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## *The Gospel According to Matthew*

### *When Traditions Parade as God's Word*

*April 14, 2019*

**Sermon Text:** Matt 15:1-20

**Scripture Reading:** Isaiah 1:1-20

Mat 15:1-20 Then Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem and said, (2) "Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat." (3) He answered them, "And why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? (4) For God commanded, 'Honor your father and your mother,' and, 'Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.' (5) But you say, 'If anyone tells his father or his mother, "What you would have

gained from me is given to God," (6) he need not honor his father.' So for the sake of your tradition you have made void the word of God.

(7) You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said: (8) "This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; (9) in vain do they worship me, **teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.**"

(10) And he called the people to him and said to them, "Hear and understand: (11) it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but what comes out of the mouth; this defiles a person." (12) Then the disciples came and said to him, "Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this saying?" (13) He answered, "Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be rooted up. (14) Let them alone; they are blind guides. And if the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit."

(15) But Peter said to him, “Explain the parable to us.” (16) And he said, “Are you also still without understanding? (17) Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth passes into the stomach and is expelled? (18) But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. (19) **For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander.** (20) These are what defile a person. But to eat with unwashed hands does not defile anyone.”

heart as God’s Word does. Rather, they prescribe outward works –

- What to eat
- What to drink
- What to wear
- Where to go, and so on.

This is what Paul meant when he wrote:

Rom 14:17 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

### Teaching Traditions as Scripture

In our experience over the years in the local church, your experience as well as mine, we have seen many examples of what Christ is teaching in this passage. *Human traditions, the inventions of people, being taught and presented as “thus saith the Lord.”* And while the Word of God is healing and freeing and gives us clarity of mind conscience (even when it convicts us and leads us to repentance), *the traditions of man enslave and harm.*

As we are about to see, man-made traditions, though they claim to be God’s Word, are the devices of man which are designed to force people to conform *outwardly*. That is to say, man’s traditions do not address the

Let’s listen once more to Jesus’ words here as He confronts the hypocrites. (And remember, these were the “pastors,” the church leaders of the day) –

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The Pharisees and the scribes. Think of this as the Pope and his cardinals or the celebrity bigwigs of the evangelical church today. Here they come. Is he going to receive them as Billy Graham received Roman bishops and cardinals at his crusades? Is He going to commend them? Hardly. And notice how they approach Him! Accusations. Anger. “Your disciples are breaking the ancient teachings of our elders by not washing their hands.”

We don’t need to go into detail about this hand-washing business. It is enough for us to know that it had nothing to do with sanitation, but rather was religious and ceremonial. Something that the Jewish traditions taught and enforced as a commandment of God but like all traditions of this kind it maintained that God is concerned with externals – that if we meet His external requirements, all is well.

This of course is a lie.

Now, you don’t want to get into a debate with God. You will lose. Jesus turned the tables on these hypocrites to show them that they were the ones who were disobeying God’s law, not Jesus and His disciples:

(3) He answered them, “And why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition?”

Jesus then quotes a basic law to them, an ABC of the Ten Commandments:

*Honor your father and mother.*

And Jesus even adds to the gravity of what they were doing by quoting still another commandment from God’s Law:

Exo 21:17 “Whoever curses his father or his mother shall be put to death.

So what they were doing was no small thing. They deserved to be executed! Not only were they failing to honor their elderly parents, they were cursing/reviling them. How?

(5) But you say, ‘If anyone tells his father or his mother, “What you would have gained from me is given to God,” (6) he need not honor his father.’ So for the sake of your tradition you have

made void the word of God.

That is, they taught people that if you said “it is given to God,” then mom and dad couldn’t get their hands on it, he didn’t need to give it to them even if they were in need. And you can’t help, knowing how these things operate, but conclude that these hypocrites were using a perversion of God’s Law for their own selfish gain. “Yeah, that money in my bank account can’t be touched because I have devoted it to God, in case He needs it, someday, maybe.”

I suppose also there could have been another angle to it. These hypocrite religious leaders knew that money given to help needy elderly parents would be money that didn’t come into their coffers! So, they make God’s Word void and insert their own tradition, teaching the people that putting the money in the offering box came first in priority over honoring father and mother.

*For the sake of your tradition, you make void the word of God.*

Traditions of men, by the way, taught as God’s Word, always, always, always benefit the ones who teach them.

