

External cultic tradition and internal ethical purity in Matthew 15

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In Matthew 15:1–20, Jesus responds to the accusation made by the Pharisees and the scribes that his disciples do not observe the tradition of hand-washing (οὐ γὰρ νίπτονται τὰς χεῖρας ὅταν ἄρτον ἐσθίωσιν), because they do not wash their hands before they eat bread. In this story of dispute, two ideas are interwoven, namely the locus of impurity (external or internal) and the manmade tradition of the elders (ἡ παράδοσις τῶν πρεσβυτέρων) versus the Word of God (ὁ λόγος τοῦ Θεοῦ). The Pharisees are depicted as obsessed with external manmade rules to ensure purity, whilst Jesus is concerned with inner purity based on God's Word. In this article, the story is interpreted on two levels. The first level describes the dispute between Jesus and the Pharisees. The second level explores the tension the Matthean community experienced in their encounter with Pharisean Judaism of their day – the Judaism of the dual *Torah*. The question is which aspect of the *Torah* is challenged by Matthew's Jesus, and what he considers to be the true meaning of the Law. It seems that Matthew uses this story to define and maintain the identity and values of his community over and against that of the Pharisees and their successors. Devices that Matthew uses to define the identity and required morality for his community, are identified. Such devices demonstrate how a community's values can influence the identity and ethics of a society.

In Matteus 15:1–20 reageer Jesus op die aantygning van die Fariseërs en skrifgeleerdes dat sy dissipels nie die handewas-tradisie eerbiedig nie. In hierdie verhaal van dispuut word twee idees vervleg: eerstens dié van die locus van onreinheid, en tweedens dié van mensgemaakte tradisies teenoor die Woord van God. Die Fariseërs word voorgestel as mense wat obsessief is oor mensgemaakte reëls wat reinheid verseker, terwyl Jesus op innerlike reinheid gesteld is, wat op die Woord van God gebaseer is. In hierdie artikel word die verhaal op twee vlakke geïnterpreteer. Die eerste vlak beskryf die dispuut tussen Jesus en die Fariseërs. Die tweede vlak ondersoek die spanning wat die Matteus-gemeenskap in hulle verhouding met die Fariseuse Judaïsme van hulle tyd ervaar het. Die vraag is watter aspek van die *Torah* deur die Matteaanse Jesus bevraagteken word, en wat Hy as die ware betekenis van die Wet beskou. Dit wil voorkom asof Matteus hierdie verhaal gebruik om die identiteit en waardes van sy gemeenskap teenoor die dominante Fariseuse Judaïsme te definieer en te handhaaf. Middele wat Matteus gebruik om die identiteit en verlangde moraliteit van sy gemeenskap te definieer, word geïdentifiseer. Sodanige middele demonstreer hoe 'n gemeenskap se waardes die identiteit en etiek daarvan kan beïnvloed.

Introduction

Jesus' relation to the *Torah* forms a central motive in the first Gospel (cf. Loader 1977:165). Perhaps the most important passage in Matthew on the *Torah* is found in 5:17–19. This article considers this passage as the fundamental statement of Matthew on the Law (cf. Viljoen 2011). In Matthew, Jesus is presented as the ultimate interpreter of this Law (cf. Viljoen 2012). Parallel to this, the Pharisees are described as people obsessed with observing the *Torah*, both the written and oral traditions. The Gospel continuously describes Jesus and the Pharisees as being in conflict about the true interpretation of the Law. For example, Jesus calls for greater righteousness than the Pharisees and teachers of the Law do (Mt 5:20);¹ Jesus' *halakhic* argument on the true intention of the Law (5:21–48);² Jesus' response to the accusations of the Pharisees when he ate with tax collectors and sinners (9:10–13);³ and the Sabbath controversy (12:1–14).⁴

1. See Viljoen (2013a; 2013b) on the interpretation of righteousness in Matthew.

2. See Viljoen (2013c) on the *halakhic* argument in the Sermon on the Mount.

3. See Viljoen (2014) on the use of Hosea 6:6 in Matthew 9:13 and 12:7.

4. See Viljoen (2011) on the Sabbath controversy in Matthew.

In Matthew 15:1–20⁵ the oral Law, as observed and developed by the Pharisees, is in dispute. Different communities of Judaism interpreted the *Torah* in various ways (Neusner 2007:111). After the destruction of the temple in 70 CE, the Pharisees and scribes carried forward the oral traditions, which were associated with the *Torah*. They formed the community of Judaism that observed the written *Torah* in accord with these oral traditions. This approach earned them the title and identity of ‘the Judaism of the dual *Torah*’ (Neusner 1994:5–7; 2007:111). In the ‘Judaism of the dual *Torah*’ the *Torah* is preserved in three forms: the Hebrew Scriptures, the memorised oral tradition (first written down in the *Mishnah* ca. 200 CE), and by the sages called rabbi’s⁶ (Neusner 1994:5).

The Pharisees believed that God gave Moses, in addition to the written law, also orally transmitted laws. (Cohen 2006:222).⁷ These laws had to be memorised and passed on through generations (Neusner 1971:1–11). The oral laws derived from the written Law, supplement and interpreted it (Cohen 2006:195). The Pharisees believed that the written *Torah* could not be understood on its own and that it had to be explicated by these oral traditions. Besides the traditions, which they believed had originated from Moses and had been passed on through generations, the Pharisees were very innovative in extending these laws to account for the needs of their own times. Flavius Josephus, the 1st century Romano-Jewish historian, remarks: ‘The Pharisees have imposed on the people many laws from the tradition of the fathers not written in the Law of Moses’ (*Ant.* 13. 297). One of these ideas was the development of the laws on hand-washing, which were intended to ensure the observance of purity laws (cf. *Mishnah Berkakhot* 8:12–14).⁸

In verses 1–20, Jesus responds to the accusation made by the Pharisees and the scribes that his disciples do not observe the tradition of hand-washing. In this story of dispute two ideas are interwoven, namely the locus of impurity (external or internal) and the tradition of the elders (ἡ παράδοσις τῶν πρεσβυτέρων) versus the Word of God (ὁ λόγος τοῦ Θεοῦ). The fact that Matthew’s Jesus contrasts the tradition of the elders with the Word of God implies that he does not regard these traditions as coming from God, but as manmade. The Pharisees are depicted as obsessed with external manmade rules to ensure purity,

5. Further references to Matthew 15 will be indicated only by verses.

6. A rabbi was considered as equivalent to a scroll of the *Torah* (Neusner 1994:6) as presented in the following statements from the Babylonian Talmud: ‘He who sees a disciple of a sage who has died is as if he sees a scroll of the *Torah* that has burned’ (Y. Moed Qatan 3:7.X), and ‘An elder who forgot his learning because of some accident which happened to him – they treat him with the sanctity owed to an ark [of the *Torah*]’ (Y. Moed Qatan 3:1.XI).

7. Rabbinic terminology distinguished between oral and written *Torah*, as the ‘*Torah* in writing’ and the ‘*Torah* by word of mouth’ (b. *Git.* 60b; *Midr.* *Tanhuma, Ki. Tassa* 17).

8. The *Mishnah Berakhot* (completed around the year 200 CE) states:

1. The House of Shammai say: ‘They wash the hands and afterward mix the cup’ and the House of Hillel say: ‘They mix the cup and afterward wash the hands’.
2. The House of Shammai say: ‘He dries his hands on the cloth and lays it on the table’ and the House of Hillel say: ‘On the pillow’.
3. The House of Shammai say: ‘They clean the house, and afterward they wash the hands’ and the House of Hillel say: ‘They wash the hands, and afterward they clean the house’.

whilst Jesus is concerned with inner purity based on God’s Word. Earlier in this Gospel the Pharisees’ concern about purity is also emphasised when some of them objected to Jesus’ association with ‘sinners and tax-collectors’ (Mt 9:11). The story of hand-washing reflects debates about purity as well as the status of oral Law in comparison to written Law; a debate that emerged during the 1st century CE (Evans 2012:299).

In this article, the story is interpreted on two levels. The first level describes the dispute between Jesus and the Pharisees. The second level explores the tension the Matthean community experienced in their encounter with the Pharisean Judaism⁹ of their time. The Matthean community¹⁰ was in the process of forming their own identity alongside that of Pharisean Judaism and other main Jewish sects of their time (Overman 1990:41). However, an attempt to reconstruct the social and religious setting of the first audience should be done with caution. Other than in letters, the Gospels do not directly provide such information of their first readers.

The aim of this article is to explain how the dispute as described in verses 1–20 fits into Matthew’s overall teaching of Jesus and the *Torah*. The question is which aspect of the *Torah* is challenged by Matthew’s Jesus, and what he considers to be the true meaning of the Law. It seems that Matthew uses this story to define and maintain the identity of his community over and against the views of the dominant Pharisean Judaism that they encountered. To reach this aim, attention is paid to the three scenes of this story. In the first scene the objection of the Pharisees and the scribes regarding their traditions and Jesus’ response is investigated to establish the opposing views on the oral Law. In the second scene, where Jesus addresses the crowds, the central philosophical view of Jesus regarding purity is identified. In the third scene, where Jesus responds to questions of his disciples, Jesus’ explanation of his central view on purity is investigated. From this, the investigation devices¹¹ that Matthew uses to define the identity and required morality for his community are identified.

