros* would've been understood by all to refer to members of the Sanhedrin. And yet the later New Testament uses the word about elders within the Christian church, who got to that status regardless of social position but purely on the basis of spiritual qualification; thus a spiritually qualified slave or young believer in their 20s could be a *presbeteros* in the new Israel which was being consciously created by the Lord in parody of the old Israel.

*Don't wash their hands*- Rabbi Joses claimed that "to eat with unwashed hands is as great a sin as adultery." And Rabbi Akiba in captivity used his water ration to wash his hands rather than to drink, resulting in him almost dying of dehydration.

15:3 Although the Lord was very hard in some ways upon the twelve, accusing them of "no faith" etc., whenever He spoke about them to others or to His Father, He was so positive and defensive about them. This is a valuable window onto His current mediation for us. The disciples were ordinary Jews who weren't such righteous men; they didn't wash before a meal, and the Pharisees criticized them. The Lord explained why this wasn't so important; but the disciples still didn't understand (:15,16). And yet He justifies them to the Pharisees as if they *did*

understand, and as if their non-observance of ritual washing was because of their great spiritual perception. Surely the Lord imputed a righteousness to them which was not their own. He had asked the disciples to be obedient to every jot and tittle of the teaching of the Scribes, because they “sit in Moses’ seat”. And yet when they are criticized for not doing what He’d asked them to do, for not washing hands before a meal, the Lord Jesus vigorously defends them by criticizing their critics as hypocrites (Mk. 7:2-8). Indeed, the Lord’s passion and anger with the critics comes out very clearly in the subsequent record of the incident; and it is the essence of that passion which He has for us in mediating for us.

*You also transgress-* The force of “also” is that the Lord didn’t deny that His men were transgressing the tradition of the elders- even though He had elsewhere taught them to obey those who “sit in Moses’ seat” (Mt. 23:2). But still He justifies His disciples to the world, reflecting His love and imputation of righteousness towards them. And this Lord is our Lord.

*The commandment of God-* The tension is between human *tradition*, and Divine *commandment*. There is a tendency to assume that tradition passed down over a period of time is in fact from God. Even the most protestant of Protestant churches have this tendency. And it is in all of us. The Lord goes on to demonstrate that God’s *command* is transgressed not only by bold faced disobedience, but equally by seeking to get around its real force and by *omitting* to do what that command implies. Accepting the real implication of God’s inspired word means that we will fearlessly break with tradition when necessary, and will examine whether our response to His word is direct obedience or rather a mirage, ‘getting around’ the direct requirement. All this is the practical outcome of believing the Bible to be inspired.

*Your tradition-* The tradition in view is not specifically their teaching about washing. The subsequent context shows the Lord has in view other traditions. His argument is therefore ‘If *some* of your traditions are wrong and unBiblical, then why demand we keep other traditions which are within that same body of tradition’. And so He relentlessly requires that tradition within any religious group is fearlessly analyzed- if some are unBiblical, then the others need not be respected. Just as “tradition” and “commandment” are placed in apposition to each other, likewise “your” is in opposition to “of God”. Elevating tradition to the status of Divine commandment is yet another way in which religious people ‘play God’.

15:4 *God commanded-* His word speaks directly to us, whereas the Greek word for “tradition” means something passed down. To make the point, the Lord speaks of the commandments of

Moses as *God* commanding. The Jews spoke of *Moses* commanding (Jn. 8:5), and although the Lord also does (Mt. 8:4), His point is that it was effectively *God* commanding.

*Saying-* This apparently redundant word serves to emphasize that God's word is a living word, speaking directly to us, and not mediated to us through passed down traditions of men.

*Honour your father-* The Lord Jesus saw as parallel the commands to honour parents and also not to curse them. These two separate commands (from Ex. 20:12 and 21:17) He spoke of as only one: "*the* commandment" (Mk. 7:9). He therefore saw that not to honour parents was effectively to curse them (Mk. 7:10). *Omitting* to honour parents, even if it involved appearing to give one's labour to God's temple, was therefore the same as *committing* the sin of cursing them. He therefore speaks in :6 of how they did *not* honour their parents by the legal loophole they had devised- but this is the same as cursing them. The Lord looked very deeply at the implication of human behaviour and positions; and He does the same with ours too. The fact He has such penetrating depth of analysis highlights His patient grace with us- for He realizes the nature of human sin far more perceptively than we do, who see only a few implications of each sin.

*Die the death-* In Mark's account, the Lord taught that to wangle one's way out of caring for their parents by delegating it to the synagogue was effectively cursing them, and those guilty must "die the death" (Mk. 7:10,11). To him who knows to do good but does it not, this omission is counted as sin (James 4:17- written in the context of brethren omitting to help each other).

15:5 *But you say-* The saying of God (note the word "saying" in :4) was overridden by the saying of men. This quotation was from the passed down traditions of the Jews. But the Lord says that *you* say this. The 'saying' of the Rabbis became the 'saying' of those who obeyed them. Thus obedience to a command (in this case, of men) is counted as 'saying' it- for we pass on teaching by our example of doing it. The depth of the Lord's analysis of their behaviour is amazing.

*Shall say to his father ...-* To give a word, or written contract.

*A gift-* If a gift was made to the temple treasury of what was reckoned to be the obligation of the man to his parents, or if the man agreed to list the temple treasury as a beneficiary in his will, giving to them the amount he would have spent caring for his elderly parents- then he was

considered free from having to honour and care for them. The reasoning was that something promised to God in the future was His and could not therefore be spent on parents. But this was *not* honouring the parents (:6). We can't buy our way out of spiritual responsibility by making donations or making legacies which cost us nothing today. We can think that we are devoting ourselves to the Lord's cause over and above that which is required of us- when actually, we do nothing of the sort. We can give to the Lord's cause, when actually we have only got round the essential intention of God's commandments to be generous-spirited and show a true love (Mt. 15:5,6). The Jews fasted on days which the Law did not require of them; but in God's ultimate analysis, they did this for themselves, to bolster their own spiritual ego, rather than as a fast which he recognized (Zech. 7:15,16). The more active we are in the community of believers, the more we feel we go the extra miles- the more sober is this warning.

*That with which you might have been profited by me is given to God-* The very language of “profit” is inappropriate. If we have a duty to help someone, then that help is hardly their “profit”. The very term reduces love and the care that comes from love to a mere transaction.

15:6 *Honour not-* To not honour ones' parents is, in the Lord's book, to actively curse them, even though it is doubtful those He was criticizing ever actually did so (Mt. 15:1-6). This is the power of sin of omission.

*Of no effect-* It could mean, literally, of no authority. Again the Lord is making the point that practical obedience to God's word is a function of what authority we give it. To disobey God's commands by seeking to 'get around' them is effectively saying that God's word is of no authority. And this is the context of this whole discussion- God's word is to the sole authority, and not human tradition and the concessions to disobedience made by men. His word is sent forth and *will accomplish* its purpose, Isaiah says; and yet we can make “the word of God of none effect” by our traditions or our lack of preaching it. The word / Gospel will inevitably have a result, and yet it is also limited by the attitudes of men.

Or we can understand “effect” as just that- effect. The command to honour and practically care for elderly parents had an “effect”. God's laws are not simple tests of obedience for the sake of it. The process of obedience has “effect”; disobedience therefore robs us of the positive effect which obedience will bring. Caring for elderly parents, putting “honour” into practice rather than leaving it as mere words, is designed to teach us something. Here in Matthew we read of the “commandment” (*entole*) of God, but in Mk. 7:13 of the “word” (*logos*) of God. What did the

Lord say? Perhaps ‘You make the commandment, that is, the intention (*logos*) of God, of no effect’. God’s word of command is a *logos*, an intention. See on :9 *in vain*.