Notice something else here, and notice it very, very carefully:

*The traditions of men taught as Scripture always oppress people. They are merciless. God’s Word always renders justice and mercy.*

I cannot tell you how often I confront this in our ministry to domestic abuse victims. There are so many false pastors and counterfeit churches that are dens of hypocrites, teaching traditions of their own as God’s Word. These traditions enslave. They make void God’s Word. They oppress the oppressed. And if we are not very careful and discerning, we can be duped by these false teachings.

*“The elders and myself have reviewed your case. We demand as does God’s Word that you not proceed with your divorce filings pending our determination of whether your husband is a Christian or not.”*

Actual case. Not fiction. This so-called pastor acknowledges that this lady has indeed been subject to abuse by a wicked man for decades. And yet he says that the fellow may still be a Christian. Furthermore, he claims it is God’s Word that only the pastor and elders can grant her permission to divorce and only they can determine if the man is a Christian or not.

This is the thing. And it happens all the time. Most churches are infected with this hypocrisy and notice how serious it is in the Lord's sight – *if you revile father and mother you are to be put to death.*

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*Hypocrite religion is lip religion, not heart religion.* That is to say, it is not a religion of “you must be born again.” It is works. It is externals. And it is evil. And it creates laws, calling them God's Word, that address externals. If your religion is no more than this, then you are still under God's condemnation – you do not know Him. That is the very thing that was prevalent in this church 25 years ago, you see.

And notice what the Lord thinks of the “worship” of such a church, of hypocrites like this:

*In vain do they worship me*

Remember how Isaiah opens as we heard earlier in the Scripture reading?

Isa 1:10-15 Hear the word of the LORD, you rulers of Sodom! Give ear to the teaching of our God, you people of Gomorrah! (11) “What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? says the LORD; I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of well-fed beasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of goats. (12) “When you come to appear before me, who has required of you this trampling of my courts? (13) Bring no more vain offerings; incense is an abomination to me. New moon and Sabbath and the calling of convocations— I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly. (14) Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hates; they have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them. (15) When you spread out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood.

Going “to church” is not always a good thing! There are many local churches who are repugnant to the Lord and – He cannot endure their sin mixed with “solemn assembly.” He calls for someone to stand up and shut the doors and refuse to let the hypocrites in.

Jer 7:8-11 “Behold, you trust in deceptive words to no avail. (9) Will

you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, make offerings to Baal, and go after other gods that you have not known, (10) and then come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, ‘We are delivered!’—only to go on doing all these abominations? (11) Has this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, I myself have seen it, declares the LORD.

Let me point out one more thing that we see in Jesus’ words:

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Notice that Jesus calls the teachings of the hypocrites:

- The commandments of men
- Tradition

In contrast, He calls the Scriptures –

- *doctrine,*
- *the commandment of God,*
- *the word of God.*

And here is the point I want us all to see. *All doctrine, any teaching about God and His will, either has its origin in man or in God. One or the other.* That is to say, *no tradition of man is the Word of God.* And the Word of God is not originated in man.

1Co 2:6-10 Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. (7) But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. (8) None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. (9) But, as it is written, “What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him”— (10) these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God.

Now let’s apply this. We can KNOW if some teaching is from God or not. In fact we are required as God’s people to make this discernment:

1Jn 4:1 Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.

*If some teaching or doctrine or commandment is not in the Bible, and I don't mean somehow "derived from" Scripture by the convoluted reasonings of men, then it is not the Word of God.*

There is no justification in Scripture for "traditions of men" being binding upon Christ's people. Therefore the entire body of tradition that the Roman Catholic Church teaches as the authoritative Word of God is from man, it is evil, it is a false gospel, and we can know this with absolute certainty.

- Confession to a priest
- Justification by water baptism
- Penance
- Purgatory
- The Papacy
- The priesthood
- The mass
  
- And on and on it goes. All lies from the enemy. All to be rejected. All teachers of which are guilty hypocrites before God.

Christian, you need not be enslaved to such things. You need not obey the mass of traditions that exist today in evangelical churches. Such things only address externals and they are oppressive.

We will close with this and plan to consider Jesus' words here further next time:

(10) And he called the people to him and said to them, "Hear and understand: (11) it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but what comes out of the mouth; this defiles a person."

The heart, you see. Christ looks at our heart. True religion addresses the essence of who we really are, and unless we are born again we remain unclean before God no matter how much washing and doings we perform.