

**Matthew 15:1-9:** Then Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem and said, <sup>2</sup> "Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat." <sup>3</sup> He answered them, "And why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? <sup>4</sup> For God commanded, 'Honor your father and your mother,' and, 'Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.' <sup>5</sup> But you say, 'If anyone tells his father or his mother, What you would have gained from me is given to God, <sup>6</sup> he need not honor his father.' So for the sake of your tradition you have made void the word of God. <sup>7</sup> You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said: <sup>8</sup> "'This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; <sup>9</sup> in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.'"

**Intro:** There's a way to have an appearance of zeal for God that is not according to God's Word. Why are you here

- **2 Timothy 3:1-5:** But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. <sup>2</sup> For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, <sup>3</sup> heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, <sup>4</sup> treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, <sup>5</sup> having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people.

- **Romans 10:2-4:** I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. <sup>3</sup> For, being ignorant of the righteousness that comes from God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. <sup>4</sup> For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

There is a way to perform all kinds of external acts of worship: prayer, preaching, giving money, singing, but have a heart that is far from God.

**Verses 7-9:** You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said: "This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; <sup>9</sup> in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men."

### **1. The Pharisees And Scribes Came To Jesus And Asked A Question**

**Matthew 15:1-2:** Then Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem and said, <sup>2</sup> "Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat."

**a. The Pharisees and scribes:** These are the Jewish religious leaders and teachers of the law in Jesus' day. They were like the pastors of the day. They were the interpreters of the law of God. (Most of them wrongly interpreted God's law; self-righteous; lovers of money; rejected God and His Word; evil; led the people astray!) **GOSPEL!**

**b. The Pharisees' and scribes' asked Jesus a question: Verse 2:** Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat.

**1) Traditions are not necessarily bad and unbiblical: 1 Corinthians 11:2:** Now I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions even as I delivered them to you.

**2 Thessalonians 2:15:** So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter.

Traditions must (1) serve and affirm God's Word and God's commandments – they have to be in harmony with God's Word and submit to God's Word; and (2) traditions cannot contradict God's Word or lead you to break God's commandments – they should help you be faithful to God and help produce sincere, heart-felt obedience to God and His Word done by faith in Christ and done by the power of the Holy Spirit for the glory of God.

**2) The Pharisees' & scribes' concern was a religious concern, not so much a hygiene concern: Exodus 30:17-20:** The LORD said to Moses, "You shall also make a basin of bronze, with its stand of bronze, for washing. You shall put it between the tent of meeting & the altar, & you shall put water in it, with which Aaron & his sons shall

wash their hands & their feet. When they go into the tent of meeting, or when they come near the altar to minister, to burn a food offering to the LORD, they shall wash with water, so that they may not die.

**3) The Pharisees' and scribes' concern was misguided because it was based on the tradition of the elders and not on the law of God:** Notice the command in Exodus 30 was not about washing your hands before you eat! It was about the priests, Aaron and his sons, washing before they ministered in the tent of meeting.

**Daniel Doriani:** They knew nothing of germs & microbes. The law required priests to wash hands & feet & so to enter the tabernacle spotless & undefiled as they served there (Ex. 30:17-21). The Pharisees' tradition expanded this law. Above all, they required everyone to live according to the standard of the priests. Beyond that, they greatly amplified the regulations of washing. The Mishnah [oral tradition that expands and explains God's law] has a whole section, nearly four thousand words in English translations, on how to wash correctly. Does the washing of hands extend to the wrist? How much water must be used? From what sources & vessels may the water come?

We should beware of making human traditions equal with God's Word. Read/Know/Understand the Word & Christ

**4) Since the Pharisees & scribes' wrongly equated the tradition of the elders with God's law, they wrongly accuse Jesus' disciples of breaking God's law:** They view Jesus & His disciples as law breakers and blasphemers. They eventually want Jesus dead!

On the other hand, those who know God love Jesus Christ. Jesus is God! Jesus, God's Son, inspired the law/Word!

The religious traditions of men that these scribes and Pharisees were relentlessly committed to follow were so complex and ultimately contrary to God's Word that they totally impeded the effective action of following God Who had come in the flesh and stood before them – the Lord Jesus Christ!

**Sinclair Ferguson:** How complicated the lives of the Pharisees must have been by comparison with the life of Jesus & his disciples. & how child-like the lives of the disciples must have seemed by comparison with the complexity of the Pharisees. That was not accidental. In fact, it takes us to the very heart of the difference between the Pharisees & Jesus. To them, God was a distant Law-maker who hemmed in the lives of the people. To Jesus, God was the Father of those who trusted in him. He wanted His children to live in open fellowship with Him.

