

**Confusing Man's Traditions with God's Commandments, Part 1**

Scripture: Matthew 14:34-15:9

Code: 2311

This morning, as we open again the Word of God, we find ourselves in Matthew 14-15. I invite you to open the Word of God with me to this passage. One of the supreme statements of God's will is expressed in Exodus 20:7. The very familiar statement there is this, "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain."

We all know that command, and have heard it many times if we've been raised in a Christian environment. We've heard it said so often that we are not to take the Lord's name in vain, but we may not fully understand what that means. The concept of 'name' has to do with person, character, nature, essence, who someone is. Therefore, we are not to take God, in the fullness of who He is, and treat Him in a vain way, or an empty, irreverent, impious, insincere, phony, fraudulent manner.

Not taking the Lord's name in vain, then, is not limited to cursing or something like that, but it means to treat God with irreverence, superficiality, insincerity, or phoniness, or to bring to God empty worship, hypocritical worship or honor. Someone has said frankly that God's name is taken in vain more often in the church than outside of it, where people come and offer empty worship with their needless repetition, empty praise-words, singing without thought of God, praying with indifference, hearing the Word and never applying it - all of this is empty worship, phony, hypocritical. Such worship is damnable, condemned in the Word of God.

It is not only in our day that this is condemned, but in days past as well. In fact, if we go back in the history of Israel to the prophet Isaiah, and look at Isaiah 1:13, we read this. "Bring no more futile sacrifices; incense is an abomination to Me. The New Moons, the Sabbaths, and the calling of assemblies -- I cannot endure iniquity and the sacred meeting. Your New Moons and your appointed feasts My soul hates; they are a trouble to Me, I am weary of bearing them. When you spread out your hands, I will hide My eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood."

In other words, all of those things which God had ordained - the feasts, festivals, occasions, ceremonies, sacrifices - He said, "I don't want any more of those things because your hearts aren't right." Verse 16 says, "Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, rebuke the oppressor; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow. 'Come now, and let us reason together,' says the LORD, 'Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall

be as wool."

In other words, God wants to cleanse your hearts, and to wash you on the inside; He will not otherwise tolerate your empty, vain worship. At the end of Isaiah, you basically see the same thing. In fact, this entire prophecy is bracketed by a call for true worship. God says in the last chapter that He has made everything, but He still looks for one thing. In all that He has made, there is one thing He still wants: "I look for one who is poor and of a humble spirit who trembles at My words." Then He indicts them for their false religion. "He who kills a bull is as if he slays a man; he who sacrifices a lamb, as if he breaks a dog's neck; he who offers a grain offering, as if he offers swine's blood; he who burns incense, as if he blesses an idol."

In other words, "It's all meaningless because your hearts are so perverted." In verse 3, it says, "Their soul delights in their abominations." In verse 5, he says, "Hear the word of the LORD, you who tremble at His word." God wants genuine worshipers. The prophet Amos, in chapter 5, verses 21-27, that whole section says, "I don't want any more feasts, festivals, sacrifices, and I want you to stop your singing until you get your hearts right." Malachi says the very same thing, "Don't offer any more polluted offerings, lame and blind and maimed animals, don't desecrate your marriage relationships and deal treacherously with the wives of your youth and then come into My temple and purport to worship Me. Get out until your life is right." Proverbs 21:27 sums it up by saying, "The sacrifices of the wicked are an abomination."

In other words, empty, hypocritical worship is intolerable to God. Isaiah said it, we say it today, and Jesus, our Lord, said it as well in this text. Verse 9 sums it up, "In vain," or with emptiness, "Do they worship, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." In this passage, Jesus is basically preaching the same message that Isaiah preached about empty, hypocritical, insincere, disingenuous worship. Let's set the scene.

After our Lord had fed the 5,000+, He had reached the peak of popularity. They wanted to force Him to be a king, and to haul Him down to Jerusalem, put Him on the throne, and have Him destroy the Romans and Herodians. They wanted Him to give them liberty and healing and food, and do all the things they had seen Him do with His miracle power. They really had come to a fever pitch in terms of Jesus fitting their definition of an economic, political kingdom. But Jesus rejected their shallow, self-centered, indulgent ambition. He said, "No," to their political, economic, self-indulgent definition of a kingdom. He sent the crowd away, and went back to being with His disciples. That was the peak, and from here on, it's downhill.