It’s also quite legitimate to understand *akuroo* as meaning to disannul (s.w. Gal. 3:17). In this case, the Lord is saying that the Jews were doing the unthinkable for them- disannulling God’s law. The law was disannulled by the death of the Lord Jesus, and Judaism and the early communities of Jewish converts clearly struggled with that idea. But Matthew records the Lord’s words at this point to demonstrate that effectively, the Law had been disannulled already by Jewish disobedience to it and following human traditions which left the Law without power and function.

*By your tradition-* Again, “tradition” is put here for ‘the keeping of tradition’. Tradition means ‘that which is passed on’, and it is only that if it is actually practiced.

15:7 *Hypocrites-* The Lord could use this term about people only because He could see what was on the inside (the heart, :8). We who cannot do this are perhaps not able to define others in this way.

*Of you-* The reference to “this people...” was not to be understood as only Isaiah’s hearers, but all who read this living word (:8). And so this is in the end how to study the Bible- to let it speak to *you*.

15:8 *This people-* The prophecy quoted from Is. 29 is a criticism of the common people of Judah at Hezekiah’s time; there was Godly leadership, but Isaiah laments that the ordinary people were far from Yahweh. But the Lord quotes this as relevant to the Jewish religious leadership, who prided themselves on their separation from the mass ‘people of the land’ whom they considered as apostate. Yet again we see His radical turning upside down of the Jewish worldview and creation of a new order, where secular people like His disciples were to be the new Sanhedrin leadership (see on 15:2 *elders*). Note that He was at this stage specifically addressing the Jewish elders, because only in :10 does He call the crowd to Him to listen.

*Honours Me with their lips-* They honoured with their lips, but their heart was far from God; they kept His commandments, but they frustrated their intention by not letting them influence their

essential selves (Mk. 7:6-9). They fiercely guarded the pronouncement of His Covenant Name; but in reality, they forgot that Name (Jer. 23:27).

*Far from Me-* The Lord perceived that “your tradition... the commandments of men... your doctrines” resulted in the hearts of Israel being “far from [God]”. Doctrine was intended to affect the heart; and false doctrine resulted in the heart being far from God. True doctrine, on the other hand, was and is intended to bring the heart close to God. Doctrine / teaching is therefore to affect the heart; it is not just the intellectual basis for unity in a community of believers. And the Lord goes on in this very context to talk of how “every plant which my heavenly Father hath not planted shall be rooted up” (Mt. 15:13). The Greek for “planted” is interpreted by James Strong as meaning “Figuratively, to instil doctrine”. The planting of the believer is through the instillation of Godly doctrine, rather than the doctrines of men. Note how the Lord speaks of doctrine as a command in Mt. 15:6,9: "Thus have ye made the *commandment* of God of none effect by your tradition... in vain they do worship me, teaching for *doctrines* the commandments of men". And He taught earlier that the doctrine of one God was in fact a command to action. Doctrine, *didache*, is teaching, not just theory; it is commandment towards action. For doctrine and practice are linked. In this we are helped to assess whether any idea or interpretation is indeed a 'first principle doctrine' or not. What does it inspire in practice? Or is it merely the academic interpretation of the human brain cells?

15:9- see on 15:2.

*In vain-* Worship and sacrifice to God can be done “in vain” if our attitude to His word is wrong. The reason for the vanity of their worship and devotions was because their doctrine was wrong. This clearly shows that religious devotion alone doesn’t mean anything in terms of acceptability with God. And it also shows that the intention of doctrine, of teaching from God’s word, is so that our lives are *not* lived “in vain”; there is “effect” in the outworking of God’s true word in human lives. “In vain” here is surely to be semantically paralleled with “no effect” in :6.

*Teaching for doctrines-* The original of Is. 29:13,14 doesn’t say this. It is addressed to *the people*, stating that their fear of God is taught by the doctrines of men. The Lord amends the text slightly to make it relevant to the *teachers* whom He was addressing. Such amending of Old Testament quotation was common in Jewish *midrash*. The point is, that God’s ancient word is to be reapplied to us today in *our* contexts, rather than be left as mere historical statement to people long ago.

*The commandments of men-* The emphasis was surely upon the word “men”. The Lord has been comparing the commandments of *God* with Jewish tradition. Tradition had become the word of God to these people.

15:10 *Called the multitude-* His previous teaching in this chapter was therefore given to the “scribes and Pharisees” of :1 in a private audience. See on :8 *this people*.

*Hear and understand-* The Lord was speaking specifically to the crowd, without the presence of the disciples, who only later came to Him (:12). The Greek words for “hear and understand” were repeatedly used by the Lord in Mt. 13:13,14,15,19. There He had explained to the disciples that the crowds did *not* and *could not* “hear and understand”, and therefore He was confusing them by parables; only the disciples heard and understood. But here, hoping against hope, the Lord makes a desperate appeal to the crowds to hear and understand. Such is His hopefulness that He was unashamed to depart from a declared position about people, and hope that they might somehow respond. We are left to imagine the tone of desperate pleading in His voice as He appealed for them to “hear and understand” in the light of how He had used those words about the crowds in Mt. 13.

15:11 *Not that which goes into... defiles-* The same words are found in the Lord’s final message to us in Rev. 21:27- nothing will *go into* the Kingdom of God which *defiles*. Surely He had in mind the words He had spoken here 30 years previously. Nothing can go into and defile- but a *person* can. The Lord is showing that defilement is a personal matter, not a question of avoiding eating or touching ‘unclean’ things. The whole discussion here about defilement is in the context of the Pharisees criticizing the disciples for eating “with defiled, that is, unwashed, hands” (Mk. 7:2 s.w.). Paul had meditated upon the Lord’ teaching here deeply, because he clearly alludes to it in saying that he is “persuaded by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean [s.w. ‘defiled’] in itself” (Rom. 14:14). Again we see the nature of the living word- these black words on white paper become the Lord Jesus reasoning with us and persuading us over issues.

*That which comes out of the mouth defiles-* Here we see the huge importance placed by the Lord upon our words. He goes on to explain that it is what comes out of the *heart* which defiles (:18,19), but words are an expression of the heart. Therefore by them we shall be judged (Mt. 12:37). What comes out of the heart is what comes out of the mouth (:18)- ultimately, at least, after we have finished all the hypocritical games of trying to say one thing whilst thinking otherwise. And Mark adds that what comes out of *the man*, what comes out “from *within*”, is

what defiles him (Mk. 7:15,23). A man is his heart and so he is his words, just as “the word was [and is] God”. We note that the same word is used about gracious words ‘proceeding out of [the Lord’s] mouth’ (Lk. 4:22). They were a reflection of the grace deep within Him, which *is* Him. And likewise ungracious words are not to ‘proceed’ [s.w.] from *our* mouths, but only words that “may minister grace to the hearers” (Eph. 4:29).

15:12- see on 17:10.

*The Pharisees were offended-* The Lord’s teaching that nothing external can defile was undermining the very basis of their worldview. No wonder they were angry. Although it was the death of Christ which ended the Mosaic Law and cleansed things so that nothing should be called “defiled” (s.w.- Acts 10:15,28; 11:9), the Lord ahead of that time pronounced this to be the case. And in essence this was the case anyway- because in spiritual terms, the ‘unclean’ things could not defile a person. They were only declared unclean under the Law of Moses to teach people about the more important internal defilements they should avoid.

The Lord elsewhere taught of the immense danger and responsibility of making another stumble / be offended (18:6,8,9). But sometimes stumbling is inevitable- “in many things we offend all” (James 3:2). Responsibility for stumbling is therefore not only with the party who causes it. Some did stumble at the Lord’s teaching (Mt. 11:6; 13:21,57); He was a rock of stumbling. But perhaps the disciples hoped the Pharisees would be converted, and considered that the Lord’s teaching here was so radical that it was going to make them stumble from that path. According to this understanding, the Lord didn’t make the Pharisees ultimately stumble. The disciples *feared* He would, thinking (wrongly) that a less demanding message might make the way easier for the Pharisees. And the Lord conceded to their concerns, whilst not agreeing with them- for in Mt. 17:27 He picks them up on this incident and tells that they should act in such a way that does not “offend” others.