The composition of the story

Verses 1–20 contain a parallel to the hand-washing dispute described in Mark 7:1–23, but with significant changes. For the sake of comparison, significant passages, which only appear in one of the versions, are underlined (see Table 1).

9. While Matthew identifies the Pharisees as chief opponents, a variety of Jewish groups existed throughout the period from the Maccabean revolt to the end of the 1st century. Judaism was quite fragmented and fluid with various groups exercising influence at one stage or another (Cohen 2006:12; Stanton 2013:125; Repschinski 2000:346). It seems as if the Pharisees were the dominant group in Matthew’s situation. See Neusner (1973) on the evolution of Pharisean Judaism.

10. The ‘Matthean community’ should not be seen as one small localised group of people who would be able to gather at one house church, but rather as a linked set of communities sharing similar convictions about Jesus (see Stanton 2013:125).

11. In an earlier article the devices ancient authors used to mark the identity of their communities are discussed, for example commitment to a central figure, the naming of groups, claims of ultimate revelation and interpretation, critique of opponents, eschatological expectations, and appropriate conduct for their communities (Viljoen 2013b).

TABLE 1: Comparison between Mark's and Matthew's version of the story.

Mark 7:1–23	Matthew 15:1–20
Scene 1: Jesus and the Pharisees: Streitgespräch with a challenge and riposte	
Pharisees' challenge	
<p>¹Καὶ συνάγονται πρὸς αὐτὸν οἱ Φαρισαῖοι καὶ τινες τῶν γραμματέων ἔλθόντες ἀπὸ Ἱερουσολύμων.</p>	<p>¹Τότε προσέρχονται τῷ Ἰησοῦ ἀπὸ Ἱερουσολύμων Φαρισαῖοι καὶ γραμματεῖς ...</p>
<p>¹The Pharisees and some of the teachers of the law who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus</p>	<p>¹Then some Pharisees and teachers of the law came to Jesus from Jerusalem ...</p>
<p>² καὶ ἰδόντες τινὰς τῶν μαθητῶν αὐτοῦ ὅτι κοιναῖς χερσίν, τοῦτ' ἐστὶν ἀνόπτιοι, ἐσθίουσιν τοὺς ἄρτους, ³ οἱ γὰρ Φαρισαῖοι καὶ πάντες οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι ἐὰν μὴ πύγῃ νύωνται τὰς χεῖρας οὐκ ἐσθίουσιν, κρατοῦντες τὴν παράδοσιν τῶν πρεσβυτέρων, ⁴ καὶ ἀπ' ἀγορᾶς ἐὰν μὴ ῥαντίσωνται οὐκ ἐσθίουσιν, καὶ ἄλλα πολλά ἐστὶν ἃ παρέλαβον κρατεῖν, βαπτισμὸς ποτηρίων καὶ ξεστῶν καὶ γαλκίων.</p>	<p>... and asked, ²'Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders, because they don't wash their hands whenever they eat bread?'</p>
<p>² and saw some of his disciples eating food with hands that were defiled, that is, unwashed. ³(The Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they give their hands a ceremonial washing, holding to the tradition of the elders. ⁴When they come from the marketplace they do not eat unless they wash. And they observe many other traditions, such as the washing of cups, pitchers and kettles.)</p>	<p>... and asked, ²'Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders, because they don't wash their hands whenever they eat bread?'</p>
<p>⁵ καὶ ἐπερωτῶσιν αὐτὸν οἱ Φαρισαῖοι καὶ οἱ γραμματεῖς Διὰ τί οὗ περιπατοῦσιν οἱ μαθηταὶ σου κατὰ τὴν παράδοσιν τῶν πρεσβυτέρων, ἀλλὰ κοιναῖς χερσίν ἐσθίουσιν τὸν ἄρτον;</p>	<p>... and asked, ²'Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders, because they don't wash their hands whenever they eat bread?'</p>
<p>⁵So 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 defiled hands?'</p>	<p>... and asked, ²'Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders, because they don't wash their hands whenever they eat bread?'</p>
Jesus' riposte	
<p>⁶ ὁ δὲ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς· Καλῶς ἐπροφήτευσεν Ἠσαΐας περὶ ὑμῶν τῶν ὑποκριτῶν, ὡς γέγραπται</p>	<p>³ ὁ δὲ ἀποκριθεὶς εἶπεν αὐτοῖς· Διὰ τί καὶ ὑμεῖς παραβαίνετε τὴν ἐντολὴν τοῦ θεοῦ διὰ τὴν παράδοσιν ὑμῶν; ⁴ ὁ γὰρ θεὸς εἶπεν· Τίμα τὸν πατέρα καὶ τὴν μητέρα, καὶ ὁ κακολογῶν πατέρα ἢ μητέρα θανάτῳ τελευτάτω. ⁵ ὑμεῖς δὲ λέγετε· Ὅς ἂν εἴπῃ τῷ πατρὶ ἢ τῇ μητρὶ· Κορβάν, ὁ ἐστὶν Δῶρον, ὁ ἐὰν ἐξ ἐμοῦ ὠφελῆθῃς, ⁶ οὐ μὴ τιμήσῃ τὸν πατέρα αὐτοῦ· καὶ ἠκυρώσατε τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ διὰ τὴν παράδοσιν ὑμῶν. ⁷ ὑποκριταί, καλῶς ἐπροφήτευσεν περὶ ὑμῶν Ἠσαΐας λέγων·</p>
<p>ὅτι Οὗτος ὁ λαὸς τοῖς χεῖλεσίν με τιμᾷ, ἡ δὲ καρδιά αὐτῶν πόρρω ἀπέχει ἀπ' ἐμοῦ.⁷ μάτην δὲ σέβονται με, διδάσκοντες διδασκαλίας ἐντάλματα ἀνθρώπων.</p>	<p>⁸ Ὁ λαὸς οὗτος τοῖς χεῖλεσίν με τιμᾷ, ἡ δὲ καρδιά αὐτῶν πόρρω ἀπέχει ἀπ' ἐμοῦ⁹ μάτην δὲ σέβονται με, διδάσκοντες διδασκαλίας ἐντάλματα ἀνθρώπων.</p>
<p>⁸ ἀφέντες τὴν ἐντολὴν τοῦ θεοῦ κρατεῖτε τὴν παράδοσιν τῶν ἀνθρώπων. ⁹ Καὶ ἔλεγεν αὐτοῖς· Καλῶς ἠθετέτε τὴν ἐντολὴν τοῦ θεοῦ, ἵνα τὴν παράδοσιν ὑμῶν τηρήσῃτε.¹⁰ Μωϋσῆς γὰρ εἶπεν· Τίμα τὸν πατέρα σου καὶ τὴν μητέρα σου, καὶ ὁ κακολογῶν πατέρα ἢ μητέρα θανάτῳ τελευτάτω.¹¹ ὑμεῖς δὲ λέγετε· Ἐὰν εἴπῃ ἄνθρωπος τῷ πατρὶ ἢ τῇ μητρὶ· Κορβάν, ὁ ἐστὶν Δῶρον, ὁ ἐὰν ἐξ ἐμοῦ ὠφελῆθῃς, ¹² οὐκέτι ἀφίετε αὐτὸν οὐδὲν ποιῆσαι τῷ πατρὶ ἢ τῇ μητρὶ, ¹³ ἀκυροῦντες τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ τῇ παραδόσει ὑμῶν ἢ παραδόκατε· καὶ παρομοίᾳ τοιαῦτα πολλὰ ποιεῖτε.</p>	<p>³ Jesus replied, 'And why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition? ⁴ For God said, "Honour your father and mother" and "Anyone who curses their father or mother is to be put to death."⁵ But you say that if anyone declares that what might have been used to help their father or mother is "devoted to God,"⁶ they are not to "honour their father or mother" with it. Thus you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition. ⁷You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you:</p>
<p>⁸He replied, 'Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written:</p>	<p>⁸These people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. ⁹They worship me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules.'</p>
<p>'''These people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. ⁷They worship me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules.'</p>	<p>'''These people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. ⁹They worship me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules.'''</p>
<p>⁸You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to human traditions.'</p>	<p>'''These people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. ⁹They worship me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules.'''</p>
<p>⁹And he continued, 'You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe^c your own traditions! ¹⁰ For Moses said, "Honor your father and mother," and, "Anyone who curses their father or mother is to be put to death."¹¹ But you say that if anyone declares that what might have been used to help their father or mother is Corban (that is, devoted to God) – ¹²then you no longer let them do anything for their father or mother. ¹³Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that.'</p>	<p>³ Jesus replied, 'And why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition? ⁴ For God said, "Honour your father and mother" and "Anyone who curses their father or mother is to be put to death."⁵ But you say that if anyone declares that what might have been used to help their father or mother is "devoted to God,"⁶ they are not to "honour their father or mother" with it. Thus you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition. ⁷You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you:</p>
Scene 2: Jesus and the crowds: Midpoint axiom	
<p>¹⁴ Καὶ προσκαλεσάμενος πάλιν τὸν ὄχλον ἔλεγεν αὐτοῖς· Αἰκούσατέ μου πάντες καὶ σῦντε. ¹⁵ οὐδὲν ἐστὶν ἐξῶθεν τὸ ἄνθρώπου εἰσπορευόμενον εἰς αὐτὸν ὃ δυνάται κοινῶσαι αὐτὸν· ἀλλὰ τὰ ἐκ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐκπορευόμενά ἐστιν τὰ κοινῶντα τὸν ἄνθρωπον.</p>	<p>¹⁰ Καὶ προσκαλεσάμενος τὸν ὄχλον εἶπεν αὐτοῖς· Αἰκούετε καὶ σῦντε.¹¹ οὐ τὸ εἰσερχόμενον εἰς τὸ στόμα κοινοῖ τὸν ἄνθρωπον, ἀλλὰ τὸ ἐκπορευόμενον ἐκ τοῦ στόματος τοῦτο κοινοῖ τὸν ἄνθρωπον.</p>
<p>¹⁴Again Jesus called the crowd to him and said, 'Listen to me, everyone, and understand this. ¹⁵Nothing outside a person can defile them by going into them. Rather, it is what comes out of a person that defiles them.' [¹⁶]</p>	<p>¹⁰He called the crowd to him and said, 'Listen and understand. ¹¹ What goes into someone's mouth does not defile them, but what comes out of their mouth, that is what defiles them.'</p>
Scene 3: Jesus and his disciples: teaching	
<p>¹⁷ Καὶ ὅτε εἰσῆλθεν εἰς οἶκον ἀπὸ τοῦ ὄχλου, ἐπηρώτων αὐτὸν οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ τὴν παραβολὴν. ¹⁸ καὶ λέγει αὐτοῖς· Οὕτως καὶ ὑμεῖς ἀσύνετοί ἐστε; οὐ νοεῖτε ὅτι πᾶν τὸ ἐξῶθεν εἰσπορευόμενον εἰς τὸν ἄνθρωπον οὐ δύναται αὐτὸν κοινῶσαι, ¹⁹ ὅτι οὐκ εἰσπορεύεται αὐτοῦ εἰς τὴν καρδίαν ἀλλ' εἰς τὴν κοιλίαν, καὶ εἰς τὸν ἀφεδρόνα ἐκπορεύεται; — καθαρῶς πάντα τὰ βρώματα.</p>	<p>¹² Τότε προσελθόντες οἱ μαθηταὶ λέγουσιν αὐτῷ· Οἶδας ὅτι οἱ Φαρισαῖοι ἀκούσαντες τὸν λόγον ἐσκανδαλίσθησαν;</p> <p>¹³ ὁ δὲ ἀποκριθεὶς εἶπεν· Πᾶσα φυτεία ἣν οὐκ ἐφύτευεν ὁ πατὴρ μου ὁ οὐράνιος ἐκρίζωθήσεται. ¹⁴ ἀφετε αὐτούς· τυφλοὶ εἰσὶν ὁδηγοὶ τυφλῶν· τυφλὸς δὲ τυφλὸν ἐὰν ὀδηγῇ, ἀμφοτέρω εἰς βόθυνον πεσοῦνται.</p> <p>¹⁵ Ἀποκριθεὶς δὲ ὁ Πέτρος εἶπεν αὐτῷ· Φράσον ἡμῖν τὴν παραβολὴν ταύτην.</p>
<p>²⁰ ἔλεγεν δὲ ὅτι Τὸ ἐκ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐκπορευόμενον ἐκεῖνο κοινοῖ τὸν ἄνθρωπον.²¹ ἐσθῶν γὰρ ἐκ τῆς καρδίας τῶν ἀνθρώπων οἱ διαλογισμοὶ οἱ κακοὶ ἐκπορεύονται, πορνεία, κλοπαί, φόνοι, ²² μοιχεῖαι, πλεονεξία, πονηρία, δόλος, ἀσέλγεια, ὀφθαλμῶδες πονηρὸς, βλασφημία, ὑπερηφανία, ἀφροσύνη²³ πάντα ταῦτα τὰ πονηρὰ ἐσθῶν ἐκπορεύεται καὶ κοινοῖ τὸν ἄνθρωπον.</p>	<p>¹⁶ ὁ δὲ εἶπεν· Ἀκμὴν καὶ ὑμεῖς ἀσύνετοί ἐστε; ¹⁷ οὐ νοεῖτε ὅτι πᾶν τὸ εἰσπορευόμενον εἰς τὸ στόμα εἰς τὴν κοιλίαν χωρεῖ καὶ εἰς ἀφεδρόνα ἐκβάλλεται; ¹⁸ τὰ δὲ ἐκπορευόμενα ἐκ τοῦ στόματος ἐκ τῆς καρδίας ἐξέρχεται, κάκεῖνα κοινοῖ τὸν ἄνθρωπον. ¹⁹ ἐκ γὰρ τῆς καρδίας ἐξέρχονται διαλογισμοὶ πονηροὶ, φόνοι, μοιχεῖαι, πορνείαι, κλοπαί, ψευδομαρτυρία, βλασφημία. ²⁰ ταῦτα ἐστὶν τὰ κοινῶντα τὸν ἄνθρωπον, τὸ δὲ ἀνόπτιοι χερσίν φαγεῖν οὐ κοινοῖ τὸν ἄνθρωπον.</p>
<p>¹⁷After he had left the crowd and entered the house, his disciples asked him about this parable. ¹⁸'Are you so dull?' he asked. 'Don't you see that nothing that enters a person from the outside can defile them? ¹⁹ For it doesn't go into their heart but into their stomach, and then out of the body.' (In saying this, Jesus declared all foods clean.)</p>	<p>¹²Then the disciples came to him and asked, 'Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this?'</p>
<p>²⁰He went on: 'What comes out of a person is what defiles them. ²¹ For it is from within, out of a person's heart, that evil thoughts come – sexual immorality, theft, murder, ²²adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. ²³All these evils come from inside and defile a person.'</p>	<p>¹³He replied, 'Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be pulled up by the roots. ¹⁴Leave them; they are blind guides. If the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit.'</p>
<p>²³All these evils come from inside and defile a person.'</p>	<p>¹⁵Peter said, 'Explain the parable to us.'</p>
<p></p>	<p>¹⁶'Are you still so dull?' Jesus asked them. ¹⁷'Don't you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body?' ¹⁸But the things that come out of a person's mouth come from the heart, and these defile them. ¹⁹For out of the heart come evil thoughts – murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. ²⁰These are what defile a person; but eating with unwashed hands does not defile them.'</p>