He rejected the shallow, sham kind of interest. It was superficial, political, self-centered, self-indulgent; they wanted food, they wanted healing, they wanted freedom from Rome and the Herodians, but they didn't want their hearts changed, or Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, so He rejected the shallowness of their interest. From here on out, things begin to descend; He loses

popularity, hostility begins to rise, we are one year away from His crucifixion, and the majority of that year is spent in seclusion with the Twelve. He is readying and equipping them for the tremendous ministry they're going to have when He leaves.

So we see a turning point occurring in this part of the Scripture. In Matthew 16:21, there is a rather definite statement that from that time forth, He began to show His disciples. There, we see Him moving into a withdrawn ministry; He retires to be with them and to invest that last year with them. But prior to that, there are a couple of times when He is with the multitudes. This is one of those times that we'll look at in our text today.

From here on out, He's going to spend more and more time with the Twelve as the hostility, anger, bitterness, and rejection arises. Again, as we look at our text, we see an instant change that helps us note this as a turning point. The crowd has given to Jesus the pinnacle of popularity, and it is the very next day that He is confronted, here in this text, with the scribes and Pharisees who pour their venom on Him, and reveal the fact that what they really want to do is publicly discredit Him and get rid of Him. So the turning point comes immediately, and we are faced with the hostility of these religious leaders of Israel.

These are stony ground again, as Jesus defined all men in their responses to the Gospel in the parable of the soils; this is the stony ground, the hard, resistant soil of those who are not interested. Among the Jews, there were always the true and the false; there were always those who truly sought God, and the real remnant with pure hearts who did respond to God's Word and responded, in this period, to God's Messiah. But this group did not; they are the hardhearted religious phonies, those who manned the legalistic system as it existed, and they want Jesus Christ out of the way.

The Lord confronts them in this passage, and confronts them with the emptiness of their worship. It's no different than the message that Isaiah, Amos, and Malachi gave, or than a message that I might give today to a church where we know there are people who hypocritically worship God. It's the same basic message: that when you come to worship God, it must be with a pure heart, and you must worship Him from the inside, not only externally.

Let's look at the text, beginning in Matthew 14:34. "When they had crossed over, they came to the land of Gennesaret. And when the men of that place recognized Him, they sent out into all that surrounding region, brought to Him all who were sick, and begged Him that they might only touch the hem of His garment. And as many as touched it were made perfectly well. Then the scribes and Pharisees who were from Jerusalem came to Jesus, saying, 'Why do Your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread.' He answered and said to them, 'Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition? For God commanded, saying, "Honor your father and your mother"; and, "He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death." But you say, "Whoever says to his father or mother, 'Whatever profit you might

have received from me is a gift to God' -- then he need not honor his father or mother." Thus you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition. Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying: "These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.""

That is a very important passage; it crystallizes the religious battle between Jesus and the religion of His day, which was the dominant religion. As we look at this text, I want us to see some glimpses of our Lord here. We want to see Him as the main character.

First of all, in verses 34-36, we see Him as the compassionate healer. Then in the first 9 verses of the next chapter, He is the condemning judge; then, next week, in verses 10-20, we see Him as the correcting teacher. In each case, He is setting right something that is wrong. Their diseases He made into wholeness; their hypocrisy, He unmasked and postulated true religion; their misunderstanding of truth, in verses 10-20, He corrected for proper doctrine. He comes as one who heals, who condemns hypocrisy, as one who corrects false teaching.

Let's look first of all at Him as the compassionate healer in verses 34-36, and this will give us the context out of which the incident occurs in chapter 15. "When they had crossed over," that is, the disciples and our Lord had gone over the Sea of Galilee. Remember that they had spent the day before feeding the multitude and healing and preaching the Kingdom, and at night, Jesus had come, walking on the water. They had finally arrived at the shore, and sometime after that, they had come into the land of Gennesaret. So it may be the next day, later in the day.