15:13 *Every plant which My Heavenly Father has not planted-* It was commonly understood that all Israel were the planting of the Lord, having been planted as vines in His vineyard (Num. 24:6; 2 Sam. 7:10; Ps. 44:2; 80:8,15; Is. 5:2; Jer. 2:21; 11:17; 45:4). Yet He implies here that the scribes and Pharisees were *not* planted by God. The Old Testament references to Israel having been planted by God are many- to say that Israel’s religious leaders were *not* planted by God was to clearly say that He did not consider them to be the true Israel. But the restored Kingdom of God was to feature planting of new vines (Is. 41:19; 51:16; Jer. 24:6; 31:28; 32:41; Ez. 36:36; Am. 9:15) just as He had planted a garden in Eden (Gen. 2:8), and so again the Lord is hinting that the old Israel was coming to an end, and a new Israel being planted which was in embryo the



Kingdom of God, paradise restored. Paul picks up this figure in speaking of how his preaching of the Gospel was 'planting', specifically, a vineyard (1 Cor. 3:6-8; 9:7). This connects with the Old Testament and New Testament descriptions of Old Testament Israel as the vineyard God planted (Mt. 21:33; Lk. 13:6; 20:9). Paul saw that a new Israel was being formed one by one. Teaching God's word is described by Paul in 1 Cor. 3:6-8 as 'planting', and it would seem this was a Jewish metaphor used for the instilling of God's word into students. In this case, the Lord would be continuing the theme developed so far in Matthew 15- that attention to God's word is what makes someone part of the true Israel. Because of their rejection of the word of God in favour of the word of men, the Pharisees and scribes were therefore not planted by the Father. This was their choice.

*Rooted up-* Clearly the Scribes and Pharisees were plants, in the same field as the ones planted by the Father, who would be rooted up. They had been planted by someone other than the Father. This of course is exactly the picture presented by the parable of the wheat and weeds. But the Lord taught in that parable that the 'rooting up' must be left to the Angels at the last day. The subsequent command to the disciples to "let them alone" could be understood in the context of the wheat and weeds parable- the idea might be 'Don't *you* think you can sort them out. Leave them alone. Let God do it'. The Lord saw the problem that the disciples might root up wheat as well as weeds (He uses the same word- Mt. 13:29). And His concern was justified- for as noted on :1, there were within this general category of Scribes and Pharisees a number who would later repent and come to Christ. Those who are to be plucked up at the last day are in essence already plucked up by God, from His perspective (Jude 12 s.w.). The repentance of some of those Scribes and Pharisees (see on :1) who appeared in the 'to be plucked up' category is a great example and warning to us.

15:14 *Let them alone-* The Lord bothered with the scribes and Pharisees, and some were converted thanks to His efforts (see on :1). But He knew it was best for the disciples to keep away from these people. Yet He may have meant 'Don't *you* try to root them up' - see on :13.

*Blind leaders-* But some in this category repented (see on :1). That was how they were at that time. But even blind leaders can repent, Saul of Tarsus being the great example. They were heading for the "ditch" of condemnation, but some pulled back.

*Into the ditch-* The blind can lead the blind into the ditch, i.e. to be 'rooted up' in condemnation (Mt. 15:13,14 cp. 13:29). And yet *now* in this day of marvellous opportunity, we can lift both ourselves and others out of that pit of condemnation (Mt. 12:11). Some of those who are now 'rooted up', i.e. condemned as they would be in the future judgment (Mt. 13:28), who are

“wandering” as the rejected will in the last day, can still be saved from this by us pulling them out of the fire of condemnation (Jude 12,22). Men can escape from the "damnation of hell" in which they are in (Mt. 23:33). Herein lies the urgency of our task in both personal repentance and pastoral work. But we note too the responsibility of leaders- they can lead others to condemnation. We do well to analyse our leaders. When the Lord elsewhere spoke of the blind leading the blind, He went on to tell the story of the partially sighted man who tries to remove what he perceives as a splinter of wood from his brother's eye (Lk. 6:39-42). The implication is that we are all blind, and need leadership- but by the Lord, not by each other. And He is saying the same thing here in Mt. 15. By telling the disciples not to be led by the Pharisees in order to avoid falling into condemnation, He is effectively implying that the disciples were blind- for if the blind lead the blind, then they will fall into the ditch of condemnation.

*Fall into the ditch-* Of condemnation. And yet the Lord likens Himself to a man who lifts His sheep out of the ditch / pit (s.w. Mt. 12:11). We can be condemned in this life, as Peter was, and yet be saved out of it. Just as some of those blind Scribes and Pharisees were saved (see on :1).

15:15 *Declare unto us this parable-* The Lord replies by expanding upon what He has said in :11 about a man being defiled by what comes out of him, rather than by what he eats or touches. And yet the Lord's teaching in :11 was hardly parabolic. Perhaps it was too much for the disciples to believe that the Lord had declared void the entire conception of becoming unclean by what you eat; and they assumed He must be talking in parables. Peter in Acts 10 was still convinced that defiled food should not ever be eaten. But it could also be that the “parable” Peter wanted explained was what the Lord had just spoken about the blind leading the blind and falling into a ditch; Lk. 6:39 specifically calls this saying a “parable”. In this case, the Lord didn't oblige, at least not specifically. He went on to expand on His previous teaching that we are defiled by our own thoughts and words, rather than by what we eat. Perhaps the Lord meant that once that point was truly grasped, then it would be apparent that the Pharisees with their concept of ritual defilement by food were blind leaders- and should not be given the status of leaders.

15:16 *Are you also yet without understanding-* The emphasis may be on the “yet”- He says the same in the next verse, “Do you *still not* understand?”. The Lord asked the disciples; as if to say that He was surprised the disciples still hadn't come to the understanding which He hoped the Pharisees soon would. The crowds that followed the Lord didn't understand His parables; in fact, He spoke in parables so that they wouldn't understand, as He intended His teaching only to be grasped by the disciples (Mk. 7:17,18). Therefore, in that very context, it is significant to read of the Lord's frustration and disappointment when the disciples likewise didn't understand the parables. And the record goes on to show that in fact it was a regular occurrence, that they like

the crowds didn't understand the parables, and the Lord had to explain to them later. So the disciples, contrary to the Lord's high hopes of them, were no better than the crowds. They too 'didn't get it'; and Mark's [i.e. Peter's] record of the Gospel therefore brings out the point that they too, the ones now preaching to the crowds, only got the understanding they did of the Lord by an undeserved grace. This is the kind of humility we need in our teaching of others, especially when it involves correcting their lack of understanding on a point.

15:17 *Do you still not understand*- The world would not perceive / understand (Mk. 4:12); but they did, or so the Lord told them. And hence His distress that they did *not* perceive (Mk. 7:18; 8:17); and yet He said that blessed were their ears and minds, because they understood what had been hidden from so many. Surely He imputed more perception to them than they really had. The Lord was frustrated that by this point in His ministry, they still didn't understand that food couldn't really defile a person. And yet by the time of Acts 10, Peter was still persuaded of this. The Lord's hopefulness in them was such that He had great expectations of the speed of their spiritual growth, which resulted in disappointment for Him. This is all very much the enthusiasm of the lover for the beloved.

15:18 Mark adds: "This He said, thus making all foods clean" (Mk. 7:19). Paul really did meditate on every word of his Lord. Thus he says he was *persuaded* by the Lord Jesus that all foods were clean (Rom. 14:14)- this is how he took the Lord's teaching in Mk. 7:19. Those words *lived* to Paul, they were as the personal persuasion of his Lord, as if Christ was talking to him personally through the Gospel records. Peter was taught the same lesson (Acts 10:14,15), as was Paul: "I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself" (Rom. 14:14). Earlier, Paul had reasoned that to refuse certain foods was a sign of spiritual weakness (Rom. 14:2). Our attitude to food "does not commend us to God" (1 Cor. 8:8). Most incriminating of all is the warning that apostate Christians would teach men, "to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth" (1 Tim. 4:3).