Matthew's redaction of the story is quite extensive. He truncates the story by almost half. He omits the section explaining the ceremony of hand-washing (Mk 7:2-4) Matthew commonly omits explanations of Jewish traditions and practices, probably because he, unlike Mark, wrote to a community who were familiar with Jewish traditions. Furthermore, Matthew omits the statement that Jesus made all the food clean (Mk 7:19). He thus limits his discussion to the ritual of hand-washing based on oral tradition without attending to food laws in general. This is quite significant, as it indicates some sensitivity for these Jewish laws with Matthew. On the other hand he adds a parable and a condemnation of the leaders as 'blind guides' (v. 13-14). Such a sharpening of the conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees is typical to Matthew, which signifies a bitter separation between the Pharisean Judaism and the Matthean community. Another addition is the conclusion of Matthew's Jesus with a reference to the washing of hands (v. 20b). He thus refers back to initial challenge to tighten the overall structure of the three scenes of the story, and to emphasise its key issue. Matthew also transposes the quotation of Isaiah 29:13 to the end of Jesus' riposte.¹² In such a way he tightens the structure of the *Streitgespräch*. In this story, themes of external tradition and purity are intertwined with the Law and internal purity. Scribal regulations are explicitly set aside (v. 20). Whilst Matthew sharpens the conflict with the Pharisees, he softens Mark's comments on dietary laws. This redaction probably reflects Matthew's and his community's struggle with the Jewish leadership about the value of the Pharisees' tradition, whilst he makes the passage more acceptable for Jewish Christians who probably were inclined to observing dietary laws.

Like in Mark, Matthew 15:1-20 gives an outdrawn objection story in three scenes (Davies & Allison 2004:516). The story has a close knit structure as can be demonstrated with Figure 1.

The first scene depicts Jesus with the Pharisees and scribes¹³ (v. 1-9); the second scene, Jesus with the crowds (v. 10-11);

12. In Matthew 9:10-13 and 12:1-8 the Scripture quotation also concludes the controversy stories.

13. It is noteworthy that, in the seven times Matthew links the scribes and Pharisees, this is the only occurrence where the Pharisees are mentioned first: 'Pharisees and scribes'. In the other six occurrences the order is 'scribes and Pharisees'. This can be because of Matthew's dependence on Mark here, but more probably Matthew wants to emphasise that the *παράδοσις* [traditions] at stake here are specifically those of the Pharisees (Hagner 1995:430). Notably, the reference to the scribes in this story is been left out later (v. 12).