We remember when they came to the other shore early in the morning, Jesus taught that great and profound discourse on the bread of life. The same crowd that had been on the eastern shore had come across; they had a free dinner and they were back for a free breakfast. But instead of Jesus feeding them physically, He fed them spiritually, speaking about the bread of life. That may have occupied the morning, and it may have been later in the day that they retreated to the land of Gennesaret.

Gennesaret is not a town, or a village, or a city; it is an area. Gennesaret is a plain about 3.5 miles long and maybe up to 2 miles wide at its widest point. It borders the northwestern coast of the Sea of Galilee. It is in proximity to Bethsaida and Capernaum, and it is very likely that Jesus went there with His disciples to find some of that privacy and quiet that He had sought the day before in the mountain on the other shore, and He had been so interrupted by the multitude. So again, they go into the land of Gennesaret.

By the way, that particular land, according to Josephus, was a lush land with unrivaled beauty, marvelous crops, and a variety of products. It had no less than four springs pouring forth almost full

rivers of water to water it. It had magnificent wheat fields; all kinds of vegetation grew along the edge of the lake which was inhabited by many kinds of birds. It was a beautiful area. Because of its rich soil, it could produce three crops a year. There was no city in that area, so it was all just plain farmland. They went there for a time of rest.

Luke calls the lake the lake of Gennesaret, so it was a well-known area, even giving the lake its name in some people's minds. Verse 35. Jesus, again, no doubt, endeavoring to spend time with His disciples, is interrupted. "When the men of that place recognized Him, they sent out into all that surrounding region, and brought to Him all who were sick." So they went around and collected all the diseased people, "And begged Him that they might only touch the hem of His garment. And as many as touched it were made perfectly well."

They went into the whole countryside and collected all those who were still ill. We don't know how many there were in that group, but we do know that in past ministry there, He had healed multitudes and multitudes and multitudes, so there were a lot less than there originally were. But whoever they were, they were diseased, and whatever their disease was, they were all collected, believing in the miraculous power of Jesus which had been demonstrated in their area for so long now. They brought them all together, and were so confident of His power that they said, "We'll just touch you."

They may have remembered the woman in chapter 9, who grabbed His robe and was healed. All they felt they needed to do was to touch Him, and I think there is a sense of beautiful propriety here, a sensitivity here; they are saying, "We need so desperately what you have to give, but we don't want to be an extra burden for you. You don't have to get around to all of us; we'll just touch You, and that way we'll be as little a problem to You as we can be." So there is a sense of propriety and sensitivity in their approach, and a great, great measure of faith.

The end of verse 36 says, "As many as touched it were made perfectly well." There are no progressive healings, or claims that, "Jesus healed me, and I've been getting better ever since." They were made totally well in the instant that they touched Him. Here, again, we are wont to remark that the compassion of God is demonstrated; He is the compassionate healer. It is so that God may be revealed as a compassionate God, a God of loving kindness and tenderness toward people.

While they were somewhat sensitive and while we see the compassion of God, there is a note of pathos in this. It strikes me that this again is a classic example of the fact that people inevitably came to Jesus to get what they wanted. Then, having gotten what they wanted, they left. That is the pathos of this whole thing. It always seems to be so with Jesus. Once people have received what they wanted, they're gone.

Even today in our contemporary kind of Christianity, Jesus is seen as a genie who responds to our wishes, and having received our wishes, we abandon any meaningful relationship. It's as if Jesus is

offered as one who is a panacea and little else. We, today, are as guilty of ingratitude toward God and Jesus Christ, which, by the way, may be the ugliest of all sins, as these were in that day. So in spite of their ingratitude and self-centeredness, and in spite of the fact that their commitment to Him was one of great faith and great need and not one of great adoration, He healed them. That is the compassion of God.

From the compassionate healer, we come to the condemning judge. Let's look at verses 1-9. May I say that you really need to understand this passage because it is a crucial passage in the flow of the gospel record and the flow of human history. We see the condemning judge; as compassionate as He is on one hand, so condemning is He on the other hand. God, as God, is compassionate, but is also a God of great judgment and justice.