15:19 *Out of the heart*- I have repeatedly used this verse to demonstrate that sin comes from within, and not from any cosmic being called 'Satan'. If indeed Satan is responsible for initiating human sin, then this would be the classic place for the Lord to teach it. Instead, He traces sinful words and actions to their true source, the heart. That, in the end, is the great 'satan', or adversary. "Out of the heart" parallels "out of the *mouth*" (:18)- the implication is surely that sin is committed through the route of heart - mouth - action. The Lord heavily condemns thought (heart) and words (mouth) because these are considered not sinful, or not very sinful, by human judgment. What one thinks internally is not a criminal act in any court of law, and what one says

is only rarely so. External actions are all important in human judgment (remember the context is of washing at meal times)- the Lord is saying that thought and word are the essence which God looks at rather than the external action. What comes out of the mouth comes out of the heart- that is the clear teaching. And yet we fool ourselves into thinking that we can think one thing, and say something else with our mouth. The Lord's parallel would suggest that sooner or later, that breaks down, and words reflect thought.

The Pharisees were concerned about things entering a person and defiling them. The Lord perceptively noted that this implied that a person was basically clean, and just needed to avoid contamination by externalities. His teaching attacked that base assumption- He taught that the inward parts of a man were the source of defilement. This difference in perspective is reflected in differing approaches to the Gospel today. Some focus upon the need for social reform and improvement of the circumstances surrounding people, believing that the right external environment will lead to reformation of life. I favour the approach taken by the Lord- that the essence is of internal reformation, so that in whatever external environment we are living, the internal spirit is pure. The Lord reasons from the very structure of the human alimentary canal, that unclean food is naturally passed out of our system. But there is no such natural, inbuilt ability to deal with matters of the heart. The implication could be that we therefore need external intervention in the arena of the human heart in order to be cleansed and have strength against defilement- and this is precisely the work of the Holy Spirit. It may be that the Lord is not so much teaching the need to somehow control the fountain of potential defilement thrown up by the heart- as implying that we need a new, cleansed heart. This is what was promised as part of the new covenant (Ez. 18:31; 36:26), and those in Christ have entered that new covenant and received the promised gift of the Spirit to transform the human heart, the "inner man" (Eph. 3:16).

*Proceed evil thoughts-* Mark's parallel record uses the same Greek word for "thoughts", but different ones for "proceed" and "evil", although the meaning is similar (Mk. 7:21). The Lord likely said the same thing twice, repeating phrases in sentences, and repeating whole sentences with slight differences. This was inevitable in speaking without speech reinforcement and with much background noise. Further, given the illiteracy of the audience and the newness of the ideas being presented, any teacher would have repeated the ideas several times over, using slightly different words. I have found myself doing this many times when speaking in a missionary context to illiterate people. Once I replayed a recording of my preaching, and noticed myself doing this. From then on, I never had much problem with the fact that the parallel records in the Gospels often use different words and phrases for the same ideas. And of course it's highly likely the Lord spoke in Aramaic, and Matthew and Mark are as it were translating that Aramaic into literary Greek. It's absolutely legitimate to translate an original spoken word in various

ways, indeed it would appear suspicious, forced and unnatural if the Gospel writers used precisely the same Greek to translate the Lord's original Aramaic.

*Thoughts-* The Greek means reasonings or disputings (s.w. Phil. 2:14). The Lord surely had in mind the cunning but carnal reasoning of the Pharisees which is mentioned at the start of this section (15:1-6). There are separate Greek words used here for "evil" and "thoughts"; but every single one of the 14 New Testament usages of the word *dialogismos* ("thoughts") is in a distinctly sinful context (Mk. 7:21; Lk. 2:35; 5:22; 6:8; 9:46,47; 24:38; Rom. 1:21; 14:1; 1 Cor. 3:20; Phil. 2:14; 1 Tim. 2:8; James 2:4). Yet the word itself has no moral overtone, it means simply 'to think / reason'. But the point is, that human thinking is so often sinful, and is the root cause of sinful behaviour.

*Thoughts, murders-* Notice the purposeful juxtaposition of bad *thinking* next to murder. This confirms the Lord's constant emphasis that the thought is equivalent to the action in His judgment. Murder, adultery and fornication have already been defined in the Sermon on the Mount as being essentially performed in the heart. The list of seven sins here is surely intended to encompass all sin in totality (seven)- whatever specific sin there may be, it originated in a human heart.

15:20 *With unwashed hands-* The emphasis may be upon the word "hands". The idea would then be that it is the heart which requires washing, rather than hands. In this case the Lord would be directing their minds to Jer. 4:14: "O Jerusalem [note the Pharisees in question were from Jerusalem, Mt. 15:1], wash your heart from wickedness, that you may be saved. How long shall your evil thoughts dwell within you?". But this of course begs the question- how can a man wash his own heart? Surely it needs the Father and Son to do this for us. The whole offer of Jesus is of a *holy* spirit or heart to be given to those who believe in Him. Perhaps John's equivalent of this section of teaching is in the repeated mention he makes of the Greek *nipto*, to wash- the same word used here in Mt. 15:2. John records how utterly essential it is for the disciple to allow the Lord Jesus to wash *them* (Jn. 13:5,6,8,10,12,14, and also in the record of the cleansing of the blind man in Jn. 9:7,11,15). The cleansing of the heart in and by Christ is implied by the teaching recorded here in Mt. 15, but only made explicit in John's Gospel.

*Defiles not-* The Greek *koinoo* strictly means 'to make common'. The later New Testament uses it in a quite different and spiritual way, speaking of how there is a "common faith" (Tit. 1:4; Jude 3) which means that the community of believers are bound together by what they have "in common" (Acts 2:44; 4:32). The Lord's new Israel had new principles. If the heart was cleansed, then the focus moved from fear of collective *defilement* to rejoicing in and experiencing what we

have *in common* in Christ.

15:21 *Departed*- A poor translation, because the sense is definitely to retire or withdraw oneself. It is used of fleeing persecution or avoiding difficult circumstances (Mt. 2:12-14,22) and often about Jesus (Mt. 4:12; 12:15 “when Jesus knew it, He *withdrew Himself*”; 14:13 “When Jesus heard of it, He departed thence”). We get the sense of the Lord desperately needing to be away from the crowds, out of the limelight, alone with the Father and the disciples. And yet so often when He makes such a withdrawal, the crowds follow Him, or human need is felt by Him to an almost overpowering extent, so that He again comes into the public view. This need to ‘withdraw’ may simply have been from basic human fatigue, both physical and psychological. Or there may also have been the desire to focus upon training the twelve rather than being side-tracked by trying to give surface level fragments of teaching to the crowds who were clearly more interested in miracles than in His teaching. Recall how at the end of chapter 12 and from chapter 13 onwards, the Lord turned away from the crowds towards the minority who had responded. But whatever the reason, His responsiveness to human need and potential was amazing.

*Tyre and Sidon*- The Lord had emphasized earlier that His mission was not to the Gentiles but to the lost sheep of Israel. Perhaps He decided to go to Gentile areas in order to avoid engagement with the crowds and focus upon the disciples. But again, His humanity is indicated by the fact that even that plan had an outcome that He didn’t foresee, in that there He met a Gentile woman who so deeply impressed Him by her perception that He healed her daughter.

15:22- see on 18:11.

