

How to Recognize the Spiritually Blind

International Bible Lesson

Matthew 15:1-20

Sunday, May 18, 2014

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“Then the disciples approached and said to him, ‘Do you know that the Pharisees took offense when they heard what you said?’” (Matthew 15:12—KJV).

“Then the disciples approached and said to Jesus, ‘Do you know that the Pharisees took offense when they heard what you said?’” (Matthew 15:12—NRSV).

The Pharisees considered themselves the most astute leaders in Judea. The only person to seriously challenge them was a mere carpenter’s son, or so they supposed. After Jesus spoke with them, they made no secret of the fact that Jesus offended them. Therefore, Jesus told His disciples that not all religious leaders have been set apart by God to do God’s work or teach God’s word. Eventually, God would remove them from their place. Jesus also said that some leaders are spiritually blind. Based on Jesus’ recent encounter with these offended Pharisees, the Bible shows how to recognize those who are spiritually blind. First, by their interpretations and for the sake of their traditions, they “make void the word of God” (Matthew 15:6). Second, they may seem to honor God by what they say, “but their hearts are far from God” (Matthew 15:8). Third, they teach human precepts or rules as though they were the doctrines or commands of God that everyone must believe and obey (Matthew 15:9). Those who make void the word of God, become increasingly blind and they mislead the spiritually blind (those who prefer human philosophies and traditions to the doctrines of the Bible). Jesus told His followers how to interact with the spiritually blind, “Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind. And if one blind person guides another, both will fall into a pit” (Matthew 15:14). Since His followers could not help them, they needed to “let them alone.” Perhaps after the spiritually blind have fallen into enough pits, they will learn the wisdom of living according to the Bible.

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Thinking Further

1. What teachings from the Bible did the Pharisees accuse Jesus’ disciples of breaking? Explain your answer.

2. What did Jesus accuse the Pharisees of doing?

3. What commandment of God did Jesus accuse them of breaking? Why do you think He chose that commandment?

4. In what ways do people make void the law of God? In what ways do people make void the word of God?

5. Who (or what kind of people) are Jesus’ followers to leave alone? Why might Jesus have advised this response by His followers?