We'll see the unfolding of these 9 verses in three segments. Number one is the confrontation in verse 1. Then, and the 'then' is indefinite; we don't know if it's the very same day that the healing in Gennesaret began or if it's one of the days, or a few days afterward. We really don't know, so it's a rather indefinite 'then.' We know this was around the time of the Passover, according to John 6, which means this is the third Passover in the ministry of our Lord, and the fourth one was the one in which He was crucified, so there is a year of His life left.

"At that time came to Jesus scribes and Pharisees who were of Jerusalem." Here again we are introduced to the scribes and Pharisees. If the Passover has already happened, then this delegation is sent post-Passover to Galilee, no doubt at the request of the Galilean Pharisees who were equally upset at Jesus. In fact, back in Matthew 12:14, it says that they wanted to kill Him.

So no doubt at their request, a delegation with clout was sent from Jerusalem. They are representatives of the legalistic, self-righteous, external, hypocritical, phony religious establishment. They are of Satan, not God; they hate Jesus Christ. They lie about what they teach, so they despise the truth that is in Christ; they are in darkness, so they despise the light. They are the enemies of our Lord.

Among the people of Israel, there were some who believed, whose hearts were turned toward God. But these are not among those. These were the bitter, legalistic people who were leading the religious, hypocritical establishment, and they were threatened by the truth of Jesus Christ. For them, religion was external, ceremonial, had nothing to do with the inside, but only with the outside, so when Jesus talked about the inside, He posed an imminent threat to the security of their position.

It says in verse 1 that they were from Jerusalem, which is an important note, because now Jerusalem is in on the act. Not only is Galilee angry at Jesus in terms of its religious establishment, but so is Jerusalem. All of this will converge on His head ultimately in His death. Jerusalem was the seat of the temple, the place of the schools of Judaism, the most eminent minds and scholarship, so this is the

high-powered group that come to discredit Jesus publicly. They want to attack Him publicly because they want to make Him look bad in front of everyone. They want to get rid of Him and discredit Him. I might add that since they were more prestigious than the local group, Jesus handled them with more severity.

What Jesus taught was diametrically opposed to what they taught, it was the exact opposite, and they were on a head-on collision course. They believed that worship was ceremonial and external, and Jesus taught that it was in the heart. So there is the religion of external ceremony and the religion of internal spirit on a collision course, and that is what ultimately resulted in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ - the ceremonialists would not accept the religion of the heart. They both cannot exist; one must die, and we find out in this text which one.

Let me also add that this is the same battle that Isaiah, Malachi, and Amos fought, and the same battle we fight today with hypocrisy in the church, and people all over the world who call themselves Christians but who are not, but go through external motions. It is the same battle, and we could call it the continual, religious heavyweight championship of the world. It never stops.

The first blow is thrown in verse 2 by the scribes and Pharisees. "Why do Your disciples transgress the traditions of the elders?" May I tell you, folks, that they thought about that question for a long time. They had a long trip, 60 miles at least, walking. They had thought a long time about that question, and it sums up the battle instantly. "Why do your disciples transgress the traditions of the elders? Why do You teach people to break ceremony?" It's exactly what they're asking, and hitting the nail right on the head, crystallizing the issue. This shows where they were. They were utterly, totally committed to tradition.

Let me talk about tradition so you'll understand what it was; you can't understand what He says unless you understand what the tradition of the elders was. Tradition is that which is handed down from one generation to the next. It is not to be confused with that which comes from God; that is Scripture. Anytime you have a religion that is Scripture plus tradition, you have a problem. That is the case with Roman Catholicism, which we'll see tonight, and the case with Judaism. It is even the case with Protestantism in many, many instances, where tradition has been added to Scripture, and people no longer know what is from God and what is from men.

Let's see where their tradition fits in, and talk about them in general. The Talmud, which is the codification of Jewish law, says that God gave the oral law to Moses, and then told Moses to pass it on to great men of the synagogue, and these men of the synagogue were to do three things with the law of God. First, to be deliberate in judgment. In other words, properly apply God's law. Two, they were to raise up many disciples so that, in the next generation, there would be others to apply the law. Three, and this is the key, to build a fence around the law; wall it in to protect it. Don't let it suffer attack, but wall it in.