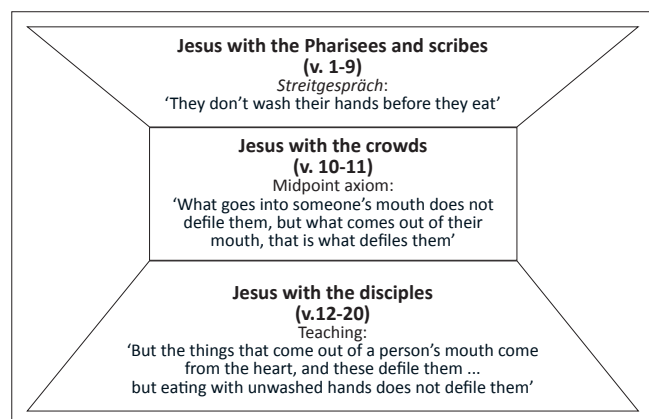


FIGURE 1: Objection story in three scenes.

and the third scene, Jesus with the disciples (v. 12-20).¹⁴ Scenes one and three each begins with a question directed at Jesus: the first scene with a question by the Pharisees and scribes (v. 2-3); and the third scene with a question by the disciples (v. 12). Verse 11 ('What goes into someone's mouth does not defile them, but what comes out of their mouth, that is what defiles them') forms the midpoint of the story (Davies & Allison 2004:516). It forms a response to the first scene, whilst the third scene provides an explanation of the second scene. Verse 18 elaborates on the response of the midpoint ('But the things that come out of a person's mouth come from the heart, and these defile them'), verse 20 concludes the response ('These are what defile a person; but eating with unwashed hands does not defile them), and refers back to the accusation of verse 2 ('They don't wash their hands before they eat'). Thus, the third scene creates a sense of unity between the first and second scenes, whilst confirming the main issue in the story.

The significant reference to the 'mouth' in the midpoint of the story should be recognised. In terms of zones of interaction with the world around, the ancient Mediterranean people considered one's mouth to function in the zone of self-expressive speech (Malina & Rohrbaugh 1992:56). As centre of his argument Matthew's Jesus contrasts the effect of food entering the mouth (which does not defile a person) with self-expressive speech that exits the mouth (which indeed defiles a person).

First scene: *Streitgespräch* between the Pharisees with the scribes and Jesus (Mt 15:1-9)

The first scene forms a typical *Streitgespräch* with the elements of challenge and riposte (Repschinski 2000:254). In honour and shame societies it was a common phenomenon to challenge the honour of an opponent and respond with an equal challenge in return (Malina & Rohrbaugh 1992:42). Such a challenge had to be played in public to reach its aim. The challenge of the Pharisees and scribes (v. 1-2) is countered by Jesus' twofold charge, namely that the Pharisees transgress God's command with their tradition (v. 3-6) and the claim Isaiah prophesied against them (v. 7-9).

Challenge

The challenge of the Pharisees and scribes consists of a setting, a charge and a reason for the charge, as depicted in Figure 2:

In the setting (v. 1), the hostility of the challenge is highlighted by the reference to the fact that the Pharisees and scribes came from Jerusalem. Jerusalem, not mentioned in the previous ten chapters,¹⁵ is associated with the home town of

14. In Matthew the Pharisees are usually depicted as disbelieving and hostile; the crowds as potential believers and neutral; and the disciples as believers and loyal.

15. In Matthew, Jerusalem is usually used in a hostile context: Herod and Jerusalem are disturbed when hearing about the new born King (Mt 2:1, 3); Jerusalem is the place where Jesus suffers and get killed (16:21; 20:17, 18); and Jerusalem kills the prophets and stones those sent to them (23:37). Although Jesus had a triumphal entrance into Jerusalem (Mt 21:1), the whole city is stirred and asks: 'Who is this?' (21:10). Matthew, nevertheless, mentions that people from Jerusalem, all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan came to be baptised by John (Mt 3:5), and that large crowds, including people from Jerusalem, followed Jesus (4:25). In the Sermon on the Mount, Jerusalem is also mentioned as a place where the Jews swear their oaths (Mt 5:33).

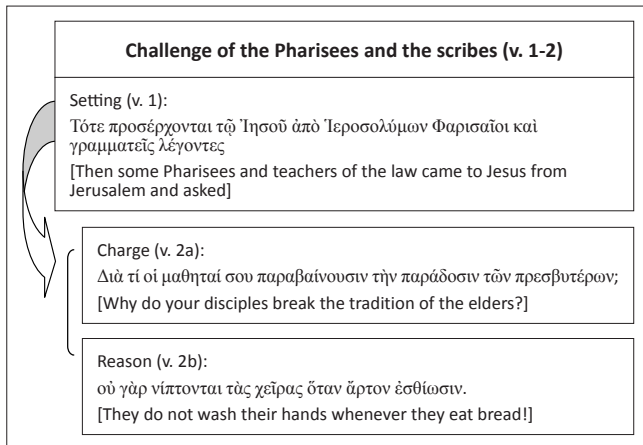


FIGURE 2: Setting, charge and reason for the challenge.

Jesus' opponents (Elliot 1977:462–469). Matthew mentions Pharisees and scribes as a united front opposing Jesus.¹⁶ The historic present form of the verb *προσέρχονται* [come], makes the coming particularly dramatic so that it probably refers to a semi-official delegation sent to test Jesus' faithfulness to the *Torah*, both written and oral (Osborne 2010:585; Turner 2008:378; Witherington 2006:295). France (2007:575) describes this as 'a foretaste of the confrontation to come'.

In the charge of the Pharisees and the scribes, the status of ἡ παράδοσις τῶν πρεσβυτέρων [the tradition of the elders]¹⁷ (v. 2a) is at stake. The *παράδοσις* [tradition] was a technical term referring to the collection of Jewish traditions. These traditions went beyond what was written in the *Torah* (Baumgarten 1987:66). These traditions probably refer to *massoret* (Davies & Allison 2004:520). Initially they were transmitted orally and then formalised in the *Mishnah* around the beginning of 200 CE (Baumgarten 1987:64; Davies & Allison 2004:520; Neusner 1994:5). In the time of Jesus, the tradition was still quite fluid and the use of such tradition to apply the *Torah* was regarded as quite innovative¹⁸ (Senior 1998:176). Schiffman (1994:280–281) remarks that during the late Second Temple Judaism 'sectarian law was a living, developing phenomenon constantly giving rise to new compilations of lists of laws'. After the destruction of the temple, the Pharisees and scribes felt themselves obliged to preserve these oral traditions (Neusner 2007:111).

The reason for the charge refers to the transgressing (*παραβαίνουσιν*¹⁹; [they transgress]) of the tradition of hand-washing (v. 2b). The tradition of hand-washing was more than a hygienic custom. It formed part of ceremonial and ritual cleansing. There is no commandment in the Hebrew

16. In Mark 7:1 the Pharisees seem to be already in place, while certain scribes came from Jerusalem.

17. In the Gospels, only Mark and Matthew use this word, and only in the context of this story.

18. Some rabbinic traditions indicate that the tradition was valued more than the written *Torah*: 'Greater stringency applies to the observance of the words of the scribes than to the observance of the works of the written Law' (m. Sanh. 11:3); and 'My son, be more careful in the observance of the words of the scribes than in the words of the *Torah* ... whoever transgresses any of the enactments of the Scribes incurs the penalty of death' (b. Eruv. 21b; Talbert 2010:188).

19. The verb *παραβαίνω* [transgress] is only used three times: twice in this context (v. 2, 3) and once to describe the act of Judas 'to go where he belongs' (Ac 1:25).

Bible concerning the washing of hands for ordinary meals. It seems that the Pharisees adopted the requirement set for priests before they ate consecrated food. The Pharisees also applied these requirements to themselves and all Jews, even when eating ordinary food²⁰ (Booth 1986:173; Carter 2000:316; Finklestein 1966:278; Hagner 1995:430; Neusner 1973:83; Witherington 2006:296). This tradition goes back as far as regulations imposed by the rabbi schools of Hillel and Shammai early in the 1st century CE (Hauck 1964:946–948). Neusner attests that the practice of hand-washing prevailed amongst Pharisees in the time of Jesus. He writes: 'What was the dominant trait of Pharisees before 70 C.E.? It was ... concern for the matters of rite, in particular, eating one's meals in a state of ritual purity as if one were a temple priest' (Neusner 1977:670). The tradition of hand-washing thus developed as an identity marker of the Pharisees. The Pharisees reasoned that there were many unclean objects that one would touch during a day. This would lead to unclean hands and when touching food with unclean hands would result in unclean food. When eating such unclean food, one would become unclean. The tradition therefore evolved that all Jews had to perform a ritual of hand-washing along with the blessing that preceded the eating of meals (*Mishnah*. Ber. 8:2–4). The *Yadayim*²¹ is a treatise of the *Mishnah* (ca. 200 CE) and the *Tosefta* (ca. 300 CE), dealing with the laws of hand-washing and their ritual impurity. The issue of hand-washing became so important that a whole tractate in the Babylonian Talmud (ca. 600 CE), the *Yadayim* [the Hands], was devoted to this. Although it is clear that the Pharisees observed traditions of hand-washing in the time of Jesus and when Matthew wrote his gospel, it is difficult to determine to what extent this developed legislation of *Yadayim*, as described in Rabbinic literature, was observed in the times of Jesus.

In verse 2 ὅταν [whenever] is inserted to describe the practice of Jesus' disciples. Eating with unwashed hands was not a single incident, but a customary procedure. This probably reflects a custom of the Matthean community, which was in conflict with the traditions of the elders (Repschinski 2000:156). This issue about the washing of hands before meals might be an example of the Matthean community breaking with Pharisaic traditions.

Riposte

In Matthew's story, Jesus responds to the accusation of the Pharisees and Sadducees in a twofold manner. First he

20. Mark 7:3 explains this habit: 'The Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they give their hands a ceremonial washing, holding to the tradition of the elders.' John 2:6 also implies such a custom: 'Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing.' It seems that this habit was widespread.

