

Matthew 15:1-9

Ritual or Devotion

Matthew 15:1-9

¹ 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.’”

Matthew 15:1-9

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.' "

The Pharisee's Question

The Charge: "Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders?"

The Example: "for they do not wash their hands when they eat."

Tradition of the elders – "oral laws developed to help explain and apply the Scriptures"

Jesus' Question

The Charge: "And why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition?"

Example: Ignoring obligation to parents (Mat 15:4-6)

Traditions vs God's Word

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.

Isaiah's Prophecy

Matthew 15:7–9 (ESV)

⁷You 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.’ ”

Hypocrite - “one who pretends to be other than he really is”

Jesus' Accusation

The Pharisees & Scribes are hypocrites for two reasons:

1. They teach their human tradition rather than God's Word.
2. Their actions are merely external. They don't flow from their hearts.

Consequence: Nullify the word of God & their worship is in vain.

Ritual or Devotion?

“This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me...” (v8)

Ritual: say or do the “right things”; focus is external, what other’s see.

Devotion: What we do flows from the heart, an expression of our love for God and others.

The Great Commandment

³⁷ And he said to him, **“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.** ³⁸ This is the great and first commandment. ³⁹ And a second is like it: **You shall love your neighbor as yourself.** ⁴⁰ On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.” (Mat 22:37-40)

Reflective Questions

- Do the things I say and do “for God” flow out of ritual or devotion?
- Does God’s Word have greater influence in your life than tradition? The culture? My own needs and wants?
- Am I more concerned about what others see or with what God sees?
- Am I motivated by love for God and love for other people?