They were protectors of the law. So you know how they decided to protect it? Since so many people's hearts were not right, basically, and the obedience was not spontaneous from the heart, the only other way to get people to do things is to make them do it. If they won't do it willingly, then you have to force them to do it. So they started adding laws and laws and laws and laws and laws, and they became the spiritual enforcers of the laws. Down through history, the slats in the fence kept going up, and there were more and more and more and more. The ultimate result was that it totally obscured the law of God. All the people saw was all the fence slats, but they couldn't see the law of God.

All those fence slats that were to protect the law but actually obscured the law are what we call the tradition of the elders, or the wise old sages who put these things down and said, "This is what we want you to do, they are the principles of behavior." Let me approach that general concept in a more specific way. When Israel and Judah went into captivity, and particularly Judah to Babylon in 586 B.C., it was a shock to the land of Israel and the Jewish people. It was as if God had abandoned them. I mean, here they were, the promised people of God, living in the promised land of God, and now all of a sudden they're hauled off into captivity. They were jolted.

The God-fearing Jews among them realized that what had happened had happened because they had departed from Jehovah God, and they were getting what Isaiah said they would get and what Jeremiah said they would get; they were getting the judgment of God because they departed from God. So they decided that the only hope of reconciliation was to turn to God, go back to God. As a result of that, a movement started to put those fences back up and reacquaint the people with the law and all the traditions of the elders, to get them back to the right kind of behavior.

A man by the name of Ezra fathered a whole group of people known as scribes, and the job of a scribe was to collect, collate, interpret, propagate all of these slats in this traditional fence. It kept building up, and every rabbi commented on it, and every student commented on it, and more and more stuff kept piling and piling. This is a key point that they lost the distinction between the law of God and the tradition of men; it got rubbed out, and was a big mishmash. The commentary effectively obscured the basic law of God.

Over the years, this thing became unwieldy and difficult to handle, so in 200 A.D., Rabbi Yehuda pulled the whole pile together and committed it to writing, which must have been an absolutely monumental job, and it is called the Mishnah, which is from the Hebrew verb 'to repeat.' Then, not only did they have the Mishnah, but beyond that, they needed commentaries on the Mishnah, because the Mishnah, which was trying to explain the law of God, needed to be explained. So they then had the Gemara, and that is a series of commentaries on the Mishnah. So there is a massive accumulated tradition, the Mishnah, and the Gemara, which is the commentary on the tradition, and it's filled with all kinds of things.



Some rabbinical schools got together and decided to put all of this together, and in Jerusalem they put the Gemara and the Mishnah together, and it became known as the Talmud. In Babylonia, they did the same thing, only they made it four times as big by collecting four times as much material, so the Babylonian Talmud is now the best, or the most accepted, among the Jews. By the way, if you were to buy a set, it's at least 20 volumes in Hebrew; a massive amount of material.

Now this wasn't enough either, so they added to this the Midrash, which are the commentaries on various books of the Bible. So there is the Midrash, the Gemara, the Mishnah, and just volumes and volumes of stuff to wade through, which is all supposedly to fulfill the Mosaic injunction to the scribes to put a fence around the law. What it did, in effect, was totally obscure the law of God. It is absolutely chaotic.

The sum of it is this, and here is the key. This is where these guys were, even though they were 200 years before the Mishnah was even codified and written, they still have all the stuff, all the tradition. They're still trying to deal with all this material, and they had come to be so committed to it that the Talmud says, "The words of the scribes are more lovely than the words of the law. It is a greater crime to transgress the words of the school of Rabbi Hillel than the words of Scripture. My son, attend to the words of the scribes more than the words of the law." So you see, they were committed to a lot of traditional stuff, not the Word of God. They had ceremony and tradition as over against truth and righteousness.

