

"THE PHARISEES WERE OFFENDED."

Rev. Robert T. Woodyard

First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden

September 2, 2012, 10:30am

Texts for the Sermon: Mark 7:14-23; Matthew 15:12-14

Introduction.

Last week as I was preaching on this same text I was aware I was skipping over several issues in the text that were below the surface. I decided to come back to this text and tie up several loose ends.

In doing this I don't mean to apply that today we will finish squeezing all the juice out of this text. God's Word is a deep well and there's always more good water to be drawn up. The Bible is the eternal Word of the Infinite God, we can read the Bible from cover to cover every year and still find it fresh and relevant. Every year every text yields more gold and silver. There's no other book like it.

So let's go back and see what more the Lord has for us in His Word under *three offenses*.

The offense of the Pharisees, Matthew 15:12.

I inserted into our reading of Mark's gospel a few verses from Matthew's gospel which include this comment from the disciples to Jesus.

Matthew 15:12 The disciples came and said to Jesus, "Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this saying?"

There are two things to notice in this little exchange.

First, of course Jesus knew they would be offended and He said what He said anyway. Notice Jesus' boldness in opposing false teaching and His instructing His followers in true doctrine so that they would know the difference and be equally bold in opposing false doctrine.

Jesus showed no regard for the Pharisees' man-made religion and their self-righteousness. He rebuked their pride and hypocrisy. He dismissed their washings and purification rituals as trifles, not nearly as important as God's Laws.

When the truth of God's Word is at stake we cannot sit idly by in the name of tolerance or out of fear of giving an offense.

That's not an excuse to be harsh or mean spirited, to shoot off our mouth any way we want. In our responses we are not excused to sin. We shouldn't try unnecessarily to give an offense. The point is simply to stand for the truth with clarity and conviction, and with humility and grace.

Second, notice the other side of the exchange. As is often the case with those who don't like conflict the disciples may be suggesting Jesus tone down His rhetoric and smooth over the offense and hurt feelings. It's common for the weak in faith or constitution to avoid controversy and try to keep everything nice. Sure it would be nice if everyone understood and agreed but

Satan blinds eyes and closes minds to the truth and enflames hearts to take offense and hate the truth no matter how nicely it's presented. The issue is not tone but truth.

We have to exercise wisdom and discernment to differentiate between those who are ignorant of the truth and those who are too proud to bend to the truth. We have to balance being wise as a serpent and gentle as a dove.

When preaching and teaching the Word of God does not succeed the way we think it should we have to be careful not to automatically assume that the fault is with the sender. It may be with the receiver.

The unspiritual cannot understand spiritual things. The unbelieving will hate the truth no matter how nicely and pleasantly it's served up. The gospel is veiled to those who are perishing. This is why Paul says:

II Corinthians 2:15-16 We are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, 16 to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life.

The Pharisees were proud and unteachable and completely resistant to any reform, they were headed for destruction because they hated the truth even when it stood in front of them in person.

We can't be surprised when the world hates the church and when the media makes fun of us. If they took offense at Jesus they will certainly take offense at us. Is the servant above the master? Nor should we assume that the problem is always us. The world has always and will always take offense at the message of the Bible and the message of Jesus and the cross and the life of holiness. Jesus did not give an offense, they took offense.

We must beware when all men speak well of us. We may be too soft or easy or compromised. If we remain silent in the presence of error, wickedness or blasphemy against our God and His Word we may be betraying our faith and our Lord. Don't let the offense of others cause you to cave in or compromise or force you into silence.

Let me show you now in our text how an offense from our world has worked its way into the church and into our own Bibles.

The offense of modern translators. "There is nothing outside a person ..." (7:15, ff).

Remember last week I said the NIV and the ESV left some words untranslated in our text, the words about the toilet or latrine. I didn't have time then to go into some more serious translation issues in our text.

Just as the tradition of the Pharisees had covered up the true meaning of the original Law of God, a similar thing is going on today. The traditions of man, of the politically correct, of the feminists are covering up the Word of God today. Translations are bowing to the winds of the times, and accommodating the sensitivities of various interest groups.

In these ten verses the Greek word "anthropos" occurs seven times, five times it's mis-translated person, one time it's translated man and once him. Anthropos is the Greek word from which we get our anthropology which literally means the study or science of man.

Anthropos means man and also as mankind, the term for the human race that's inclusive, meaning it includes men, women and children. Anthropos is understood as inclusive of both genders, as both are created equally in the image of God.

Anthropos is the Greek word used to translate the Hebrew word adam, the word God gave to our race. Adam means man, again as in mankind, inclusive of both men and women.

The English language dating from its beginnings well over a thousand years ago has always understood there to be an inclusive use of man and mankind.

This is also true of the Greek word adelphos, translated brothers. Paul uses that word a lot when he writes his letters to the different Christian churches. When he says brothers he's not singling out just the men. He's using brothers in the understood inclusive sense of the whole congregation, the brethren, the brothers and sisters included.

Only in the past 50 years has there arisen a great offense. With feminists leading the charge there has been an attack on the use and meaning of words. In the 1960s the feminists began a great campaign to impose on our culture politically correct language and to change millennia of linguistic understanding.

They took up an offense and made everyone else bow to their offense. It's called feminist language or sexist language. Sexist language is the invention of the feminist movement in the last half of the twentieth century. They started with their offense over Miss. and Mrs. wanting a nondescript Ms. Out also are stewardess, waitress and actress, along with chairman and fireman.

Their basic goal was to expunge from our language and purge from every book every masculine pronoun and replace it with something generic like "person." In the name of being more gender inclusive they are trying to do away with our gender inclusive language and give us a more cumbersome and less clear way of communicating. He/she, him/her, etc.