Do you as individuals or we as a church have any traditions of men that fail to serve, submit to, and affirm God's Word and commandments? Do we have any traditions that contradict God's Word and commandments or even lead us to break God's commandments? Or do our traditions help us be faithful to God and help produce in us sincere, heart-felt obedience done by faith and done by the power of the Holy Spirit? I hope and pray they do!

To ensure we have God honoring, Biblical traditions we must know our Bibles. But the scribes and Pharisees knew their Bibles! We must do more than know our Bibles. We must know the Christ of the Bible and embrace Him and His finished work in His death and resurrection! Do you know, trust, and love this Christ? We all have, to some degree, put man's opinion or tradition or our own selves above God. We do it every time we sin. We need Jesus!

## **2. Jesus Rebukes The Pharisees And Scribes**

**Matthew 15:3-9:** He answered them, "And why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? <sup>4</sup> For God commanded, 'Honor your father and your mother,' and, 'Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.' <sup>5</sup> But you say, 'If anyone tells his father or his mother, What you would have gained from me is given to God, <sup>6</sup> he need not honor his father.' So for the sake of your tradition you have made void the word of God. <sup>7</sup> You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said: <sup>8</sup> "'This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; <sup>9</sup> in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.'"

**a. Jesus answers their question with a question: Matthew 15:3:** He answered them, “And why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition?”

You don't always have to answer questions people ask you: Hebrew Israelite: “Who is a Jew?”- No, Is Jesus God?

Jesus is the leader here! Jesus is always the leader! **John Piper:** Even while He was on His knees washing their feet, no one doubted who the leader was.

**b. These traditions of the Pharisees and scribes were in direct contradiction to the commands of God: Verses 4-6:** For God commanded, 'Honor your father and your mother,' and, 'Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.'<sup>5</sup> But you say, 'If anyone tells his father or his mother, What you would have gained from me is given to God, <sup>6</sup> he need not honor his father.' So for the sake of your tradition you have made void the word of God.

**Daniel Doriani:** if a parent asked a child for material or financial help, and the child did not want to help, the child need only say “Corban” over the goods in question. That made the child's possession a gift, dedicated to God (Mark 7:11-12). Since it was dedicated to God, it could not be given to or used by anyone else. Yet the child was free to deliver the gift to God many years later, so he could use it until then, even while his parents could not. Thus the tradition nullified the word of God. This is what traditions can do. They play one law against another. Corban is allegedly about loving God, but hard-hearted children used it to avoid caring for their parents. Tradition looks as the letter of the law and often seeks to manipulate it or exploit loopholes. It ignores the law's spirit and the people whom the law protects and directs. Traditions look at the hands; God's law examines the heart.

**Matthew 23:23:** Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others.

**c. Jesus rebukes the Pharisees & scribes: Verses 7-9:** You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said: “This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.” - They are fake worshipers! The inside does not fit with the inside – mask!

**d. True worship must come from the heart:** There's a way to perform all kinds of external acts of worship (acts of honor; acts of showing great worth): prayer, preaching, giving, singing, but have a heart that is far from God.

**John Piper:** We all know this sort of experience in our ordinary life. One man retires from the firm loved by all, respected by his colleagues, admired by the junior executives. When the party is given to honor him, everyone knows that the hand shakes, and speeches, and congratulations, and gold watch are sincere. They come from the heart. But then a few years later old Grumble-Full retires, and out of duty the party is given with the same handshakes and speeches and gold watch, but everyone knows this time that honor was paid with the lips, but the heart was far away. Or haven't you sat through a school talent show and observed how some applause comes from internal appreciation, but other applause comes from external expectation.

We can learn what true worship of the heart is from watching the world cup, college football, NFL. Flowers; dresses; diamonds. Husbands; wives; children; boyfriends; girlfriends. Toys; houses; phones; stuff; hobbies, etc.

**God is better: Genesis 15:1:** After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying, "Do not be afraid, Abram. I *am* your shield, your exceedingly great reward."

- **Psalm 16:11:** in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

- **Psalm 37:4:** Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart.

- **Psalm 42:1-2:** As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God?

- **Psalm 63:1:** O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you . . .
- **Psalm 73:25:** Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you.
- **Philippians 3:7-8:** But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. <sup>8</sup> Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ . . . .

**e. We must fight to truly worship God with a heart near to Him: John Piper:** Confess; Ask; Act – do your duty

**f. Verse 9: in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men:** May we know God's Word so well that only and always teach as doctrines the commandments of God, not of men! Read the Word!