This huge mass of material in the Talmud is divided into six main sections. Under those, there are tracts and treatises, and under those, there are paragraphs and chapters so that you can look things up. One of those sections is on cleansings and washings, and under one of those headings is a whole part on hand rinsing, and that becomes the issue here. Look back at verse 2.

"Why do your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders?" That is a general statement, but then they give an illustration. "For they don't rinse their hands when they eat bread." They're not talking about cleanliness, or saying, "These guys didn't wash their hands before they eat," and anyone knows you want to be clean before you put food in your mouth; that is not the issue. They aren't accusing them of being uncouth, but of violating religious tradition.

They believed, because it taught in all this material, that you had to go through ceremonial washings of your hands for two reasons. Reason number one was that if you had touched a Gentile that day, you had been defiled, and there was a prescribed ceremony to detoxify your Gentile touch. Secondly, the rabbis taught that there was a demon by the name of Shibtah, and he dwelt on people's hands while they slept. So if they did not go through the ceremonial washings that eliminated him, they would pass him to their food and into their bodies.

This became so important to them that Rabbi Ta'anith taught, "Whosoever has his abode in the land of Israel and eats his common food with rinsed hands may rest assured that he shall obtain eternal life." They believed that you received eternal life by going through the ceremonial rinsing of your hands.

Granted, in the Old Testament there were washings that God instituted in Exodus 19 before the people came before God; He had them wash all their garments. The priests in Leviticus 15-17 had to wash themselves before they could carry out any rites of the priesthood, but those were outward symbols of an inward reality. They had long ago slain the reality and now, they had magnified the symbols and invented their own. Nowhere in any part of Holy Scripture does God ever say to go through this kind of stuff, to rinse your hands in a ceremonial way to get rid of Gentile influence or to drown the demon Shibtah so he won't get in your body.

Edersheim, the great Jewish scholar, writes, "Water jars were kept ready to be used before every meal. The minimum amount of water to be used was a quarter of a log, which is defined as enough to fill one and a half eggshells. The water was first poured on both hands, held with the fingers pointed upward. It must run down the arm as far as the wrist and drop off from the wrist, for the water itself was now unclean having touched the unclean hands. If it ran down the fingers again, it would render them unclean. The process was repeated with the hands held in the downward direction, the fingers pointing down, and finally, each hand was cleansed with being rubbed with the fist of the other, and a strict Jew would do this before every meal and between every course in every meal."

Rabbi Ta'anith said that if you did that, you'd obtain eternal life; so they did it. So the Word of God was utterly submerged in their tradition. In fact, a story is told of the very famous Rabbi Achabah, who was put into prison. His water ration was reduced, and he took what little water he was given to wash his hands before eating rather than to drink it, saying that he would rather die than transgress the tradition of the elders. Another rabbi said, "It is better to go four miles to get water than to incur guilt by neglecting hand rinsing before you eat."

Lest you think it is unique to the Jewish people, I submit to you that it isn't necessarily unique to them, although it is unique to them in this instance. Throughout history, even in Christianity, people have attached all kinds of meaningless ceremonies that have obscured the truth. Spurgeon said one time that if there were no Sunday morning service at 11, he thought many people would not be Christians. You can have all kinds of ceremonies and traditions.

We go, then, from the confrontation to the condemnation in verse 3. Watch how Jesus responds to this. They are defending ceremonial religion, the religion of the external. "But He answered them, 'Why do you also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?'" I want you to notice the word 'also.' That word is an admission of guilt. Jesus is saying, "Yes, we do break your tradition. We

don't deny that." Then He dismisses it; He doesn't even bother to deal with it, because it's so meaningless. He didn't have any reason to keep their tradition because it wasn't binding. There was no point in it. "Yes, we do that. So what?" He swept the whole thing away as meaningless and never even interacted with it, discussed the issue, or answered the question about washing and rinsing. He never discussed the disciples' hands, or what they did or didn't do when they ate.

There was no issue there for Him to deal with; it was utterly meaningless and pointless. He simply said to them, "We're not violating any commandment of God, but you are with your tradition, therefore the only thing that matters is not tradition but Scripture. That's all that matters." Only Scripture is binding. They called them the traditions of the elders, but He says that they are their traditions, so He pulled them out from behind the skirts of the elders and showed them to be the responsible parties.