Today in colleges and graduate school all across America students are required to refrain from using masculine pronouns or the mix them equally with he and she.

But that wasn't enough, and it never is. The offense grew to include masculine nouns and pronouns used for God. And soon seminaries were requiring students to expunge from their theology papers any masculine references to God.

So we are left with sentences like, "When God created the earth God created people in the image of Gods-self."

And the offense deepens. They seek to rewrite history and the classics and every work that is a translation. This brings us to the problem we face today with the feminists controlling the agenda of how God's Word written in Hebrew and Greek is translated. Will we translate it literally so we can understand the true meaning of what was written or will we change the words to be sensitive to modern day offenses and sensitivities?

It was done to our Psalter hymnal in the 1980s. It was done to all our creeds and confessions last year at Synod.

Thousands of words in our modern Bibles are being changed. The Word of God breathed out by God and written by men under the direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit is being changed because of the opinions and offenses of man.

Man has set himself up as an authority over God's Word when he censors it thinking he can say it better. The integrity of the Word of God is at stake. At stake is our commitment to and our confidence in the inerrant Word of God. We should fear God and not man.

It shouldn't surprise us that our culture is at war with the Word of God and takes offense at it. What should surprise us is when our own pastors and seminary professors and Bible scholars answer the offense by trying to back pedal or clean up or change or compromise in order to take away the offense of the gospel. A major part of the problem is the church no longer owns our Bible, but major secular publishing houses. About the only faithful translations left are KJV, NKJV, NASB and Geneva Bible.

We need to open our eyes to the pressures our culture is bringing to bear on our denominations and seminaries and our churches. In many respects the culture is winning the culture wars and will continue to win unless we are wise and discerning and resist.

The perceived offense of the OT food laws. "Thus Jesus declared all foods clean" (7:19).

Christians today still struggle with how to understand the OT. And we especially get tongue tied when outsiders attack us over what appear to be inconsistencies or what they call hypocrisy in our beliefs and practices.

For instance the OT says we shouldn't eat shellfish or sew two different kinds of fabric together and that homosexuality is a sin. So why do we disobey some of the laws but hold on to some others? They accuse us of picking and choosing our morality.

It's a complex issue, but to keep it as simple as possible, we need to differentiate between the commands that are still upheld and the commands that are superseded by Christ.

Mark 7:19 Thus he declared all foods clean.

Notice Jesus didn't *say* all foods are clean, He *declared* all foods are clean. Something big is happening with Jesus' coming to earth and with His teaching. Jesus is God and as the author of the Bible He has authority to interpret and change the Word of God.

Civil and social commands and ceremonial or religious ritual commands find their fulfillment in Christ and so they no longer apply.

Could someone who reads our US Constitution say we aren't following it because the 18th amendment clearly states that the manufacture, sale, and transportation of alcohol is prohibited? Well yes that was a law but it's now superseded by the 21st amendment which repealed the 18th.

The Bible is all God's Word but it has a historical flow. Not everything was meant to be permanent. The OT anticipated a new day and a new covenant.

One of the main functions of the commands in the OT was to create a totally separate people holy unto God, untainted by all the pagan cultures that surrounded them.

In the OT the people of God were to separate themselves from all the pagan cultures and to show that separation in all facets of their lives, religions, civil, and moral. Now Christ is sending His people, His church out into all the cultures. Christianity is to flourish in every kind of culture among all kinds of customs, traditions and habits, with all kinds of special days and particular foods.

Jews and Gentile are no longer separated under the Mosaic Law but united under the new covenant in Christ. In Christ there's no distinction, no Jew nor Greek.

Another main function of the OT commands was to be a preparation for the new covenant. The OT is a shadow of the substance that was coming in the NT.

“Tear down this temple and in three days I will raise it up.” One who is greater than the temple is here. The focus shifts from the temple to Christ. The temple no longer plays the central role for the people of God, Christ is central. Jesus is the new wineskin to replace the old wineskin.

Whether you eat pork or not no longer matters. To not do so is fine, but to obligate one not to do so stands in the way of the grace and freedom that's ours in Christ.

Paul explains this in Colossians.

Colossians 2:16-17 Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. 17 These are a *shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ*.

One of the main points of the book of Hebrews is to show the shift from the old to the new, from the shadow to the substance, from the inferior to the superior who is Christ.

With the coming of Christ there's a massive and sweeping change in redemptive history. Christ replaced the shadows with reality.

The function and purpose of the food laws and purity laws about what you could or couldn't touch are fulfilled in Christ and no longer remain. It's not what we eat or touch that makes us clean but Christ makes us clean. The focus is on Christ.

Yes, moral distinctions remain, the Ten Commandments are still a summary of what it means to love God and love our neighbor, no matter what land our neighbor lives in. The Ten Commandments speak to things of substance.

So Jesus says root out all sin, all things contrary to the law of God in your hearts like the sin of “evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, 22 coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. 23 All these evil things come from within, and they defile a *man*” (Mark 7:21-23).

Application and conclusion.

Remember the heart of the matter and that's that it's the heart that matters. True heart religion doesn't consist of external things, what you eat or drink or wear, it consists of repentance, faith and the fruit of repentance in holy lives, lives set apart from the sins that flow from our hearts.

Make Christ central in your heart, in your life, in your words and actions. There is no salvation in anyone else and in anything else. We stand and fall as individuals and as a church only on our dependence on Christ.

For thousands of years God's people longed to see what you see, hear what you hear, know what you know. Don't take it for granted and don't neglect it. The Sun of righteousness has shown, life in the light.

II Corinthians 3:12-18 Since we have such a hope, we are very *bold*, ... 17 Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is *freedom*. 18 And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

Be bold in defending the truth of God's words against those who are quick to take offense, and maintain your freedom which Christ purchased with His blood.

