

# Matthew 15:1-20

## “The Kingdom and Religious Ritual”

Religious rituals can be a great benefit to the worship of God. They can also be obstacles to worship. Can rituals make us right with God? How are we made right with God? What is the place of religious ritual in the worship of God?

### Study Guide Qs

1. What is one of your favorite religious rituals and why?
2. What are some of the benefits of religious ritual?
3. What are some of the dangers?
4. Talk about a time when you engaged in some religious ritual but your heart wasn't really worshipping?
5. Talk about a time when you engaged in some religious ritual and your heart was really worshipping?

**“Jesus is our King and the community realm”**

**Consider your neighbors. What are you grateful for about your community?**

**Pastor Robb Oram**  
**Mobil Ave. campus**

subject: religious ritual and the Kingdom of God

objective: worship the Lord in spirit and truth

I. God's commands trump our rituals (1-6)

II. real worship requires a right heart (7-9)

“God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” (John 4:24)

III. impurity flows from the inside (10-20)

# Pastor Bruce Zachary

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**Intro.** Religious rituals can be a great benefit to worship of God. They can also be obstacles to worship. Can rituals make us right with God? How are we made right with God? What is the place of religious ritual in the worship of God?

**Subject:** The place of religious ritual in worship

**Object:** Worship God in Spirit and truth

**A. The problems of religious ritual without true worship [1-9]** Then the scribes and Pharisees who were from Jerusalem came to Jesus, saying, <sup>2</sup> “Why do Your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread. A delegation of religious leaders confronted Jesus for neglecting **the tradition of the elders** regarding ceremonial washings. The *Mishna* would later record the oral rabbinic traditions (@150AD), and a whole book was devoted to ceremonial washings. This was an attempt to be ceremonially pure not a hygiene issue. The traditions had become as important as the Scriptures.

**What are some of the rituals (traditions) that you’ve seen in the local church?**

*Sunday worship, private + corporate prayer, Bible study, worship in song, baptism, communion, order of service, dress, formal liturgy or casual reverence ...*

**1. Religious ritual can obscure God’s commands [3-6]** He answered and said to them, “Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition? <sup>4</sup> For God commanded, saying, ‘Honor your father and your mother’; and, ‘He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death. <sup>5</sup> But you say, ‘Whoever says to his father or mother, “Whatever profit you might have received from me *is a gift to God*” — <sup>6</sup> then he need not honor his father or mother.’ Thus you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition. Jesus corrects them for neglecting God’s commands because of their traditions. Jesus quotes from **Ex.20:12** the 5<sup>th</sup> of the 10 Commandments to **honor your father and your mother** and **Ex.21:7** that he who curses a parent should be put to death [4]. Then shows how their tradition of dedicating a gift to God could obscure the commandment. For example, your parents need money, but you tell them your savings are a gift dedicated for a sacred purpose (*korban* Mk. 7:11) so you can’t help your parents. But the vow to God could later be annulled so that you could use your savings as you please. Yet, you use the tradition to justify neglecting your parents.

*\* Traditions re men’s + women’s min + programs vs. command to love God + neighbor*

**2. Religious ritual without true worship doesn’t satisfy God or man [7-9] Hypocrites!** Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying: <sup>8</sup> ‘These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with *their* lips, But their heart is far from Me. <sup>9</sup> And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’ Tradition is ritual but God’s word is reality. Real worship is consistent with God’s word.

**a. The heart of the problem is the problem of the heart:** Jesus reveals the hypocrisy [7] of focusing on the external without a heart [8] to truly worship God [9] [Is. 29:13].

**b. Religious ritual without true worship cannot make you right with God:** Ritual can't change the heart: e.g. baptism, communion, going to church, giving, serving

## **B. The solution: a heart transformed by Christ to truly worship God [10-20]**

**1. Defilement comes from within not from without [10-11]** When He had called the multitude to *Himself*, He said to them, “Hear and understand: <sup>11</sup> Not what goes into the mouth defiles a man; but what comes out of the mouth, this defiles a man.” Jesus addresses the multitude and calls them to **Hear and understand** and declares that impurity comes from within not from without.

a. Neither food nor unclean hands make you impure

b. Radical statement in light of **Lev.11** describing clean (kosher) and unclean foods

i. Obeying God's commands re food results in blessings, including better health in light of food hygiene issues at the time, but not purity without worship of God

**2. Traditions that are not of God will be exposed and uprooted [12-15]** Then His disciples came and said to Him, “Do You know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this saying?”<sup>13</sup> But He answered and said, “Every plant which My heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted. <sup>14</sup> Let them alone. They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch.” The Pharisees were offended by Jesus' teaching re defilement [12]. Jesus confirms that traditions that are not of God (e.g. ceremonial washings) will be uprooted [13].

### **a. The New Testament uproots many of the traditions related to the Old**

The Pharisee and their followers were blind to the truth that defilement comes from within not from without and thus stumble [14]. Traditions are difficult to uproot [15] **Then Peter answered and said to Him, “Explain this parable to us.** Peter thinks Jesus is sharing another parable, and doesn't understand that Jesus is declaring doctrine. Cf. Ac.10 Peter finally understands.

### **3. You are right with God by faith in Christ that transforms your heart [16-20]**

<sup>16</sup> So Jesus said, “Are you also still without understanding? <sup>17</sup> Do you not yet understand that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and is eliminated? <sup>18</sup> But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man. <sup>19</sup> For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. <sup>20</sup> These are *the things* which defile a man, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man. Jesus again affirms that food that *goes in your mouth* doesn't make you impure before God [16-17]. We are defiled by what comes *out of our mouth* because it flows **from our heart** [18]. A heart that is not submitted to Christ produces evil [19] and is contrary to God's commandments (v.19 lists the 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, and 9<sup>th</sup> of the Ten Commandments).

*Cf. Transformed heart: Rom. 10:10 belief, Col. 3:16 praise, Matt. 22:37-38 priority, 2 Cor. 9:7 purpose, Lu. 24:32 passion*

### **C. God is seeking worship in spirit and truth [Jn. 4:23-24]**

**“To worship is to quicken the conscience by the holiness of God, to feed the mind with the truth of God, to purge the imagination by the beauty of God, to open the heart to the love of God, to devote the will to purpose of God” [William Temple]**

**1. True worship flows from faith in Messiah characterized by obedience to the word, and dependence upon Messiah’s sacrifice to make you right with God.**

*What is the place of religious ritual in the worship of God?*

**2. Religious ritual can be an expression of, or aid to worship, but only when the heart seeks to worship God in spirit and truth** prompted by the Spirit and consistent with the truth of the Bible.