

SERMON TEXT: Matthew 15:1-20

SERMON TITLE: Drawing Near to God with Our Hearts

Main idea: To draw near to God with our hearts, and offer worship that is not vain, we must worship God according to His commandments and not add any traditions of men.

Introduction

Missing God's instructions because of man's ideas. The Pharisees focused more upon unwashed eating hands than upon what was coming out of their hearts. This is because only God decides what is **true religion—the true way of approaching Him and being accepted**. Tradition about religion always eventually displaces God's Word about religion.

In Jesus's correcting them about this, He gives two other instances of where the traditions of men squeeze out the Word of God:

Another example from their current practice: **true morality v.s. tradition-altered morality**

Fulfillment of Isaiah 29:13: **true worship v.s. tradition-altered worship**

True morality v.s. tradition-altered morality

They focused more upon a system of designating offerings than upon taking care of parents in their own age. This is because **only God decides what are good works**. Manmade ideas about good works always eventually displace God's Word about good works.

True worship v.s. tradition-altered worship

In fact, **Jesus draws a terrible conclusion about the people. "Their heart is far from Me. And in vain do they worship Me."** What a terrifying statement! Upon what basis does He draw this conclusion? "Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men." This is because only God decides what is true worship. Regardless of what sounds like it is coming out of man's mouth and off of man's lips, if he has decided for himself how to worship, he has put himself in the place of God. He may be full of sentimental notions about the idea of God that he thinks he is honoring, but God's own verdict is, "their heart is far from Me."

In its original context, the saying is perhaps even a little more frightening. In Isaiah 29:13, God is judging His people by blinding their eyes from seeing what His Word commands. With open Bibles, they are yet blinded—unable to see that the Lord commands the specific way of drawing near to Him and fearing Him, but still making vain attempts to draw near and honor Him.

Now Jesus takes this and says that the Pharisees are voluntarily doing this to themselves. Whether our traditions are newer or older, **whatever is manmade instead of Scripture-derived in worship always does this: makes our hearts far from Him and our worship worthless.**

As we are here in this passage for its teaching on worship, we need to see two very important issues that Jesus is emphasizing in vv12-14: **legalism and powerlessness.**

One aspect of **legalism in worship is that, when manmade ideas are introduced into the service, others must suddenly obey men rather than God.** Jesus points out that adding tradition doesn't just make them blind, but also those who lead others into blindness. Legalism in approaching God results in legalism in causing others to approach In corporate worship, so long as the church only does what Scripture commands, all are being led by God and obeying God. But as soon as a manmade idea enters public worship, the whole congregation is being made to do what man has invented.

The more in-agreement the church is, the worse it becomes. If there is just one who does not hold to the tradition, this increases the oppression in which the rest of the body is imposing their will upon him.

If the whole body holds to the man-made idea, then we still have to face the fact that in attempting to join the worship of heaven, we would now attempt to impose man-made ideas upon the holy angels and the souls of the righteous made perfect.

Even on earth, if a believer from another body or even place or culture comes in, he who ought to have been an honored guest in God's worship becomes subjected in the holy assembly itself not to God but to the ideas of his human hosts. In our passage, Jesus calls this "the blind leading the blind, and both fall into a ditch."

This “falling into a ditch” statement reinforces to us the **powerlessness** of manmade ideas in worship. We are in a spiritual war, and the weapons we must use cannot be fleshly but must be spiritual.

Whatever comes from us is fleshly. It cannot reach up to heaven. It cannot make worship true. It cannot do anything to reduce filthiness or guiltiness. It cannot do anything to produce spiritual life. Our ideas are lifeless, powerless, helpless. Only what God has given carries with it the attending of God’s own power and therefore has in it life, and power, and help. This is one reason the favorite call-to-worship in the Reformation was Psalm 124:8, “Our help is in the Name of Yahweh, who made the heavens and the earth.” Indeed. He alone is our help. So, on His day, let us rejoice and be glad in Him!

As soon as we find ourselves thinking, “I wish that we would...” ... if the next thing is not something that God Himself has commanded, then Jesus says that our hearts are far from Him.

As soon as we find ourselves thinking, “I wish that we would...” ... if the next thing is not something that God Himself has commanded, then Jesus calls such worship worthless.

As soon as we find ourselves thinking, “I wish that we would...” ... if the next thing is not something that God Himself has commanded, then Jesus says that we are blind legalists, imposing manmade worship upon others.

As soon as we find ourselves thinking, “I wish that we would...” ... if the next thing is not something that God Himself has commanded, then Jesus says that we are falling into a ditch—replacing the powerful and effective institution of God with the powerless and helpless ideas of man.

Conclusion: The greatness of true worship, and the patience of Jesus with us while we learn that greatness

- But God HAS invested His power in the worship that He commands
- And God HAS given us instruction, so that worship would not impose man’s will on others
- And God HAS given us a way to worship Him—which, we find from other passages, is all about the Lord Jesus Christ—that He counts as worthy
- And God HAS given us a way to worship Him, in which He grants for our hearts to draw near

Now, this last part brings us to something very important. Because just coming in the right actions does not mean by itself that our hearts are drawing near.

Coming with incorrect actions means that our hearts are NOT.

But coming with correct actions, our hearts can be just as far away!

We must come in faith:

according to His Word

submitting our hearts

clinging to Christ

with our whole selves

putting away distractions

focusing our minds

fostering our affections

stirring up our zeal

And this Jesus, to Whom and through Whom we come, patiently persists with us, even as He asks, “Are you still without understanding?” His gentleness and patience themselves are part of the loveliness that should drive us to worship Him as He wants!