21. The treatise on the *Yadayim* is 11th in the order of *Tohorot* in most editions of the *Mishnah*, and is divided into four chapters, containing 22 paragraphs in all (Herr 2007:264). The first chapter deals with the quantity of water that is needed to wash hands when pouring it over them; the vessels from which the water may be poured over the hands; the kinds of water, which may not be used to cleanse the hands; and persons who may perform the act of manual ablution. The second chapter deals with how the water should be poured over the hands; the first and second washing and doubtful cases, which include whether the ablution was properly performed. Chapters 3 and 4 discuss the objects which make hands unclean with specific reference to the canonical books. According to this tractate everyone therefore had to eat everyday meals in a state of ritual purity as if one were a temple priest (Davies & Allison 2004:521). The Qumran-community required total immersion before a meal (1 QS.8-9; 5:13; CD 10:10-13; Newton 1985:26).

charges them with the fact that their tradition causes them to violate God's commandments (v.3-6) and secondly that Isaiah prophesied against their way of worship (v. 7-9).

Other than in Mark 7:8-9, Matthew does not open Jesus' riposte with reference to Isaiah 29:13, but with a counter argument that parallels the question posed by the Pharisees and the scribes (Repschinski 2000:159). As the Pharisees accused the disciples with the words, 'Why do your disciples break (παραβαίνουσιν) the tradition of the elders?' (v. 2), Jesus begins his response with 'And why do you break (παραβαίνετε) the command of God for the sake of your tradition?' (v. 3), using the same verb.

In the first part of the counter charge, the tradition (παράδοσις) of the Pharisees is contrasted in parallel form with the command of God (ἐντολή)²² and the Word of God (λόγος). This juxtaposition intensifies the contrast between God's commandments and manmade legislation:

διὰ τί καὶ ὑμεῖς [and why do you]

παραβαίνετε τὴν ἐντολὴν τοῦ θεοῦ διὰ τὴν παράδοσιν ὑμῶν
[break the command of God for the sake (because) of your tradition?] (v. 3)

ὁ γὰρ θεὸς εἶπεν [for God said]

τίμα τὸν πατέρα καὶ τὴν μητέρα [honour your father and mother]

καὶ ὁ καταλογῶν πατέρα ἢ μητέρα θανάτῳ τελευτάτω
[and anyone who curses their father or mother is to be put to death] (v. 4)

ἠκυρώσατε τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ διὰ τὴν παράδοσιν ὑμῶν
[thus you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition] (v. 6b)

Verses 3 and 6 have parallel phrases:

- παραβαίνετε (v. 3) parallels ἠκυρώσατε (v. 6b);
- τὴν ἐντολὴν τοῦ θεοῦ (v. 3) parallels τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ²³ (v. 6b); and
- the precise wording is repeated in both verses διὰ τὴν παράδοσιν ὑμῶν [for the sake (because²⁴) of your tradition] (v. 3 and 6b).

These parallel phrases make the same point. Jesus charges the Pharisees with the accusation that they break and nullify the command and Word of God, not 'despite your [their] tradition', but much harsher, 'for the sake (because) of your [their] tradition'. Whilst Mark 7:8 speaks of the tradition of people (τὴν παράδοσιν τῶν ἀνθρώπων), Matthew emphasises that it is 'your' tradition (παράδοσιν ὑμῶν). Implicitly the juxtaposition is not only between the Law and the tradition, but (more personal) also between God, the Pharisees and the

22.As in Mark 7:8 Matthew uses the word ἐντολή [command]. This noun occurs six times in Matthew (5:19; 15:3; 19:17; 22:36, 38, 40) referring to the commandments of the Law. Matthew uses νόμος to refer to the Law, which consists of different commandments (Mt 5:17, 18; 7:12; 11:13; 12:5; 22:36, 40).

23.Within this context 'of God' (τοῦ θεοῦ) in verses 3 and 6b is a subjective genitive referring to what God commanded and said.

24.The proposition διὰ is here used with the accusative (τὴν παράδοσιν). If used with the accusative, the meaning can be defined as 'through, on account of, by reason of, for the sake of, because of'. If used with the genitive, the meaning can be 'through, throughout, by the instrumentality of' (Blass & Debrunner 1961:119).

scribes. Matthew's Jesus thus argues that his disciples do not follow the tradition of the Pharisees, because the Pharisees do not follow the commandment of God (Repschinski 2000:159). Matthew's Jesus is clearly opposed to 'Dual Torah', an identity marker of the Pharisean Judaism, as portrayed here. This signifies a separation of the Matthean community of the observance of rabbinic traditions.

The parallel phrases form an *inclusio* of verses 4b-6a in which Jesus gives an example of how the tradition is used to break the command of God. The command of God is referred to as something that God said: ὁ γὰρ θεὸς εἶπεν [for God said] (v. 4a, 6b). The divine origin of the commandment is emphasised and contrasted with the manmade tradition. What God said cannot be compared to the tradition of people. Manmade commandments cannot substitute divine commandments. Morris (1992:394) comments about this Pharisean tradition: 'Their motives may possibly have been excellent, but the result was deplorable.'

This counter challenge probably reveals the rivalry between the Matthean community and Pharisean Judaism of their day about being the real keepers of God's Law. In their desire to meet the specific obligations of the Law, they engaged in competitive disputes as to what they meant. Each group claimed to be living according to the principles of the Torah, but then implied that others were not doing so (Dunn 2003:292).

In verse 5 Jesus elaborates on his previous statement and continues to contrast the commandment of God with the behaviour of the Pharisees. He refers to the fifth commandment ('Honour your father and your mother'; Ex 29:12) and a regulation ('Let the one be put to death who speaks evil of their father and mother'; Ex 21:17), which enforces the seriousness of breaking the fifth commandment. Τίμα [honour] is an emphatic present meaning that one has to honour one's parents at all times, which includes caring for them financially (Derret 1977:112-117). From the Gospel accounts it seems as if the Pharisees introduced the tradition that children could dedicate the money, with which they were supposed to support their parents, as a gift to God. The *Mishnah Ned.* 9.1 refers to such Corban vows and the honour one owes to father and mother.²⁵ Whilst performing this cultic activity, they neglect their moral duty to care for their parents. Bailey (2000:193-209) explains the Jewish backgrounds to this misuse of the Corban and how this led to a growing antagonism against the Pharisees.

Jesus, however, regards the written Law of Moses as the commandment of God. Several phrases are therefore used to refer to these stipulations of the Torah: the command of God (ἐντολή), the word of God (λόγος), and what God said (ὁ γὰρ θεὸς εἶπεν). In contrast to these, the tradition (παράδοσις) of the Pharisees is considered as an infringement. As a result of their tradition, they legally invalidate the Word of God (ἠκυρώσατε τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ).

25.Though Corban vows were performed in the time of Jesus and when Matthew wrote his gospel, it is difficult to determine to what extent it was done at that stage.

Ironically the παράδοσις [tradition] was intended to form a fence around the written *Torah* (Hagner 1995:430; Osborne 2010:585), but Jesus accuses the Pharisees of the fact that this very fence causes them (διὰ τὴν παράδοσιν ὑμῶν; [for the sake of your tradition]) to break God's commandments. There was much dispute in ancient times about the status of this tradition, even beyond the New Testament. There was a variety of viewpoints amongst the Pharisees, Saducees and the Qumran community on purity issues (Bowley 2000:873). The more conservative Sadducees opposed these traditions, arguing that:

the Pharisees had passed down to the people certain regulations handed down by former generations and not recorded in the law of Moses²⁶ [and] for [this] reason they are rejected by the Sadducean group (Josephus, *Ant.* 13.10.6).²⁷

According to some of the Sadducees, the παράδοσις led to unnecessary self-denial (*Ps. Clem. Recog.* 1. 53–54). As the Sadducees did not believe in an afterlife, they regarded this burden and loss of pleasure as useless and a Pharisaic pursuit of an illusion (Baumgarten 1987:70). The composers of the Dead Sea Scrolls also criticised these traditions 'Teachers of lies ... have schemed a devilish scheme ... to exchange the law engraved on my heart by Thee for the smooth things (which they speak²⁸; 1QH 4.14–15). The Pharisees were sensitive to such criticism, as they often referred to the 'tradition of the fathers'²⁹ or the 'tradition of the elders'³⁰ (Josephus, *Ant.* 10.51 and 13.408). They attempted to give their traditions a reliable pedigree, as the fathers and elders were regarded as the leaders of the nation. As family traditions were widely respected in antiquity, the Pharisees indicated that the tradition of the fathers and elders was more than just that of a school.³¹ It therefore seems that the critique on the tradition in verses 1–20, at least in part, reflects conventional criticism³² against the Pharisean tradition (Carter 2000:315).

Jesus enforces his criticism of the tradition with a second charge (v. 7–9). He addresses the Pharisees with the negative label of hypocrites (ὑποκριταί; v. 7). Such negative labelling, referring to stereotypes was common practice in a challenge and riposte setting (Malina & Rohrbauch 1992:98). People were not known for their individual personalities, but by social categories and groups they belonged to. Stereotypes could be either positive or negative. When Matthew's Jesus

26. Baumgarten (1987:70-71) points out that modern scholarship increasingly observes that the laws in the *Mishnah* often bears little relation to the written *Torah*.

