**HONOR GOD WITH YOUR HEART**

April 28, 2013

Mark 7:1-23 / Key verses: 7:6b, “These people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.’”

In today’s passage, Jesus laments and rebukes the hypocrisy of the Pharisees because they honoured God with their lips but their hearts are far from him. God made man in his own image. It meant that man was created to honor and glorify God. Honoring God is the ultimate goal and purpose of our life. When we do so, we find true happiness in our life and we become glorious just like our God is glorious. In today’s passage, Jesus teaches us that in order to honor God, most of all, we must clean our hearts. Let’s learn how we can honor God with our hearts through today’s passage. Ho

**I. Jesus exposes the Pharisees’ hypocrisy (1-13)**

Let’s look at verses 1-5. After Jesus became highly recognized by large crowd of people through his powerful teaching and healing ministry, another day the Pharisees and some of the teachers of the law came from Jerusalem and gathered around Jesus. Actually they came to find out some grounds to accuse Jesus as they usually had done before. Then they saw some of his disciples eating food with hands that were ‘unclean,’ that is, unwashed. Here “unclean hands” does not mean sanitation issue. It meant ceremonial uncleanness. The Pharisees and all the Jews did not eat unless they gave their hands a ceremonial washing, holding to the tradition of the elders. When they came from the marketplace, they did not eat unless they washed believing that this washing ceremony purified them from defiling elements of the market place; such as touching unclean foods supplied by Gentiles, or unclean person accidently. They observed many other traditions, such as the washing of cups, pitchers and kettles. So the Pharisees and teachers of the law asked Jesus, “*Why don’t your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders instead of eating their food with ‘unclean’ hands*?” How did Jesus respond?

Let’s look at verses 6-8. Jesus replied, “Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written: ‘These people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teaching are but rules taught by men.’ You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men.” Jesus said plainly in front of their faces that the Pharisees were hypocrites. The main problem of a hypocrite is that his heart is far from God. The first and greatest commandment in the Law of Moses was to love God with all their hearts. The Pharisees knew this very well and they taught this to the people. But they themselves did not practice it. Instead, they gave their hearts to worldly things seeking their own honor and recognition from people. They loved money more than God. They were adulterous. Still before people they said all the right things. So, as the prophet Isaiah prophesized, their worship was in vain.

Worship is our heart commitment. God wants worship from our hearts. God is not fascinated by our religious attendance, activities, or ceremonies. To worship God, we must accept the word of God with reverence with repentant heart. But the Pharisees had no reverence of the word of God with repentant heart. Instead they clung to human traditions. In verse 8, Jesus said. “You have let go the command of God and are holding on to the traditions of men.” Here the commands of God are absolute truths of God that are eternally unchanging such as the Ten Commandments. The traditions of men are originated from human. So they are changeable. They may be beneficial for a specific situation or culture but they lack the universality of God’s absolute truth. So we must discern between the commands of God and the tradition of men.

At first, the Pharisees studied the Bible very well and honoured the word of God very absolutely. They made their own tradition with good motivation to keep the word of God better. However as time passed by, they failed to be faithful to the word of God. They became habitual and ritualistic without their heart commitment. They did not go back to the bible newly to evaluate their traditions in light of God’s absolute word. Here, we learn we must not elevate human tradition too highly more than God’s command. Human tradition needs to be evaluated in light of God’s command and we must focus our life on God’s command not human tradition.

Since Christianity became most influential worldwide in history, there have been many different styles or traditions in the church. But we must honor the word of God more than our human traditions. In our UBF ministry, the representative tradition is the refection writing and sharing meeting. This tradition was developed to encourage students to apply the word of God to ourselves more personally, deeply, and practically. And this method actually was proven method for its effectiveness in many ways. But we must admit that this is not the direct command of God. The command of God is “Obey the word of God”. It is absolute truth. “Obeying the word of God” is the matter of life and death. So our tradition of reflection writing and sharing has to be to obey his word better more effectively. As long as we focus on this purpose, this tradition is very good and beneficial. But if we lose our focus on obeying the word of God, this meeting can be degenerated as mere human meeting without spiritual benefits. We can also become hypocritical in our church meeting honouring God with only our lips without heart commitment to God.

In order to help the Pharisees to realize how hypocritical they were, Jesus gave them an example. Let’s look at verses 9-13. Let’s read these verses. “And he said to them: ‘You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions! For Moses said, ‘Honor your father and your mother, and ‘Anyone who cursed his father or mother must be put to death. But you say that if a man says to his father or mother: ‘Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is Corban’ (that is, a gift devoted to God) then you no longer let him do anything for his father or mother. Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that.”