They said, "Why do you break the traditions?" and give Him an illustration, and He says, "Why do you break the commands of God by your traditions," and gives them an illustration too. Verse 4. "For God commanded," and He quotes Exodus 20:12, "Honor your father and mother."

That is a very clear command, and bound up in honor is respect, love, reverence, a sense of dignity, and also financial support; you are supposed to take care of your parents and give them the money they need to live. When they get old and cannot work and have need, you are supposed to meet that need. That was all bound up in that. So the Scripture said that you are to honor your father and mother, to meet their needs, to care for them, to give full respect and honor to them, which means supporting them if they need it.

On the other hand, He quotes Exodus 21:17, which says that if you don't honor but revile, or curse, or remove the dignity of your father or mother, then you should die the death. In other words, you take care of your parents, or there is capital punishment. That is very clear, very simple, they knew it and understood it; there is little argument, because it is right out of the Ten Commandments.

He says, "You know that, but," verse 5, "You don't accept that command; you violate it." Then there is a most interesting and difficult verse, at first. "Whoever says to his father or mother, 'It is a gift,' or doron, or, as Mark says it, corban, "'By whatever you would be profit from me.'" Let me tell you what that is saying. Anyone who says to his father or mother, "Corban!" or "'Doron!' Whatever it might be by which you might have been helped, surely does not have to honor his father." That is the Greek translation of what is a little obscure in this text.

Your mother and your father have reached old age, and you're responsible to meet their needs. But they had developed a tradition that if you said, "Corban," or, "Doron," and corban is a gift, and doron is an offering, then you were saying, "This is for God, I'm giving it to Him," so that was exempt from any other use and you wouldn't have to give it to your parents. So they were going around teaching people that if you've ever said, "Corban," or "Doron," over your possessions, or had made a vow to

God, like in Numbers 30:2, it says you're to keep your vow to God, and if your parents come along with a need, you could say, "So sorry; I've given it to God." It is so pious, so self-righteous, and the Bible doesn't say that.

You say, "The Bible does say to keep a vow," but it also says that if you make a stupid vow, you had better change it. What they had done was to literally say, "Corban," over everything they owned. By the way, the Talmud says that you can say, "Corban," and later on, keep it for yourself. So the whole deal was that they were so selfish that they didn't want to meet the needs of their parents, so to justify that, they developed this tradition of corban or doron, and by saying that over something, they therefore exempted it from having to be given to the people who were in need.

That was a direct violation of the law of God by one of their traditions, and that was a typical situation of where they had replaced a normal, godly love and desire to care for their parents and to manifest a true, changed heart, and replaced it with self-centered, external religion and had justified it by inventing a stupid game that they played to keep things from their needy parents. Jesus said, "You are using your tradition to cause people to disobey God in the honor of their parents."

The Greek text even indicates that they are saying, "If you said, 'Corban,' you cannot give it to your father, so don't feel guilty about it because you don't have a choice." They wouldn't stop at saying that you didn't have to do it, because you'd still have to deal with the guilt, so they said that if you had ever said it, even in a passion, you were not allowed to give it. The point was that you could, later on, use it for yourself, as the Talmud said. I suppose you'd come back and say, "Un-corban." This thing got to be so ridiculous that when someone owed you money and say, "Corban on your bank account," and that person's bank account was devoted to God, and you could make claim on it.

Tradition. We think of tradition as something wonderful, and there are traditions that are warm, and that bring to us memories of past days and help us to keep culturally alive and sensitive, but this kind of tradition is debilitating and godless. The Talmud said that to be against the words of the scribes was to be more punishable than to be against the words of the Scripture, so people believed them, and they were going around teaching this tradition. Jesus said, "You break the commandments of God. True religion is bound up in one basic word - obeying the commandments of God from the heart."