*Woman of Canaan*- Canaanite women are presented in the Old Testament very much Israel's *femmes fatales*. Nobody else is described in the New Testament as a person "of Canaan" (see note on 10:4). Indeed it would appear a term not commonly in use at the time. It is therefore used in order to create associations in Biblically aware minds that here was a woman whom classically, a believer should beware of and give a wide berth to. This fits with the inversion of stereotypes and shattering of expectations which this incident presents. For the Lord had gone to this Gentile area expecting to get a break from engagement with people, because His mission was not to the Gentiles (see on :21 *Tyre and Sidon*).

*Came out of the same region*- The phrase is awkward and lengthy if the intention was simply to convey the idea that she was a local woman, a woman from that area. *Exerchomai apo* ("Came out of") implies a proceeding forth from, and is even translated "escape". *Apo* has the sense of cessation, completion, separation, departure. Further, the Greek word translated "region" or

"coasts" (AV) is not the same as that used to describe the region in :21. It strictly means a boundary or border. The impression we get is of a woman who lived in the area and yet had radically come out of it. Perhaps the awkward phrase is used to create this impression- that this Gentile woman had come out of her environment in the hope of connecting with the God of Israel. One could just about translate it with integrity: "A woman of Canaan who had emigrated out from that very area...".

*Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David-* These were the very words used by the blind men of Mt. 9:27. Perhaps she was inspired by them, or at least the rumours she had heard of them, their understanding and their healing. See on 9:27 concerning the connection between David and mercy.

*Lord- Kurios* is used about men in passages like Acts 25:26; Gal. 4:1; Eph. 6:5; Col. 3:22 and Rom. 14:4, so it is nothing but intellectual desperation which leads Trinitarians to claim that the use of *kurios* means that people thought Jesus was God. The confession of Jesus as Lord was however a fundamental part of conversion to Christianity in the early church. To openly accept Him as Lord of human life was and is the essence of the Christian call. To call upon Him as Lord is presented in the later New Testament as the essence of conversion to Him (Acts 2:21; 22:16; Rom. 10:9; 1 Cor. 12:3; 2 Cor. 4:5). The Gospels are full of examples of men and women who called upon Jesus as "Lord" during His ministry, and these individuals are being set up as the prototypes of those who would later convert to Him. The Gospel writers such as Matthew were preaching towards conversion, towards men and women calling upon Jesus as Lord in baptism and devotion to His Name. So the people they record doing this during His ministry are presented as role models to be followed by their audience. But those whom Matthew records as calling upon Jesus as *kurios* are those on the edge of Jewish society- a leper (8:2), a Gentile centurion (8:6,8), blind men (9:28)- and now this Canaanite woman. Matthew emphasizes three times that she repeatedly called Jesus "Lord" (15:22,25,27). In a society where religion was largely a hobby for men, it was quite radical thinking to present a female role model- let alone a Gentile one. See on :27 *masters' table*.

*Have mercy on me-* The parable of Mt. 18:33 uses this same phrase and presents it as the very essence of the Gospel. We all beg the Lord to "have mercy on me", and are to likewise reflect that mercy to others. Again, the woman is being presented as typical of all who would come to Christ. And the word is used in the later New Testament about how all in Christ have received such personal mercy (1 Tim. 1:13,16; 1 Pet. 2:10).

*On me-* But the request was in fact for her *daughter*. The parent is totally identified with the sick child, and in this we see the absolute psychological credibility of the record.

*Grievously vexed-* The very same words were repeated by the man of 17:15. He likewise asked for *mercy* to be shown to his *son*, as she had asked for her daughter, because he was likewise “badly vexed” (the same two Greek words are used). Just as she was inspired by the blind men of 9:27 (see above), so she in her turn inspired another man who heard of her story. This is how communities can get into an upward spiral of spiritual growth.

*Vexed by a demon-* The idea was that a demon had possessed the daughter and was controlling her, perhaps [as was thought] convulsing her. However, today we understand what causes convulsions- and it isn't demons. The language of being controlled by demons is clearly phenomenological, the language of the day for illnesses which were otherwise inexplicable. The healing of the daughter resulted in her being “whole” or “healed” (:28). The implied ‘driving out of demons’ was simply another way of saying she was cured.

15:23- see on 14:15.

*He answered her not a word-* Another case of the apparent silence of the Lord, seen also in His not coming immediately to Lazarus when He received news of his sickness, His appearance of walking past the drowning disciples on the lake, and making as if He would go further on the way to Emmaus. And, we might add, in His apparent delay in returning to establish the Kingdom, along with countless examples from human lives today. But this delay and silence is not at all from disinterest and hard heartedness, let alone distraction with other issues. We are accustomed to human lack of response to us being because of those things, and we can too easily assume that the Lord's apparent lack of response is for similar reasons. But the Bible, and the Gospels especially, surely make it clear that the lack of response is indeed only apparent- it is ultimately part of a larger spiritual plan for our eternal good at our latter end. In this case, the silence elicited in the woman a depth of understanding and intensity of hope and faith which perhaps she had not had previously. For she didn't shrug and walk away, muttering that all Jews were snobs and elitists. Instead, she considered that indeed, she was not worthy of any response, and yet seeing that this Son of David was the epitome of God's grace, she renewed her faith and appeal. Instead of shrugging and walking off, “she worshipped Him” (:25), in the spirit of Job, who said he would trust God even if He slew him (Job 13:15). And was rewarded.



*Came [pros-erchomai] and besought Him-* The woman “came” (*erchomai*) and worshipped Him (:25). The coming of the disciples to Jesus and begging Him (to send the woman away) *and being rejected* is clearly matched in the record by the woman coming to Jesus (a related word is used), begging Him- *and having her request accepted*. Again, the Gospel writers are presenting themselves negatively, in humility recognizing that their way of rejecting the Gentiles and turning people away was *wrong*. This of course had great significance in the communities of believers which were formed as a result of Matthew’s Gospel being believed. For the tendency to turn away Gentile believers was very strong.

*Send her away-* The very word the disciples had recently used in requesting the Lord to ‘send away’ the hungry crowds (14:15). He intended them to learn from their mistake, and so providentially they were presented with another case of someone whom they were tempted to “send away”. And they failed the test. And so in the feeding of the 4000 which now follows in the record, they are again presented with a temptation to “send away” the crowds (15:32)- and again, they fail. Surely Matthew is bringing out the point that they had failed miserably to grasp this point- that the Lord’s followers are tempted to send away those whom He will not send away. This point was of extreme practical relevance amongst groups of Jewish converts who were tempted to ‘send away’ Gentile converts from table fellowship. It’s just possible that the disciples were using the term “send away” in the sense that it is sometimes used elsewhere- to loose, to send away with the request granted (18:27; Lk. 13:12; 14:4). But it seems to me from the surrounding context of the sending away of the crowds that we are intended to read this as the disciples yet again wanting someone to be refused by Jesus, when He wanted to accept them.

*She cries after us-* The Greek *opisthen*, “after”, really means ‘behind’; and the word used for ‘crying’ is literally ‘to growl or croak’. This is the language of an unwanted dog running behind men and irritating them with the noise of its barking. This paves the way for the language of the woman as a pestering dog (see on :25 *worshipped Him*). But there is also a sadly typical attitude displayed here- ‘This person is irritating *us*, therefore, we deny them a relationship with the Lord personally’. So many of those called to Christ are indeed irritating types- it is the ‘normal’, calm, self-satisfied types who fail to perceive their need for Him.

15:24 *Not sent-* The Lord Jesus, who spoke and acted the words of God, was clearly willing to change His position depending on human response. He initially declined to heal the daughter of the Canaanite woman because, as He clearly stated, He had been sent *only* unto “the lost sheep of the house of Israel”; and it was not appropriate, He said, to take the food from those children and feed it to Gentile dogs (Mt. 14:24,26). He may well have had in mind His own principle of not throwing pearls before swine [Gk. ‘wild dogs’] (Mt. 7:6). But... He changed. He healed the

woman's daughter. He was so deeply impressed with her perception and faith that He changed the operation of His principles.