Jesus quoted the fifth of the Ten commandment; “Honor your father and your mother. Anyone who curses his father and mother must be put to death.” God gave this commandment as his absolute commandment, which meant that keeping this commandment is the matter of life and death. However, before this absolute command of God, how did the Pharisees nullify the word of God? They made their own tradition so called Corban. Corban meant a gift devoted to God. When we simply hear the word Corban, it may sound like they were very devoted people to God giving all their property to God. But in reality, it was the opposite. When their parents asked them for some financial help, they said to them, ‘Oh mom and dad, all my properties are Corban. I devoted them to God. I made vow to God, effective at the time of my death. So I can’t help you. it would be sin for me to help you. sorry.” But because they made such pledge effective at the time of their death, during their lifetimes they could enjoy their all properties. In this way they did not give anything that belonged to them. This is just an example of many examples. Jesus said that the Pharisees did many things like that. After Jesus’ this saying, there is no record about how the Pharisees reacted to Jesus. We can imagine that the Pharisees could not say anything to Jesus because his word was absolute truth. Jesus’ word is like a sharp sword penetrating our deep soul and heart exposing all our hypocrisy and hidden sins.

**II. We must clean our heart (14-23)**

After completely disarming the hypocritical religious leaders, Jesus turned his teaching to the crowd again. Let’s look at verses 14-15. “Again Jesus called the crowd to him and said, ‘Listen to me, everyone, and understand this. Nothing outside a man can make him ‘unclean’ by going into him. Rather, it is what comes out of a man that makes him ‘unclean.’” Until now Jesus had rebuked and revealed the Pharisees’ hypocrisy hidden in their hearts. By doing so Jesus expected the crowd including his disciples to understand what now he was saying about “what made man “unclean.” What makes man “unclean” was not food but the evilness in our hearts. After all, our heart was the matter for our cleanness before God. But the disciples didn’t understand what Jesus was explaining. Look at verses 17-19. After he had left the crowd and entered the house, his disciples asked him about this parable. Jesus’ first word toward them was “Are you so dull?” This encourages us very much. The disciples were not quick learner. They were slow learner. We too are the same as them in many ways. But still we have hope because of Jesus’ patience and unfailing love. Jesus continued. “Don’t you see that nothing that enters a man from the outside can make him ‘unclean’? For it doesn’t go into his heart but into his stomach, and then out of his body.’”

The Pharisees made accusation about the disciple’s eating problem; about cleanness and uncleanness. But Jesus clearly declared that food is not what makes us unclean. To be clean before God, what we must concern is our heart. In verses 20-23, Jesus went on. Let’s read these verses. “What comes out of a man is what makes him ‘unclean.’ For from within, out of men’s heart, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and make a man ‘unclean.’”

Today people are very much concerned about outward appearance, our external activities, showing up ourselves with our external achievements in the world. But the bible teaches that people see outward appearance but God sees man’s heart. In another gospel book, Jesus said, “man’s life is not in material possession.” Man’s life is determined by how his heart is. That is why Proverb 4:23 says, “Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.”

Since the first man Adam fell, most corrupt one in the world is man’s heart. Nature is beautiful. Animals are innocent. Only human beings became corrupt and have rebellious in their hearts against their Creator God. Man has terribly sin-sick and twisted mind toward God. So Jeremiah 17:9 says, “The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?” Among all the truth seekers, Apostle Paul was one of the greatest truth seekers trying to honor God in his own way. But he too failed again and again and cried out in Romans 7. “What wretched man I am! I don’t do what I want to do but I do what I don’t want to do; I see myself become a prisoner of sin.” This is not only Paul’s agony but all fallen sinners’ agony.

But we have good news of great joy. It is Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ came down from Heaven to earth in order to rescue us from our sins. The forerunner of the Christ; John the Baptist cried out when he saw Jesus coming toward him. “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” Jesus took away all our sins; the past, present, and even future sins in his body on the cross. Jesus died for us to forgive and cleanse our sins. In Jesus, our sins are forgiven and we can start a fresh, new, and clean life. This is not the end. Jesus also promised the Holy Spirit for those who believe in him. For those who believe in him, the Holy Spirit comes into our hearts and dwells in our hearts. Through the help of the Holy Spirit, we can continue to overcome our sinful nature and keep our heart clean and pure until the day of our complete salvation.

Today we learned that we must honor God with our heart. To honor God, we must clean our hearts. To clean our hearts, we must repent and accept Jesus Christ and constantly live Spirit-led life focusing on the word of God not human tradition. We should be very careful not to live as outwardly good-looking Christians like Pharisees who honoured with their lips but their hearts were far from God. When we always live Christ-centered; the word-centered life, we can live God-honoring life from our clean and pure hearts. May God bless each of you to live such glorious and joyful life in our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.