27. When they were in power under Hyrcanus, the Sadducees even punished the Jews who followed the παράδοσις of the Pharisees (Josephus, *Ant.* 13.10.6), but when the Pharisees came back into power under Alexandra, they reinstated the tradition (Josephus, *Ant.* 13.6.2; see Baumgarten 1987:69).

28. In the Dead Sea Scrolls the speakers of smooth things are identified as the Pharisees (Davies & Allison 2004:520.)

29. In Galatians 1:14 Paul also refers to the extreme zeal for 'the tradition of the fathers', which he earlier had.

30. Matthew 15:3 and Mark 7:3 use the term *tradition of the elders*.

31. By making their tradition priestly, they took it further than what is plausible, as there was also competition between the Pharisees and the priests (Baumgarten 1987:73).

32. As could be expected, the Church Fathers followed the Gospels in criticising the traditions of the Pharisees (e.g. Just, *Dial.* 38; Clem. Al. *Strom.* 6.7.58.2; Iren. Adv. Haer. 4.12.1; Klijn & Reinink 1973:220-223).

uses the negative stereotype of 'hypocrites' to label the Pharisees, he seriously challenges their credibility in the community. Jesus states that they pretend to be different from who they really are. They pretend to worship God, but they fail in this regard. Jesus claims that Isaiah actually prophesied about their attitude, as the prophet of old raised a similar complaint against the religious authorities of his (Isaiah's) day. The addressees of Matthew 15 would all agree that the people Isaiah denounces were hypocrites. Based on what he previously argued (v. 3–6) about the Pharisees, Matthew's Jesus now states that the Pharisees are just like the people in Isaiah's days – hypocrites too. Jesus refers to Isaiah 29:13 providing two reasons as to why the Pharisees should be considered as hypocrites:

ὑποκριταί [hypocrites] (v. 7)

Ὁ λαὸς οὗτος τοῖς χεῖλεσίν με τιμᾷ, ἡ δὲ καρδία αὐτῶν πόρρω ἀπέχει ἀπ' ἐμοῦ
[This people honour me with their lips, but their heart is far from me] (v. 8)

μάτην δὲ σέβονται με, διδάσκοντες διδασκαλίας ἐντάλματα ἀνθρώπων.
[They worship me in vain, teaching mere human commandments as teachings] (v. 9)

The first reason is that they pretend to worship God, but they do so with their lips and not with their hearts (v. 8). Osborne (2010:587) interprets this statement: 'a detailed *Torah* tradition without heart commitment is irrelevant before God'. According to the traditional Mediterranean thought, this implies that they were behaving with the zone of speech, but without the zone of emotion-fused thought. Mediterranean people thought of a person in terms of zones of interaction with the world around, namely the zones of emotion-fused thought which involves the activity of the eyes and heart (sight, insight, loving, valuing, etc.), the zone of self-expressive speech, which involves the activity of the mouth³³ and ears (speaking, hearing, etc.) and the zone of purposeful action, which involves the hands, fingers and legs (touching, walking, accomplishing, etc.; Malina & Rohrbauch 1992:56). Human activity could be described in terms of a particular zone of activity or a combination of these zones. Jesus charges the Pharisees that only one zone of activity is involved when they honour God, whilst the heart is not involved. One's heart was considered as one's religious centre which forms the root of religious life and ethical conduct (Walker 2000:563). It refers to the affective centre or desire producer of one's being and the seat of thought and understanding (Behm 1978:611–613). The Pharisees' hearts were lacking in their honour to God.

The second reason why Jesus regards their honour of God superficial is that they adhere to precepts of human origin and not of the Law God has given. They worship God by teaching mere human commandments as teachings (v. 9). In

33. The Isaiah quotation refers to 'lips' and Jesus' argument in verse 8 is that the 'lip-zone' when speaking, is detached from the 'heart-zone' of their personalities. Significantly in verses 10 and 18, Jesus indeed links what exits the 'mouth' with the heart, but not food that enters through the mouth, as it goes to the stomach and then exits the body (v. 10).

this prophecy, Isaiah warns his people against the vanity of their worship if it is based on the teachings of people. They try to do this with their own manmade tradition by which they replace the commandments of God. The alliteration of διδάσκοντες διδασκαλίας emphasises the importance of ‘teaching teachings’. Matthew’s Jesus defines the ‘tradition of the elders’ (ἡ παράδοσις τῶν πρεσβυτέρων; v. 2, 3) as human ‘teaching of teachings’. Teaching must be based on God’s truth, not on human ideas. Matthew’s Jesus clearly rejects this oral tradition.

The Pharisees and scribes do not respond to Jesus. The *Streitgespräch* ends with Jesus victoriously having the final say.

From the first scene the following conclusions can be drawn regarding the Law: this scene clearly pronounces the Pharisees’ concern for purity and the observance of their tradition. According to them, the ritual of hand-washing was necessary to ensure purity. Jesus opposes their view by contrasting manmade traditions with the Word and commandments of God. With biting irony he charges them with the fact that their tradition causes people to nullify God’s Law. They are hypocrites, as they pretend to be honoring God by observing their tradition, but by doing this they are actually doing the opposite.

This *Streitgespräch* reveals the rivalry between Judaism of the ‘Dual Torah’ and the Matthean community. The Pharisees in the story represent the Judaists who valued the oral Law as important as the written Law. The story describes the oral Law as manmade traditions in contrast to the written Law as the Word of God. Based on the performance of Jesus, he and thus Matthew and his community, distance themselves from these oral traditions and regard themselves as faithful to the real *Torah*.

Second scene: Axiom of Jesus before the crowds (Mt 15:10–11)

The next scene of the story is introduced with Jesus turning to the crowds (v. 10). Having rebuked the Pharisees, he continues by stating an axiom to the crowd. For Matthew’s Jesus, the Pharisees with the scribes and the Jewish crowds are different kind of groups who are treated differently. Pharisees and scribes are usually depicted as hostile and disbelieving (cf. Mt 9:34; 12:2, 14), whilst the crowds are considered as neutral. They are potential believers, but can also be easily convinced by the Jewish leaders to reject Jesus.³⁴

In this second scene Jesus addresses the crowds on the issue of defilement (v. 10–11). The crowd being potential believers, he urges them Ακούετε καὶ συνίετε [listen and understand] (v. 10). If they only listen, they will remain the crowd, but

34. At several occasions Matthew mentions that Jesus saw and addressed the crowd (Mt 5:1; 13:2, 34), that he felt compassion towards them (9:36; 14:14, 19), how the crowds followed Jesus (4:25; 8:1; 14:13), and that they were deeply impressed and amazed by his teaching (7:28; 9:33). However, the crowd was also persuaded by the chief priests and the elders to ask Jesus to be crucified (Mt 27:20).

if they understand, they will become disciples. In Matthew ‘understanding’ is the distinctive response of disciples (Mt 13:13–15, 19, 23, 51; cf. France 2007:582). What Jesus then tells them in a contrasting parallel axiomatic statement (v. 11), forms the midpoint of the story. He postulates this principle as the basis for further arguments against the viewpoint of the Pharisees:

οὐ τὸ εἰσερχόμενον εἰς τὸ στόμα κοινοῖ τὸν ἄνθρωπον,
[What goes into someone’s mouth does not defile him]
ἀλλὰ τὸ ἐκπορευόμενον ἐκ τοῦ στόματος τοῦτο κοινοῖ τὸν ἄνθρωπον
[but what comes out of his mouth, that is what defiles him].

On the one hand the contrast lies between what is entering and exiting a person’s mouth (εἰς τὸ στόμα versus ἐκ τοῦ στόματος), and on the other hand, between material and spiritual references.³⁵ Matthew omits Mark’s statement that Jesus made all food clean (Mk 7:19). It seems as if Matthew intentionally refrains from making a statement about the overthrowing of food laws as such (e.g. Booth 1986:221; Davies & Allison 2004:527; Hagner 1995:437; Luz 2001:332). Matthew, with his mainly Jewish-Christian audience, might have been more hesitant to explicitly include Mark’s comment. Osborne (2010:588) and Witherington (2006:296) conversely argue that Mark’s comment is surely implied in Matthew’s text. According to them, Matthew merely shortened the text as he often does. Whatever the case, the dispute in the story is not about food laws as such, but about the oral traditions of the Pharisees versus the written *Torah*. The oral tradition of hand-washing was intended to prevent impurity to enter the body, and Matthew’s Jesus distances himself from this tradition.

However, a second dimension about Jesus’ understanding of the Law is added in his statement, namely that what people eat, even if their food is contaminated with unwashed hands, cannot defile (κοινοῖ)³⁶ them. To the contrary, defilement is caused by the moral intention of a person. Jesus argues that true defilement does not come about as a result of consuming possibly contaminated food, as defilement is a moral issue (Carlston 1968–69:75).³⁷ Words coming from the mouth, results from the self-expressive zone of a person and is self-revealing (Malina & Rohrbauch 1992:56). Words reveal the inner morality of a person, and thus show that the whole person is unclean. This relates to a remark Jesus made earlier in the text: ‘For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of’ (Mt 12:34). Morris (1992:395) makes a fitting comment: ‘Words that go out of the mouth are more likely to indicate defilement than food that goes in.’ Verse 11 can somehow be regarded as a *crux interpretum* for the understanding of the

35. Using tradition historical and legal historical arguments Booth (1986:214) suggests the *logion* of the historical Jesus to be: ‘There is nothing outside a man which culturally defiles him as much as the things coming from a man ethically defile him.’ According to Booth, it is credible that Jesus would depreciate external cultic purity in favour of internal ethical purity.

