

On the Matter of Defilement

The word “defile” as we use it in English is understood by breaking it down thusly: *de*, “away from” and *file*, “column or file.” Combining these two thoughts, it means, “getting out of line” or “breaking ranks.” Through the years our dictionary gives these more severe defining synonyms for defile: pollute, desecrate and profane.

The Greek word *koinoo* is used fifteen times in the New Testament and is usually translated “defile” in the Bible, but it is also translated, “common, pollute and unclean.” “Unclean” harkens back to the days when a person was defiled by leprosy. Leviticus 13:45, 46: “And the leper in whom the plague is, his clothes shall be rent, and his head bare, and he shall put a covering upon his upper lip, and shall cry, Unclean, unclean. All the days wherein the plague shall be in him he shall be defiled; he is unclean: he shall dwell alone; without the camp shall his habitation be.” So the person defiled with leprosy had to let others know he was a leper, lest his defilement spread to others. The contagious aspect of leprosy is a reminder of the contagious-like atmosphere that is created by the sinful defilement of the soul.

With the very easy spread of COVID-19, we are now always aware of the possibility of defilement. Far before this virus was threatening us, we have been facing such an erosion of morality and open display of profane, depraved lifestyles in our culture, that it’s time we become socially distant from indulging in this prevalent “slouching toward Gomorrah” as spoken of by Robert H. Bork in his book by the same name. Paul said in reference to our posture before the Lord’s Supper in I Corinthians 11:28a, “But let a man examine himself....” In even stronger terms, he said later in II Corinthians 13:5, “Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?” It would serve us well to pray with David, “Examine me, O LORD, and prove me; try my reins and my heart” (Psalm 26:2).

The story is told of a man who awakened for a midnight snack and enjoyed some Limburger cheese placed liberally on his rye toast. Afterwards, he went back to bed. Due to his lack of sleep, he overslept and upon waking, he rushed to work. He complained all day of the wretched smell he was experiencing. His car smelled, his office smelled and he even lost his appetite for lunch because the cafeteria smelled. Then he hurt his wife’s feelings when he complained of the smell in her kitchen as she prepared supper. He did not notice until he approached the mirror to shave that the “stink” was being carried around by himself, due to the Limburger cheese that had dried on his mustache from the night before. You have already made the application, haven’t you? As we are so very tempted to deal first with the pollution in our culture, let us examine ourselves and see if we are part of the solution or part of the problem.

1. THE INQUISITION RESPECTING TRADITION

Matthew 15:1, 2

A. Washing is good because the purpose is to cleanse.

Christ loves His bride, the church and informs us in Ephesians 5:26, "That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word."

B. A simple act becomes a mere ceremony and test of fellowship.

It seemed at every place he travelled, Paul was dealing with those who would choose ceremony over substance, shadow over reality and works instead of grace. Colossians 2:16, 17: "Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ." Here's a truth that will not only take you to Heaven, but bring a little Heaven into the world of the believer: "And ye are complete in Him, which is the head of all principality and power" (Colossians 2:10).

C. There is a difference between sanctification and sanctimony.

The tradition of the elders fostered a sanctimonious pattern for life. Sanctification is that process of Christlikeness performed within the life of the believer by the Holy Spirit. Hebrews 13:12: "Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate." John 17:19: "And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth."

Sanctimony is the outward imitation of sanctification, lacking the Holy Spirit power to fulfill true holiness, therefore, creating a double life consisting of the external show and internal bankruptcy. II Timothy 3:5: "Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away."

2. THE VIVIFICATION OF TRUE SANCTITY

Matthew 15:3-6

A. Our Lord defines sin: Matthew 15:3. I John 3:4: "Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law."

B. The Penalty for sin: Matthew 15:4. There was certainly no "wiggle room" on the obligation to care for our parents. This is emphasized also in the New Testament in I Timothy 5:3,4 and then this teaching is said even more strongly in I Timothy 5:8: "But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel."

C. The attempt to circumnavigate disobedience: Matthew 15:5,6. The younger adults were under the requirement to requite their parents. But instead of giving aid to the older family members in need, they were taking the "cop-out," by saying, "I am not required to give to my parents, I already give to the local synagogue with my gifts."

3. THE CLARIFICATION OF DEFILEMENT

Matthew 15:7-11; 15-20

A. Empty words: Matthew 15:7, 8a, b; Psalm 78:36: "Nevertheless they did flatter Him with their mouth, and they lied unto Him with their tongues."

B. Empty hearts: Matthew 15:8c; Psalm 78:37: "For their heart was not right with him, neither were they stedfast in his covenant." Ezekiel 33:31: "And

they come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth they shew much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness.”

- C. Empty teaching: Matthew 15:9; Isaiah 29:13: “Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men.”
- D. The blessing of immunity and elimination: Matthew 15:10, 11a, 16, 17.
- E. The curse of contamination. Matthew 15:11b, 18-20. Matthew 12:33-37; Isaiah 32:6; Ephesians 4:29, 30; James 3:2-12.

4. THE ADMONITION TO THE BELIEVER

- A. It is a root problem: Matthew 15:13. John the Baptist calls out the root problem Matthew 3:7-10.
- B. The stance toward the false teachers: Matthew 15:14a. Matthew 7:6: “Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you.”
- C. The identification of the problem: Matthew 15:14b. Deuteronomy 27:18: “Cursed be he that maketh the blind to wander out of the way. And all the people shall say, Amen.” When one walks in the truth, this person becomes a light to those in darkness like the righteous Job as seen in Job 29:15: “I was eyes to the blind, and feet was I to the lame.”
- D. The escalation of the problem. Matthew 15:14b.

Conclusion:

Matthew 15:20. Our Lord tells us what defilement is, where it comes from and our attitude toward it and those who have it and are propagating the contagion. Let us continue to hear what He says to us through the word and “...Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the LORD...” (Hosea 6:3a). Mark 4: 21-24; Psalm 36:9.