

# Matthew 15: 15-20 Exposition

by Elder Dr. Samuel L. Dixon

<sup>15</sup> Then Peter said to Jesus, “Explain to us the parable that says people aren’t defiled by what they eat.”<sup>16</sup> “Don’t you understand yet?” Jesus asked.<sup>17</sup> “Anything you eat passes through the stomach and then goes into the sewer.<sup>18</sup> But the words you speak come from the heart—that’s what defiles you.<sup>19</sup> For from the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, all sexual immorality, theft, lying, and slander.<sup>20</sup> These are what defile you. Eating with unwashed hands will never defile you.”[New Living Translation]

**WHAT DOES IT MEAN?—Below is a detailed chapter note study. This is where important words in a passage are looked up to determine the Hebrew meaning of the word/terms for Old Testament studies and the Greek meaning of words/terms used in the New Testament. Below are definitions for the key words in the above scripture. One of my previous instructors referred to this type of study as mining gold from the scriptures. Also Bible commentaries are used to obtain information for this type of study.**

**HEART**--In other words, the heart is used figuratively for the hidden springs of the personal life. "The Bible describes human depravity as in the 'heart', because sin is a principle which has its seat in the center of man's inward life, and then 'defiles' the whole circuit of his action, [Matt. 15:19, 20](#). —Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words

**DEFILE**--"to render unholy, unclean, to defile," —Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words

**EVIL**--"Evil" in the sense of "harm, injury" is indicated in [Matt. 5:11](#). —Expository Dictionary of Bible Words

**THOUGHTS**--denotes, primarily, "an inward reasoning, an opinion" (*dia*, "through," suggesting separation, *logismos*, "a reasoning")—Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words

**MURDER**—To kill, to take the life of another. Murder is a sin against the sixth commandment. Jesus Christ taught that this commandment means far more than just prohibiting the killing of people. He enlarged the meaning to include both the anger that is aroused within the heart and the lawless motives that drive a person to kill others (cp. [Matthew 5:21-22](#)).—Practical Word Studies in the New Testament

**ADULTERY**--Adultery; sexual unfaithfulness to husband or wife. It is also looking on a woman or a man to lust after her or him. Looking at and lusting after the opposite sex, whether in person, in magazines, in books, on beaches, or anywhere else, is adultery. Imagining and lusting within the heart is the very same as committing the act. Adultery is a sin against the seventh commandment—Practical Word Studies in the New Testament

**SEXUAL IMMORALITY**--Fornication, sexual immorality, wickedness. This is a broad word including all forms and kinds of immoral and sexual acts. It is pre-marital sex, adultery, and abnormal sex—all kinds of sexual vice.—Practical Word Studies in the New Testament

**THEFT**--Theft; to cheat and steal; to take wrongfully from another person, either legally or illegally. Note exactly what Jesus was saying: "It is not things that defile a person. It is the heart that defiles a person." A person's heart is corrupt; therefore, he corrupts himself. A person is not made unclean by things; he is unclean because of his polluted heart. It is he himself who takes things and does unclean things with them. —Practical Word Studies in the New Testament

**LYING**--In [Matt. 15:19](#) it denotes "false testimony" as a vice—Expository Dictionary of Bible Words

**SLANDER**--Slander; evil speaking; blasphemy; malicious talk; to speak against God; to insult. It is hurtful, injurious speech.

The Christian citizen is *not to slander any person*. No citizen is to be slandered or verbally abused and torn down. God's ideal for society is this: all citizens working to build up and enrich the lives of each other and their community and nation. If a person, ruler or citizen, is working to build us up, why would we slander him? We know that in day-to-day practical living, we live in an evil world where some citizens are selfish and greedy and others commit some terrible and atrocious acts. It is this that causes chaos in society.

But note: the Christian citizen is not to slander any citizen, not even an evil ruler. The answer to reaching evil people is not cursing, reviling, slandering, criticizing, and tearing them down. Verbal abuse only causes more evil—active retaliation. The only answer to reaching an evil citizen is to reach out to him in kindness, trying to lead him to change and live the way he should as a contributing citizen to the community. But note this: reaching out to evil people and not slandering them does not mean that we do not use firm, strong, and warning words. We are never to give license to evil, nor to indulge the selfish and sinful acts of people. We are to speak with authority and strength against evil and untruth. We are to warn, and the community is to back up the warning with *just control*, even if it means imprisonment.

The point is this; there is no place in a just society for citizens slandering each other. Cursing, reviling, slandering, and railing at each other is not the way to help those in rebellion against God, government, and man. The way to help is to reach out with kindness, and then if kindness fails, to reach out with strong, authoritative warnings—and then back up the warning. There is never a place for slander. Christian citizens are to take the lead in speaking kind and strong words, words that warn against selfish and evil behavior.—Practical Word Studies in the New Testament

**BIBLE PASSAGE SUMMARIZED**—various translations are used below to give a better picture of what the text is saying. Sometime students are asked to write a paraphrase of the verses being studied.

<sup>15</sup> Peter said, "Explain the example to us."

<sup>16</sup> Jesus said, "Do you still not understand? <sup>17</sup> Surely you know that all the food that enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then goes out of the body. <sup>18</sup> But what people say with their mouths comes from the way they think; these are the things that make people unclean. <sup>19</sup> Out of the mind come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual sins, stealing, lying, and speaking evil of others. <sup>20</sup> These things make people unclean; eating with unwashed hands does not make them unclean." [New Century Version]

We must guard our minds so that we will not commit or practice any of the sins mentioned by Jesus in this passage. As Christians we no longer serve sin [the desires of our flesh—things we want to do which are against the will of God.]

<sup>20</sup> When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the obligation to do right.<sup>21</sup> And what was the result? You are now ashamed of the things you used to do, things that end in eternal doom.<sup>22</sup> But now you are free from the power of sin and have become slaves of God. Now you do those things that lead to holiness and result in eternal life.<sup>23</sup> For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord. [Romans 6:20-23 New Living Translation]

It is very helpful to use a Bible dictionary when you are doing a detailed word study of a Bible passage because a Bible dictionary will list some of the cultural background information