36. The use of the verb ‘κοινοῖ’, is significant. The word usually means ‘make common’ or ‘share’, but the meaning is transferred to ‘defile’. The explanation of this seems to lie in the distinction between ‘holy’ and ‘general’ in ritual terms. What is holy is suitable for ritual use and should be distinguished from what is only useful for general use. To ‘defile’ something, is to make it ceremonially unclean (Davies & Allison 2004:527; Morris 1992:395).

37. In Matthew 23:23–26 Jesus emphasises the importance of internal rather than external purity.

law, because Matthews' Jesus uses irony to expose untrue human piety and external purity by comparing it with true piety and internal purity.³⁸

According to rabbinic writings, there was also an opinion amongst rabbis that God would once again permit the eating of all flesh in the Messianic age (*Midr, Teh.* on Ps 146:7). Based on passages like Numbers 14:21: 'all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord', and Zechariah 14:21: 'Every pot in Jerusalem and Judah will be holy to the Lord Almighty, and all who come to sacrifice will take some of the pots and cook in them', they assumed that complete purity and total sanctification will once again exist according to these biblical references (Davies & Allison 2004:527; Talbert 2010:188). However, as Matthew omits Mark's reference that Jesus declared all foods clean (Mk 7:19b), he limits the issue to the tradition of hand-washing. Matthew's Jesus explicitly rejects the ritual of hand-washing without making any particular remark on food laws. In the Matthean community's conflict with the Pharisean Judaism the status of the oral traditions apparently was a main issue. Food laws as such, did not form part of the debate.

Third scene: Jesus teaching his disciples (Mt 15:12–20)

In the third scene, Jesus turns to his disciples, his own group. Jesus responds to their question about him having upset the Pharisees:³⁹ 'Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this?' (v. 12).⁴⁰ Jesus responds to the group of people who are regarded as believers and people who are supposed to understand. Jesus provides two explanations (v. 13-14, 16-19) and a conclusion (v. 20), which ties the story together. In this performative speech,⁴¹ Jesus not only passively describes the position of the Pharisees and purity, but changes the way his disciples perceive their religious and social reality.

The first explanation (v. 13–14) does not occur in Mark. This addition is noteworthy as Matthew usually shortens Mark's version. Once Matthew adds to Mark's version, it signifies an issue the evangelist wants to emphasise. Matthew's Jesus uses two metaphors: about plants planted by God and about blind guides. These two metaphors are separated by an exhortation to leave the Pharisees

38. Similar sentiments about defilement, namely in a moral rather than physical sense, are found in extra-biblical literature. Manader (*frag.* 540) writes: 'All that brings defilement comes from within'; Philo (*Spec. Leg.* 3:209) remarks: 'For the unjust and impious man is in the truest sense unclean'; and Sextus (*Sent.* 110): 'a person is not defiled by the food and drink he consumes, but by those acts which result from an evil character' (cf. Davies & Allison 2004:526-527). Jesus was therefore not the only one in this time to utter such critique.

39. The scribes, as referred to in verse 1, are not mentioned here. Matthew's remark that the disciples were concerned about offending the Pharisees is unique to Matthew and somewhat odd, as the Pharisees are usually portrayed as the opponents of Jesus and his disciples. In Mark the disciples merely ask for an explanation. This is the only occurrence of such concern for Pharisees in the Matthean Gospel.

40. The Pharisees' honour was impaired and the disciples, living in an honour and shame society, realised this (cf. Malina & Rohrbaugh 1992:42).

41. Performative utterances are defined in the *Speech acts theory which refers to statements that change the (social) reality they are describing.* The contemporary use of the term goes back to Austin's definition of performative language (Austin 2005).

(ἀφετε αὐτούς; [leave them]; v. 14). Matthew's Jesus orders his disciples, and thus Matthew and his community, to part from the Pharisees and their teaching. Jesus tells his disciples that the Pharisees are like plants not planted by his 'heavenly Father' that will be weeded in judgement (v. 13).⁴² When Jesus refers to God as 'my Father', he not only indicates his special relation with God, but also his authority to critique the Pharisees (Witherington 2006:298). Furthermore, Jesus denotes the Pharisees as blind guides misleading other blind people (v. 14). With irony and wordplay Jesus remarks that the Pharisees regard themselves as guides for the blind,⁴³ but they are actually blind themselves. There is no use in arguing with them, as they are not able to see and discern the truth, that is, they are not able to understand. Jesus argues that whilst the Pharisees regard themselves as teachers of the Law, they are blind for God's true law (Osborne 2010:590). Even worse, they increase the blindness of the people they guide. The ancient Mediterranean people believed that one could see, because light proceeded from their hearts through their eyes (Malina & Rohrbaugh 1992:64; Viljoen 2009). On the other hand, with blind people darkness proceeded from their hearts through their eyes, indicating that there was something wrong in their hearts. Darkness was not considered as the absence of light, but as an objective evil reality. This criticism anticipates the diatribe of Matthew 23:16 and 24 where the scribes and Pharisees are also denoted as 'blind guides' (Evans 2012:301).

This interpolated explanation probably reflects the tension between the Matthean community and the Pharisaic Judaism of their time. The remark that the disciples should leave the Pharisees, could refer to the separation between church and synagogue (Gundry 1994:307). The issue at stake is not limited to the tradition of hand-washing, but it is about the status of the Pharisees and their teachings in general. The community is warned not to be misled by the Pharisees and rather to go their own way.

In his second explanation (v. 16–19), Jesus responds to the request of Peter to explain the parable (τὴν παραβολὴν⁴⁴) to them (v. 15). Jesus' response includes all the material from v. 11–14, but the argument about what goes into the mouth and what exits it, is mainly intended. Jesus responds with two questions: 'Are you also still without understanding?' (v. 16) and 'Don't you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body?' (Mt 5:17).

42. The comparison of the plants reminds the reader of the parable of the wheat and the weeds (Mt 13:24-30). In verse 16 Jesus warns that the Pharisees and the scribes run the risk of being identified as bad seeds, as plants not planted by God and be rooted up on judgement day (Evans 2012:301). Evidently Isaiah 60:21 ('Your people shall all be righteous ... the shoot that I planted, the work of my hands') resonates in these comparisons. Jesus' warning stands in contrast to rabbinic interpretation of Isaiah 60 that finds in it the assurance of the salvation of every Israelite: 'All Israelites have a share in the world to come, as is said: "Then all your people will be righteous ... the branch of my planting"' (*m. Sanh.* 10.1).

43. In Isaiah 42:6-7, Israel is called to be a light for the Gentiles and to open the eyes of the blind (cf. Wis. 18:4). According to Paul, the Jewish people considered themselves to be a 'guide for the blind, a light for those who are in the dark' (Rm 2:19).

44. On the surface level it seems as if the παραβολή would refer to the parables in verses 13-14 of the planting of blind guides. However, the word should rather be interpreted as an analogy with a broader reference referring to all the material in verses 11-14.

With these two questions the ignorance (ἄσύνετοί) and lack of understanding (οὐ νοεῖτε) of the disciples are expressed.

In the first question (v. 16), Jesus expresses his disappointment that the disciples, after all he taught and showed them, are still ignorant (ἄσύνετοί). Earlier in the text Jesus implies that his disciples are 'teachers of the law' (Mt 13:52), but now they fail to comprehend his charge that the Pharisees teach the law incorrectly. This remark made by Matthew's Jesus, is probably intended as a warning to the Matthean community about their lack of discernment about the role of the Pharisees and their traditions in their community.

In the second question Jesus elaborates on the statement he made to the crowds. Jesus' response is once again given in parallel form with contrasting phrases:

πᾶν τὸ εἰσπορευόμενον εἰς τὸ στόμα εἰς τὴν κοιλίαν χωρεῖ καὶ εἰς ἀφεδρῶνα ἐκβάλλεται
[Whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body] (v. 17).

τὰ δὲ ἐκπορευόμενα ἐκ τοῦ στόματος ἐκ τῆς καρδίας ἐξέρχεται κακείνα κοινὰ τὸν ἄνθρωπον.
[But the things that come out of a person's mouth come from the heart, and these defile them] (v. 18).

The first part of the parallelism explains what does not defile a person (referring to the first half of verse 11), whilst the second explains what does (referring to the second half of v. 11). The contrast lies between what goes into the mouth (εἰς), and what comes out of it (ἐκ). Things entering the mouth do not defile a person. What enters the stomach is expelled again. It does not enter the heart (only the stomach) and therefore cannot defile a person (Luz 2001:333). However, the inner thoughts of the heart define a person's integrity. Similar sentiments are found in Philo's writings, which state that impurity is primarily injustice and godlessness (Spec. leg. 3.208–9). The true character of a hypocrite (v. 7) is a person who pretends to be religious by performing outward ceremonies, but whose inner person is defiled. This explanation by Jesus must be interpreted according to biological and anthropological views of the 1st century Mediterranean people (Malina & Rohrbauch 1992:56, 110). They considered that stuff one puts in one's mouth, will eventually be expelled. However one's heart and mouth, when speaking, represent two zones of interaction with the outside world. The speaking mouth forms part of self-expression and is self-revealing. The heart forms the centre of the emotion-fused zone that involves understanding, choosing, loving, thinking and valuing. Jesus argues that what one speaks, reveals the centre of one's emotion-fused zone.