We go through the confrontation to the condemnation to the commentary, and Jesus in verses 7-9 offers a commentary on them right out of Isaiah 29:13. He quotes directly, "You hypocrites." That is not mincing words; hupokrites means 'to cover with a mask.' He was calling them spiritual phonies, frauds, "Well did Isaiah prophesy of you." In other words, He's saying, "When Isaiah said this in chapter 29, it was not only true of his own people but he was speaking right to you!" And he is very likely speaking to some of you right now, right here, as well. It was hypocrisy.

An early rabbi said, "There are ten parts of hypocrisy in the world; nine in Jerusalem and one everywhere else." I suppose that today, we could say that there are nine parts of hypocrisy in the world; nine in the church and one everywhere else. If we know anything about Satan, we know that he invariably corrupts the truth with hypocrites. Hypocrites play a part.

Then, He quotes Isaiah in verse 8. "This people draws near to Me with their mouths, and honor Me with their lips, but their hearts are far from Me." God is not interested in ceremonial, ritualistic, traditional religion. You hear people say today, "Our family goes to such-and-such a religion, and it's a tradition with us." Tradition will damn your soul to Hell if that's all you've got.

Jesus is not interested in tradition, or people who draw near with their mouth and honor with the lip, but whose heart is far from God in empty pretense of worship. That is the indictment that He rendered in Matthew 23, and we'll see that as we get further in this book, but that is just a blistering attack on them, "Whited sepulchers; outside, painted white, and inside, stinking, full of dead men's bones," and all these indictments of hypocrisy, and ceremonial external ritualistic religion that just keeps tradition and goes through ceremonies, and the heart is not toward God, a heart of obedience, love, and true worship.

In verse 9, He quotes again from that same text, this time from the Septuagint, or the Greek version, "In vain," or in pretense, "They worship Me, because they are teaching for doctrine the commandments of men." They are putting human wisdom on the level of divine wisdom. What a terrible thing. Some men worship ritualistically, ceremonially, legally, with regulations, but what God wants is a heart worship, and that's why Ezekiel 36 says that God is going to take away the stony heart and put a heart of flesh in because there has to be a new heart.

Jesus said in Matthew 5:20, "Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you'll never enter My Kingdom," and the kind of righteousness the scribes and Pharisees had was external, superficial, rules and regulations, playing around with the fence. The kind of righteousness that Jesus demanded was that of the heart, and that's why, from there on in that passage, He says, "You say not to kill, but I say not even to be angry. I'm going deeper, to the very heart attitude. You say not to commit adultery, but I say not to even look at a woman and lust after her."

In other words, He takes them from that external kind of behavior which they had ascribed as truth and pushes it into the heart and the attitude. That is the reason Jesus was crucified, because the ceremonialists couldn't tolerate the religion of the heart, because their hearts were black and sinful. They were filled with the darkness and night of sin.

May our worship be true, and what God wants it to be. I guess we could say that in closing, you need to examine your heart, and look deeply within it to examine whether you love Jesus Christ with all

your heart, soul, mind and strength. Do you long to be with Him, in His presence, like Him, to obey Him from the heart? That is the stuff of true religion. If you're going through the motions, God help you, because tradition and ceremony is a damning thing.

Father, as we have looked at this parable, for it is a parable, even though it is a true story, it is a picture, a story with a lesson, we have wanted to look at our own hearts. Are we those who are bound up in tradition, even though the tradition is connected to the truth, or are we those who worship from the heart? Are we those whose hearts are filled with the light or the darkness, the truth or the error? Are we those who are bound only to ceremony and ritual, or are we bound by love to the living Christ? God, we pray that we might realize that there can be no heart religion, no genuine relationship, no true worship except through Jesus Christ, for only in Him can we come into Your presence to receive from You a new heart. So we pray that Christ might be exalted in our lives.

If there are any in our fellowship this morning who have never come to Christ or opened their heart to Him, who have never received a new heart or new spirit, who have never been born anew, who do not worship from the inside, who have never known what it is to love, obey, or hunger after righteousness, we pray that before this hour is passed, they will enter into that knowledge through faith in Jesus Christ and His death and resurrection for them.

For the rest of us Lord, help us to pursue always true worship without hypocrisy, that we might not only honor You with our mouths and lips, but with our hearts, that You will be pleased with our worship.

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