*Lost sheep of the house of Israel-* The ambiguous genitive here could mean that the lost sheep *were* the house of Israel; or that the lost sheep had been lost *by* the house of Israel. The *apollumi* sheep means more than 'lost' as in confused and in the wrong place; the word has the distinct sense of 'destroyed' or 'dead'. The Lord's mission was almost to resurrect the slain sheep of Israel.

*15:25 Worshipped Him-* The Greek *proskuneo* is defined by Strong as meaning "to lick like a dog licking his master's hand, to crouch". This paved the way for the Lord's response, that it was not appropriate to cast the children's food to the dogs. And she responds that she is as a dog under the children's table (:27). Her posture, therefore, was perhaps consciously intended to mimic a crouching dog. Her worship was not in song, but simply in recognizing that He alone can "help".

*Help me-* The Canaanite woman simply prayed: "Lord, help me". The Lord's response was to heal her daughter, with the comment: "Be it unto you even as you wish" (Mt. 15:25,28). She didn't specifically ask for anything, she just stated her problem, but the Lord understood her few words as expressing her hidden will, and treated this as her specific prayer request.

*15:26 To take the children's bread-* The idea could be of taking the food the children were eating, and giving it to the dogs. Or, the Greek could equally mean 'the food for the children'. In this case, the Lord would be implying that He had received food to give to the children, and it was inappropriate for Him to instead throw it to the dogs rather than giving it to the children. The *artos*, "bread", is specifically bread rather than food in general. The bread obtained by the Lord is easily understandable as salvation; Judaism expected Messiah to bring manna for Israel, and the Lord makes it clear in John 6 that the manna He would give was Himself and salvation in Him. The bread of Israel was to be the salvation of the world, but it was only given to the world because of Israel's rejection of it. In this we see the economy of God, how even through human rejection of the Gospel, the final purpose of God towards salvation is still furthered.

*Cast it to dogs-* The Lord so respected Israel that He felt giving the Gospel to the Gentiles instead of them was like casting good food to dogs (Mk. 7:27). Israel (the children) didn't want to

eat, but the Lord painted them as if they did. The "crumb" that was cast to the dogs was a great miracle; but Christ saw that as only a crumb of the huge meal that was prepared for Israel. It seems the idea here is meant to be connected with His invitation to us to sit at table with Him and share the meal, both now (Lk. 14:8) and in the Kingdom (Lk. 12:37). Just one crumb of the Lord's meal is a mighty miracle, and yet we are asked to sit down and eat the whole meal with Him: as symbolised in our eating of "the Lord's supper". This is an eloquent picture of the greatness of our position as members of His table now, as well as in the future.

15:27 Sometimes what is recorded as being actually said may be only a summary of the real words (consider what the Canaanite woman actually said: Mt. 15:27 cp. Mk. 7:28).

*Truly-* A word signifying her assent to what the Lord had just said. She agreed with the position that the bread of salvation was primarily for Israel and that Gentiles were but dogs.

*The crumbs which fall-* She perceived the healing of her daughter as a mere "crumb" compared to the bread of the Kingdom, full salvation, which had been obtained for Israel by Jesus. She perceived too that that great salvation had been rejected by them, or at best, treated carelessly and without due respect, in that crumbs had fallen to her. The Lord at the end of Matthew 12 and throughout His subsequent parables of chapter 13 had explained how Israel had rejected the Gospel, and that He was therefore turning to the disciples for response. The parables of Matthew 13 were His attempt to help the disciples come to terms with the fact that in reality, Israel had rejected John's message. But this woman perceived it well, and thereby perceived that the bread of salvation must therefore be available to the Gentiles if Israel didn't want it. In this she was far ahead of the disciples themselves. It could be argued that she was not *seeking* 'crumbs', in the sense of equating the hoped for healing with the crumbs. It could be that she is saying that she is already eating of those crumbs, in that she felt she was feeding on whatever small parts of the bread of salvation were possible for her as a Gentile. She says that the dogs *are eating* the crumbs- rather than begging for them. The Lord was so deeply impressed by the woman's use of metaphor that He Himself builds it into a later parable- Lazarus the beggar desired to eat the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table (Lk. 16:21). The rich man clearly represents Judaism, which was to be condemned and rejected, whilst the beggar was saved. In this we see the Lord's humility as well as His sensitivity; He was deeply impressed by the woman, and absorbed her use of metaphor into His own mental material.

*Their masters' table-* We can too easily assume that she is considering the Jewish children sitting at the table as the masters of the Gentiles. But she uses *kurios* for 'master', and I noted on :22 that she is recorded three times here as addressing Jesus as *kurios*, "Lord". There is no Biblical

nor spiritual warrant for thinking of Jews as ‘masters’ or ‘lords’ of the Gentiles. Her triple use of *kurios* regarding the Lord Jesus surely suggests that she is thinking of *His* table, with the bread of Israel’s salvation placed upon it *by Him*, as the lord of the house and the feast- with the Jewish children sitting disinterested and disrespectfully at the table, throwing the food to the eager dogs beneath the table. It was exactly the attitude of the Lord Jesus to table fellowship, His eating with Gentiles and sinners, which was what led the children of Israel to reject Him. And this incident is sandwiched between the records of the feeding miracles, in which the Lord dealt His bread to all and sundry, including Gentiles. This amazing woman accepted Jesus as her Lord even though she felt that she was not fit to sit at His table; she got to be at His table by being as a dog. This amazing devotion to her Lord, fully accepting the barriers there were between them brought about by ethnic birth circumstances beyond her control- resulted in the Lord tearing down those barriers. Significantly, Paul uses the very same Greek words in 1 Cor. 10:21 about eating at the Lord’s table- and he has the breaking of bread service in mind. The sharing of table fellowship with Gentiles was a highly divisive issue in the communities of Jewish Christians who first responded to Matthew’s Gospel. He is surely making the point that in a strange way, Gentiles partook of the Lord’s table in that even the dogs under the table still eat what is on the table. And this happened even during the Lord’s ministry. They were “under the table” (Mk. 7:28)- but still *at* the table.

15:28 *Jesus answered*- This has been said in :23,25 and :26. His responsiveness to human words, actions and perceptions was clearly very impressive to Matthew. And this Lord is our Lord.

*Great is your faith*- The Lord commended the Canaanite woman for her understanding of the Hope of Israel and the Gentile's place in it: "Great is thy faith" (Mt. 15:28); great was her understanding, and therefore her faith. Mark records that the Lord also said: “For this saying go your way; the demon is gone out of thy daughter" (Mk. 7:29). This shows the value which the Lord placed on correct understanding. The Gentile woman had seen the feeding of the 5,000 and *understood* the implications of the lesson which the Lord was teaching. We get the feeling that the Lord was *overjoyed* at her perception and therefore made an exception to His rule of not being sent at that time to the Gentiles, but to the house of Israel.

*Unto you even as you will*- It was done unto her daughter, for her sake- an example of a third party being healed or blessed by the Lord in response to the faith of another person (see Mk. 2:5 for another example- the paralyzed man was cured for the sake of the faith of his friends). This sets a challenging precedent for us in our prayers for others. John seems to consciously allude to the Lord's words here when recording how the Lord stated a general principle, that if His words abide in us "You shall ask what you will, and it shall be done unto you" (Jn. 15:7; see too Mt. 18:19). The Lord was setting up that woman as the role model of all who would believe in Him.

His words abode in her- see comment on *from that very hour*. Mark adds: "The demon is gone out of your daughter". The Lord Jesus used well known medical techniques in His ministry (Mk. 7:33; Jn. 9:6); not because He needed to use them, but in order to somehow get His hearers at ease. And so, it seems to me, He used the language of demons. He dealt with people in terms which they would be able to accept.

*From that very hour*- We get the impression that the woman didn't have her daughter with her. She had to go home believing in the Lord's words, and according to that faith it was given to her.