In contrast to external food (food that may be contaminated with unwashed hands), which does not defile a person, Jesus continues to talk about things that come out of the mouth, which indeed defile a person or exhibit the inner defilement of a person.

The evils in the heart are then listed.⁴⁵ Lists of vices and virtues are common in Hellenistic Judaism (e.g. Wisdom of Solomon, 14:25–26; Philo, *Sacr.* 32; 4 Macc. 1:26–27; 1QS 4.8–11) and in the New Testament (e.g. in Rm 1:29–31; 1 Cor 6:9–10; 2 Cor 12:20; Charles 2000:1252–1257). Matthew starts with evil thoughts, which can lead to all kinds of evil deeds (ἐκ γὰρ τῆς καρδίας ἐξέρχονται διαλογισμοὶ πονηροί; [for from the heart comes all evil thoughts]). What is pure or impure extends from what the person says or does.⁴⁶ Matthew's Jesus thus links cleanness with integrity. Integrity is revealed in a person's deeds. Jesus describes these deeds based on the second table of the Decalogue (as the lists in 1 Cor 5:9–10; 1 Tm 9–10). These commandments follow immediately after the 5th commandment, which was under discussion when Jesus responded to the Pharisees and scribes (v. 4): murders⁴⁷ (6th), adulteries and fornications (7th), thefts (8th), false testimonies and blasphemies⁴⁸ (9th). Jesus points out that impurity does not come from overlooking some ceremonial physical regulation, but from one's innermost being (Loader 1997:220; Morris 1992:389). Personal sin, and not eating with unwashed hands, is what defiles a person. This signifies a shift from cultic purity (hand-washing ceremonies and the corban) towards moral purity.⁴⁹

In his conclusion, Jesus refers back to the issue of eating with unwashed hands stated in verse 2 and gives the final verdict. He specifically applies the principle stated in verse 11 to the issue of hand-washing. The ritual of hand-washing does not ensure true purity. Jesus challenges the traditions of the Pharisees and focuses on a person's attitude. Jesus' teaching discards the idea that human beings are pure in themselves, and that they only have to keep away from the impurities from outside to remain pure. Evil is in the innermost part of a human from where it proceeds to the outside.

What therefore matters above all is the purity of one's heart. Purity of heart was a fundamental teaching of the prophets (e.g. Is 1:12–17; Senior 1998:178). This correlates to the moral instruction of Matthew 5:8 ('Blessed are the pure in heart').

Conclusion

The story of v. 1–20 provides yet another scene in the overall picture of Matthew's Jesus and the *Torah*. It provides an explanation of the relationship between Matthew's Jesus and the tradition of the Pharisees and the Law of Moses. The

45. Didache 5.1 contains a part of Matthew's vice list and hence is probably dependent on Matthew.

46. This remark probably harks back to Mt 12:34: 'You brood of vipers! How can you speak good things, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks' (Evans 2012:302). What comes out of one's mouth is what defiles a person.

47. Matthew states all the vices in plural form (φόνοι, μοιχεῖαι, πορνεῖαι, κλοπαί, ψευδομαρτυρίαι, βλασφημίαι), referring to the multiplicity of evil deeds that can be associated with such terms.

48. It is significant that Matthew adds blasphemy (βλασφημίαι), which is not found in Mark's list. Its inclusion was most probably prompted by the experience of slander and blasphemy that the Matthean community had to endure from the other Jewish communities.

49. This shift is also recognisable in Matthew's reference to Hosea 6:6, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice' in his Gospel. This reference does not occur in one of the other Gospels. Matthew does this twice: when the Pharisees object that Jesus eats with tax collectors and sinners (Mt 9:13), and when the Pharisees object that his disciples pick some heads of grain to eat on the Sabbath (12:2).

basic matter in this scene is that Jesus contrasts the tradition of the Pharisees with the written *Torah*. Whilst Matthew's Jesus makes no explicit remark on food laws (as in Mark's version), he rejects the tradition of the Pharisees on the hand-washing ritual. He does not oppose the Mosaic Law, but the Pharisaic oral tradition.

In this story, two issues regarding the observance of the Law are accentuated. Firstly, the Law given by God is contrasted with the regulations made by the Pharisees. Several words and phrases are used to refer to the Law as given by God: the command of God (ἐντολή), the Word of God (λόγος) and what God said (ὁ γὰρ θεὸς εἶπεν). In contrast to these, the tradition (παράδοσις) of the Pharisees is mentioned as regulations made by humans. They are teaching teachings of human rules (διδάσκοντες διδασκαλίας ἐντάλματα ἀνθρώπων). Although the tradition was intended to prevent that infringement of the Law of God takes place, Jesus accuses the Pharisees of letting the opposite happen. Jesus puts it very strong: Not despite of adding their tradition to the *Torah*, but because of this addition (διὰ τὴν παράδοσιν), they break the Law of God.

The second issue relates to the locus and origin of impurity and this is illustrated with reference to the tradition of hand-washing. The idea behind the hand-washing ritual is that the locus of impurity lies outside a person. Accordingly, impurity can enter a person from outside through the mouth. A person should avoid taking in impurities by observing cultic practices such as hand-washing before eating. Jesus discards this kind of thinking. The locus of impurity lies in the heart – the innermost part of a person. One's heart is considered as the affective centre or desire producer of one's being. From an evil heart, all kinds of evil deeds emerge, but Jesus urges his disciples to seek a pure heart. Earlier in the Gospel Jesus told his disciples: 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God' (Mt 5:8). Jesus replaces the Pharisean emphasis on cultic purity with moral purity. Followers of Jesus should be concerned about keeping their hearts clean and not about the threat of impurity from the outside world. From an impure heart all kinds of evil deeds emerge. Human beings are not controlled by external codes of conduct, but by that which emerges from their inner hearts.

Matthew tells this story to inform his audience of this dispute between Jesus, the Pharisees and the scribes (on the first level of the story), but also to form their identity (on the second level). Several devices can be recognised, which Matthew employs to define his community and distinguish them from outsiders.

The Matthean community should identify themselves with the disciples in the story. Commitment to Jesus and his teachings form the central focus of their identity. Jesus, as the Son of God, should be revered as having the authority to interpret the Law and to critique the Pharisees. As his disciples, the community is not supposed to be ignorant or lack understanding of Jesus' teaching. Jesus' performative teaching is intended to convince his disciples and, per implication, the Matthean community.

They should comprehend the teachings of Jesus as the ultimate interpretation of the *Torah* and adhere to it. They should reject the oral tradition of the Pharisees and their traditional interpretation of the *Torah*, as it poses a threat to the observance of the written Law of God. This story implies an estrangement of the Matthean community from Judaism of the 'Dual *Torah*' that considered the memorised tradition equally as important as the written *Torah*. The community should expect to be confronted because of their loyalty towards Jesus and their negation of the oral tradition. Whilst the oral tradition attends to external purity, the moral behaviour of Matthew's community should be governed by inner purity. The community should realise that religious activities, performed without heartfelt commitment towards God, are worthless.

In the story the two outsider groups are the Pharisees (with the scribes) and the crowds.

The Pharisees (with the scribes) are portrayed as the opponents of Jesus. This outsider group somehow reflects the people who challenge the Matthean community because of their loyalty towards Jesus. These outsiders interpret the *Torah* according to the tradition of the Pharisees. They could also be identified with those who confront the community for their rejection of the duality of the *Torah*. These outsiders are labelled as people unable to understand the teachings of Jesus. They strictly perform formal religious rituals, but without heartfelt commitment to God. They are also labelled as hypocrites who pretend to honour God, but who ultimately fail in doing so. They perform cultic ceremonies, but neglect moral duties. They are depicted as blind guides who mislead others with their teachings. Although they attempt to improve their observance of the Law by ways of the tradition, they actually nullify the Word of God in this way. For this delusion they will be judged on judgement day.

The other outsider group is the crowds. The crowds probably reflect Jewish people or gentiles who stand neutral and who do not yet have convictions about Jesus. For Matthew the mission to Israel and the gentiles has to continue. They are potential believers. Jesus and his teachings can be proclaimed to them. If they listen, they can be brought to understanding. Whilst the Matthean community proclaimed Jesus to neutral outsiders, they are reminded that these people should have the opportunity to listen and be brought to the understanding of Jesus' teachings rather than that of the Judaism of the dual *Torah* as presented by the Pharisees.

From this story it seems that both the Matthean community as the Pharisean movement with whom they interacted in their time were much concerned about the correct interpretation of the *Torah*. It seems that the Pharisaic movement held some attraction for and influence on members of the society. This story warns the society against the Pharisaic movement. They are labeled as hypocrites and blind guides that would lead the blind into a pit. The story proposes the teaching of Jesus to be the true interpretation of the *Torah*. People with

insight and understanding should realise this. It seems as if the objection of the opponents was directed against customary practices of the Matthean community. Matthew counters their objection by arguing that his community is more faithful to the commandments of God. He argues that the traditions of the Pharisees and the scribes are opposed to the Word of God. He claims that the greater faithfulness of his community is based on the authority of Jesus. He describes Jesus as the superior interpreter of the *Torah*.

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