**Let's think about Jesus:** The Pharisees and scribes were concerned about purity. Jesus is all purity (without sin!)! Jesus made the water that cleanses, and He made the hands that need washing. Jesus spoke of the commandments of God, and He Himself is the very Word of God come in the flesh. He alone lived out God's commandments perfectly. Jesus alone honored His earthly father and mother perfectly and His heavenly Father perfectly. Jesus honored His heavenly Father with both His lips and His heart, always having a heart perfectly near to God. Jesus never was a hypocrite! He never worshiped in vain, and always and only taught God's commands and sound doctrine. In fact, no one ever spoke or taught like this man! The God-Man! And He died and rose up for sinners!

### **Jesus Cuts Bureaucracy, Humbles Aristocracy, Shatters Hypocrisy, And Rules By Autocracy!**

He despises man's ungodly tradition  
 To God's Word they seek to make an addition  
 But this is wholly contrary to Christ's mission  
 And will fuel His holy temper ignition  
 He has a relentless holy ambition  
 To save the self-righteous human condition  
 And bring godless sinners to His full submission  
 So don't put your hopes in any politician, physician, superstition, or lofty recognition  
 But trust in Jesus' death and sin remission  
 By faith alone receive a righteous position  
 And acquire a growing holy disposition  
 That declares against all sin outright opposition  
 Because the beauty of Christ has no competition!

His disciples ate with defiled hands  
 But it's the heart the eye of the LORD scans  
 To see if in it righteousness stands  
 And holiness continues and expands  
 Just as the LORD promises and demands  
 God supplies grace to obey what He commands  
 And He'll make His sons many like the ocean sands!

Jesus came to set free – to cut down the complex  
 His burden is easy and shouldn't perplex  
 Jewish rules were more and less than God expects  
 Killing heart-worship was one of their effects  
 But if you see the glory Christ reflects  
 And the beauty His Person and work projects  
 You'll beg to be His royal subjects  
 Delighting in Him as the best of objects!

Worship that's vain is completely insane  
It's like the unacceptable sacrifice of Cain  
That's only profane  
So break this evil chain  
And turn to the Lamb Who was slain  
But now lives with full reign  
As the only One Who can end your pain  
Worship Him from a pure heart to pleasure regain!

Hypocrisy He came to kill  
True humility to instill with unprecedented skill  
He did His Father's perfect will  
He died upon mount Calvary's hill  
And rose up from the dead with zeal  
The law and the prophets to fulfill  
And open history's every seal  
He Himself became our meal  
And to His name all people's kneel  
Through His blood all nations heal  
And He gives an everlasting thrill!

The Pharisees' hands had to be washed clean  
Though their hearts were dirtier than a latrine  
Outwardly they shine, clear, bright, and pristine  
But inside they're dead and rotten gangrene  
It's uglier than anything you've ever seen  
Unless, of course, the Clean of cleans you've seen  
Who makes even the dirtiest latrine clean, bright, and pristine  
Brings to life gangrene and clears it from the scene  
For sinners He'd intervene  
He's the mediator and God's go-between  
In order to turn the ugliest into the most beautiful clean!

If your worship is fake  
It's for your own sake  
God's glory you take  
Vile idols you make  
You'll burn in the lake  
Unless Christ makes you awake  
Your sin forsake  
Selfishness He'll break  
And save you from heartache  
In His glory you'll partake  
And your life He'll remake  
Worship won't be fake  
But be done for His own name's sake!

God doesn't want honor merely from your lips  
It's your whole life and heart He takes and grips  
His delights flow down like the honeycomb drips  
So come to Christ by faith and with joy He equips

From His river of pleasures you'll forever take sips  
Where His glory will never suffer slips, trips, or eclipse!

God's holy commandments you shouldn't leave  
But run to the glorious Christ and cleave  
He saves if you'll only repent and believe  
He died and rose, salvation to achieve  
Dead, hell-bound sinners He came to retrieve  
By His grace may you have new eyes to perceive  
He lives for you now, your fears to relieve  
He's the most precious gift you could ever receive  
He's greater than all your mind could conceive!

He rules the world with almighty power  
He's our refuge and strength, our strong high tower  
All of our enemies He'll finally devour  
Though His tenderness and beauty bloom like a flower  
May we be ready now, He returns any hour  
Upon us great blessings He'll eternally shower!

Christ Jesus Makes True Worship Real  
He Is God's Word With Passion Zeal  
Sinners By Vain Tradition Steal  
His Glory, Yet To Him They Kneel  
He Wants Our Hearts His Praise To Feel  
For He Died And Rose To Seal  
Our Salvation And To Heal  
Us From Every Sin And Ill  
Now By Faith We Do His Will  
The Holy Spirit He Does Fill  
With Christ Our Everlasting Thrill!