15:29 *Departed from thence*- The Greek could imply a relocation, as if He had been based in that Gentile area and now returned to spend time in Galilee.

*Into a mountain and sat down there*- Reminiscent of the giving of the sermon on the Mount, the earlier feeding of the 5000 (Jn. 6:3 "Jesus went up into a mountain, and there He sat"), and also His sitting upon the Mount of Olives teaching (Mt. 24:3). Sitting on a mountain was metaphorical for reigning (Rev. 17:9). Although His political Kingdom had not yet come, in His teaching He was as it were ruling over His people- which is exactly the sense in which He is now ruling over us His king-dom, those under the domain of His teaching and rulership as Lord and King.

15:30 *Multitudes*- The use of the Greek word *ochlos* is perhaps intended to be associated with the very similar word *oichos*, family. The Lord was seeking to turn those multitudes of variously motivated people into a family- His ecclesia.

*The lame, the maimed, the blind, the dumb*- This is an intentional echo of the Kingdom prophecy of Is. 35:5,6, where we read of the healing of "the blind... the deaf... the lame... the dumb". The Lord purposefully healed multitudes of lame and blind, and allowed them to come to Him in the temple (Mt. 21:14). His acted out message was clearly that those who were despised as unfit for God's service were now being welcomed by Him into that service. The lame and blind were despised because they couldn't work. They had to rely on the grace of others. Here again is a crucial teaching: those called are those who can't do the works, but depend upon grace.

*Cast them down*- Another touch of the eye witness account. For they had just carried handicapped people up a mountainside.

*At Jesus' feet-* This is not merely an incidental description. To be *para pous* ("at the feet of") a person was significant- it was a declaration of their seniority as a leader and teacher (Lk. 7:38; 8:35,41; 10:39; 17:16; Acts 4:35,37; 5:2; 7:58; 22:3). The term would surely not have been used here unless it has that sense. The point is perhaps that people were brought to Jesus, with all the healing and teaching that implies, because of the effort of third parties for them.

15:31 *The multitude wondered-* They had struggled to carry those sick and handicapped folk up a mountainside, casting them down in exhaustion at the Lord's feet (see on :30). Surely they did so because they believed. Precisely what they hoped and prayed for was given- hence the record labours the point that the dumb *spoke*, the blind *saw*, the lame *walked*, the maimed were *made whole*. And yet when they saw the fulfilment of what they had hoped and prayed for, they "wondered". Rather like the believers praying for Peter's release and then being amazed when he appeared at the door. We can genuinely believe and even act according to that faith, and yet not have the faith which calmly envisages the answer as having effectively been already given.

*Glorified the God of Israel-* The implication is therefore that these were Gentiles. The Lord therefore broke His bread with non-Jews; see digression on 14:20.

15:32-39 The account of the feeding of the 4000 is very similar to that of the feeding of the 5000. Therefore see notes on 14:14-21.

15:32 *Called His disciples unto Him-* We often meet this note in the Gospels. The implication is surely that if discipleship involves being with and following Jesus, then the disciples are therefore recording their own weakness in noting that they were often *not* with Jesus and had to be called unto Him. And it is observable that in many of the cases of being called to Him, they were somehow astray in action or attitude- separated from Him not just physically. The Greek specifically means 'to call towards', and so the pattern is established of the Lord's basic call being repeated throughout the course of our discipleship.

*I have compassion-* Reflect how the Lord called His men unto Him, and informed them that He had compassion on the hungry multitude. He said no more than that. But the disciples immediately started bleating on about how there was no way they had the money nor ability to arrange so much bread in a deserted place (Mk. 8:2). They understood that their Lord had transferred His compassion onto them; all that was true of Him became true for them. *He* wanted to feed the multitude; *He* was feeling compassionate to the crowd; so, axiomatically, so must they. And so must we today, as we face the crowds too. Whatever are the feelings, the mind, of

Jesus towards this world; so must our mind be. And He came, without controversy, above all to give His all, to die, for this world's redemption.

*Continue with Me-* The same word is used about believers 'cleaving unto' Jesus (Acts 11:23). The Lord uses the same word about His wish for the disciples to continue with Him in the heat of temptation in Gethsemane (Mt. 26:38), and it is the same word used so often in John for 'abiding' with Christ. The Lord was more sceptical about the (Jewish) crowd in the earlier feeding miracle (of the 5000), later commenting that their interest was largely in the food. This more Gentile crowd (see on :31) He felt were abiding with Him in a more spiritual sense.

*Three days-* The provision of manna, the bread of salvation, after three days... this is surely prophetic of the resurrection. The Lord could have fed them at the end of the first day- three days is a long time not to eat, and they were at the point of losing consciousness due to lack of food ("they will faint in the way"). The Lord surely didn't provide food earlier in order to prove the level of interest. Surely many did walk away in search of food. But 4000 (at least) remained. It certainly was a great expression of sincere interest in the Lord's message, and compares favourably to that of the crowd of 5000, who were fed after only a few hours. The disciples' desire to dismiss this extraordinary group therefore appears even worse.

*Nothing to eat-* The same Greek phrase on the Lord's lips in Mt. 25:32, where He says that condemnation awaits the man who gives 'nothing to eat' to those who are hungry. The disciples like many of us assume automatically that it can't be their problem to provide others' needs if they don't have what is required materially. But the connection between this verse and Mt. 25:32 puts that assumption under a spotlight. Even if we do not have what is needed, our confrontation with that need requires to exercise faith that that need will be resolved. And the resolution of it may well depend upon our *faith*. This doesn't mean that we ask that material resources are dropped from Heaven into *our* hands, but rather than they will be provided in order to meet the need.

*Faint in the way-* Mark adds "Because some of them had come from afar" (Mk. 8:3). This again is a hint at Gentile presence in the crowd- see on :31.

15:33 *Whence should we have so much bread?-* "From whence shall we get bread here in the wilderness?" is how Peter / Mark recorded their question to the Lord (Mk. 8:4). But the wording is so very similar to the LXX of Ex. 16:3, where a faithless Israel asked the same of Moses; and Moses responded, as did the Lord, in providing bread from Heaven. Did the disciples actually say those words? Would they really have said the very words which Israel did in one of their lowest ebbs of faith and understanding? My suggestion is that they did indeed say something similar in essence, but Mark / Peter purposefully recorded it in terms which highlight the similarity with unbelieving Israel- to as it were emphasize how weak the disciples were at that point. Peter was the public leader of the early ecclesia, and yet the Gospels all emphasise his weaknesses. The Gospels all stress the disciples' lack of spirituality, their primitive earthiness in

comparison to the matchless moral glory of God's Son, their slowness to understand the cross. But there are also more studied references to their failures. Mark's account of their words at the feeding of the crowd is shot through with reference to the attitude of faithless Israel in the wilderness: "Where shall we ['And this includes me, Mark...this is what we said to Him...'] get bread to satisfy this people in the wilderness?". We must note that the very same word "Whence...?" was used by the disciples before the feeding of the 5000 earlier (Jn. 6:5). The answer to the question then had been 'From Heaven'. But the repeated situation didn't seem to register with the disciples. Just as circumstances repeat in our lives too, but we don't perceive it.

*Whence should we-* Mark has 'Whence can a man...' (Mk. 8:4). Their reasoning was that no *man* could meet this huge need, and so therefore, they naturally couldn't meet it- for they were only men. Man can't, therefore we can't. And so our reasoning goes so often. Something is humanly impossible, therefore it is impossible to me, because I am human. The life and person of the Lord Jesus challenged this thinking very deeply. For He was fully human, of our representative, and yet did super-human things. With God's manifestation and involvement in human life, then human beings can achieve that which is humanly impossible. And this was exemplified supremely in the Lord Jesus, once we appreciate He was of our nature and not some Divine puppet playing a mere role- as required by Trinitarian theology.

*To fill-* They were indeed "filled" (:37). The Lord has just said to the Gentile woman that the Jews must first be "filled" (s.w. Mk. 7:27) before the Gentile dogs are fed. In Matthew 15, the feeding of the 4000 comes straight after the Lord's encounter with that woman. It seems the point is that the Lord judged that the time had now come to fill the Gentiles. For this was largely a Gentile crowd (see on :31).

15:34 *Seven loaves-* The feeding of the 4000 is clearly recorded in the same style and with much the same language as the feeding of the 5000. We are surely intended to place the events together. Five loaves were used in the healing of the 5000, and seven here- making a total of 12 loaves. Jewish minds would surely have thought of the 12 loaves on the table of showbread (Lev. 24:5). Moses personally was to "set them" on the table in rows (Lev. 24:1,6), which connects with how the loaves were "set" before the people (Mk. 8:6), who at the feeding of the 5000 were set down in rows (Mk. 6:40 Gk.). The hint was clearly that the most sacred bread of Judaism, the 12 loaves of the showbread, were being set before Gentiles, women, children and secular Jews- by non-priests, the disciples. And all were welcome to partake, without testing their qualification. The rending of the veil into the Most Holy at the Lord's death was only really making public that which the Lord had already achieved in His life.

*How many loaves do you have?-* The Lord's teaching style continually revolved around posing explicit and implicit questions to His hearers. John's Gospel contains a total of 161 questions;



and one brief passage in Mark (Mk. 8:14-21- the parallel to this section in Matthew) records how the Lord asked seven questions in quick succession. In this sense, the Lord Jesus intended to be intrusive into human life; He penetrates the depths of our being. His call to pick up a cross and follow Him was radical- so radical, that His hearers both then and now tended to [even unconsciously] negate the totally radical import of His demands.

*Seven and a few little fishes-* Mark's record speaks as if the fish were something of an afterthought (Mk. 8:7); the use of the diminutive word for *little* fish suggests they thought them hardly worth mentioning. The stress (in Mark) is that *they* had a few small fish. The situation is of course purposefully similar to that of the feeding of the 5000. They were really intended to learn from it. But they didn't. There were some differences, and one of them was that this time, their own small amount of food was used rather than that of the boy. The Lord was seeking to show that what little they personally had, fish they had personally caught but felt inadequate for the task, could and would be used by Him in order to meet the hunger of the Gentile world.

15:35 *Sit down-* The Greek really means to recline at table. This is another indication that He was presenting as it were the Messianic banquet, and fellowshiping at table in a spiritual sense with whoever wished to be present. See the digression at 14:20.

15:36 *Took the seven loaves-* The same Greek words for 'took' and 'loaves' have just been used in 15:26, where the Lord told the Gentile woman that it was not appropriate to 'take' the 'bread' (s.w. "loaves") intended for Israel and give them to the Gentiles. But now, just ten verses later in the narrative, He does just that (bearing in mind the evidence that this is a partly Gentile crowd). The impression is surely that the woman's spiritual perception deeply impressed the Lord, to the point that He decided the time had come to begin giving Israel's bread to the Gentiles. This openness in both the Father and Son is a function of their supreme sensitivity to men. See on 16:5.

*The disciples to the multitude-* The Lord gave the broken bread to the disciples, eloquently speaking of the gift of His life. They in their turn "did set before the people" (Mk. 8:6). We must pass on that which was given to us by the Lord. Paul is our example in this (1 Cor. 11:23). We must, of course, have a valid relationship with the Lord in the first place, feeling we have definitely received something from Him, if we are to pass it on. The Greek term for "set before" recurs in 1 Tim. 1:18 and 2 Tim. 2:2 concerning how we simply *must* pass on the word which has been given to us. Quite simply, if we've really heard it, really received it, we must pass it on.

Paul saw the breaking of bread prefigured in Christ's feeding of the 4000 (Mt. 15:36 = 1 Cor. 11:24).

15:37 *Filled*- See on :33 *to fill*.

*They took up...*- According to Mk. 8:19-21, one of the reasons behind the Lord telling them to do this was simply to make them more deeply aware of the huge amount of bread which the Lord had created- to the point that they should realize that things like bread, and indeed all physical externalities, were just ultimately insignificant to the Lord. "And they reasoned one with another, saying: It is because we have no bread... When I broke the five loaves among the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you gather? They said to him: Twelve. And when the seven among the four thousand, how many basketfuls of broken pieces did you gather? And they said to him: Seven. And he said to them: How is it that you do not yet understand?". Clearly the Lord was carefully working out a plan of spiritual education for them- and they failed to respond well to it. He does the same in our lives, although we may be barely perceptive that the process is even running.

*The broken*- Literally, 'the breakages'. The word is only ever used in the Gospels about the broken pieces of bread from the feeding miracles. The related verb *klao*, to break, is used only of the 'breaking of bread' in the feeding miracles, and every other occurrence in the New Testament concerns the breaking of bread service in memory of Jesus (Mt. 26:26; Mk. 14:22; Lk. 22:19; 24:30; Acts 2:46; 20:7,11; 27:35; 1 Cor. 10:16; 11:24). Clearly the breaking of bread in the miracles is intended to be seen as programmatic for the later 'breaking of bread' services. In this connection it becomes highly significant that there were Gentiles participating, along with women and children, and there was no 'test of fellowship' operated. The simple fact people wanted to be present around Jesus was enough.

*That was left*- Gk. 'super-abounded'. This is noted in all five records of the feeding miracles. The poor notice wastage of food, and this was the wastage of food *extraordinaire*. But such super generosity is the hallmark of God's activity, as it should be a feature of our spirit too. The prodigal recalled how there was always 'an abundance of loaves' with the Father (Gk. "bread to the full", AV; Lk. 15:16).

*Seven baskets*- The Greek of this verse is identical to the conclusion concerning the feeding of the 5000 in 14:20. The similarity between the two feeding miracles is very pointed and extensive. The point may simply be that the Lord was consciously repeating a situation so that the disciples would have the chance to put into practice what they should have learnt from the earlier situation. This principle would explain the strong sense of *déjà vu* which surely all of us have observed in the course of our lives.

*Baskets full*- The crowd were filled, totally satiated; and the leftover food *filled* the baskets. The impression is given of superabundance of provision.

15:38 *They that did eat*- Eating is a consciously presented theme in this chapter. The disciples are condemned for eating in an unclean manner (15:2), the Gentile woman eats the crumbs rejected by the Jews (15:27), and now a huge crowd of Gentiles (see on :31) including women and children (the socially and religiously marginalized) also “eat”. The incident is surely placed next to that of the Gentile woman eating the ‘crumbs’ in :27 in order to show the eagerness of the Gentiles for the bread of Israel. The amazing example of going three days without food in order to receive spiritual food (:31) demonstrated beyond doubt the legitimacy of Gentile interest in the Messianic bread / manna of the Kingdom.

The way the number of eaters is presented at the end of the meal might suggest that this is the equivalent of a bill being presented at the end of a meal. If this is the case, then the hint would be towards Is. 55:1,2, where again we have the theme of free provision of food, and being utterly filled / satisfied: "Come, he who has no money, buy, and eat! Yes, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which doesn't satisfy? Listen diligently to Me, and eat you that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness".

*Beside*- Gk. 'at a space from'. This was literally true, in that women and children would have sat separately from the men. At least 10,000 people would've been in total.

15:39 *The region of Magdala*- The Greek *horion* definitely means a border, rather like a state line in North America. Matthew especially uses the term, 7 times in all; it only occurs twice in the other Gospels, and only one other time in the New Testament. At the borders of the regions there were often customs posts through which travellers must pass. Matthew had once 'sat at the customs table', and likely knew these crossing points, or at least, took note of them as they passed through them. This is yet another incidental evidence of the veracity of the records- the

Gospel of Matthew really was written as it claims, by a tax collector called Matthew- albeit under Divine inspiration.