



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Matthew 15:1–20

Gospel of Matthew

“Human Tradition vs. Holy Scripture”

TRANSCRIPT

We turn to Matthew chapter 15 verse 1 through verse 20. Now you may remember that in the preceding context the Lord Jesus has been in Galilee and we have just had the incident of Jesus walking on the water and then the brief account of some healings in Genasaret, and now we continue the account from that context, verse 1 of chapter 15:

“Then came to Jesus scribes and Pharisees, who were of Jerusalem, saying, ‘Why do Thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? for they wash not their hands when they eat bread.’ But he answered and said unto them, ‘Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition? For God commanded, saying, Honour Thy father and mother: and, He that curseth father or mother, let him die the death. But ye say, Whosoever shall say to his father or his mother, It is a gift, by whatsoever Thou mightest be profited by me; And honour not his father or his mother, he shall be free. Thus have ye made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition. Ye hypocrites, well did Isaiah prophesy of you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is

far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.’ And he called the multitude, and said unto them, ‘Hear, and understand: Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man.’ Then came his disciples, and said unto him, ‘Knowest thou that the Pharisees were offended, after they heard this saying?’ But he answered and said, ‘Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up. Let them alone: they are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch.’ Then answered Peter and said unto him, ‘Explain unto us this parable.’ And Jesus said, ‘Are ye also yet without understanding? Do not ye yet understand, that whatsoever entereth in at the mouth goeth into the stomach, and is cast out into the draught? But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: These are the things which defile a man: but to eat with unwashed hands defileth not a man.’”

May God bless this reading of his Word. Let’s bow together in prayer.

[Prayer] Father we are grateful and thankful that we are able to meet upon a morning such as this and bring our petitions to Thee with the assurance that Thou dost hear us and answer our prayers.

We know Lord that Thy answers are not always yes, that there are many times when the proper answer for us, the one in accordance with Thy will, is no. We pray that Thou wilt help us to adjust to Thy will, to be responsive to it, and we pray, O God, that Thou wilt motivate us in our

hearts to worship Thee and to praise Thee and honor Thee in spite of the incidental facts of our daily lives.

We pray that Thou wilt enable us to surmount them and to recognize that our great God in heaven is in control of all of the events of our lives and that as we lean upon Thee and trust in Thy Word Thou wilt bring to us all of Thy will for us and glorify Thy name through us.

So Lord, we praise Thee for each one present today, and we ask Thy blessing upon them. May Thy presence be with them, and as we together study the Scriptures, we pray O God that Thou wilt give us illumination and insight and understanding and enable us to apply the things that we learn to our daily lives.

We know Lord how important it is that our worship be true worship in spirit and in truth. Deliver us from the awkward, the formal, the artificial, and enable us to have a true relationship to Thee that proceeds out of a heart cleansed through the grace manifested in the gift of the Lord Jesus.

Most of all, we give Thee thanks for the redemption that we have and the assurance that we belong to the family of God through the blood that was shed, and we pray, Lord, that Thy blessing may be upon each one in this auditorium in the sense that there is gratitude and thankfulness for all that Thou hast done and a relationship to Thee that is real and vital.

We pray for each unable to be here, ask oh Lord Thy blessing upon them. We remember the sick. We ask Thy blessing upon them as they are ministered to by their physicians, give them wisdom and guidance as they prescribe and attempt to heal.

We pray, Lord, that Thou wilt bring encouragement, that Thou wilt bring the sense of Thy perfect will in the lives of the ill, and may these experiences in spite of the unpleasantness of them be experiences that are helpful and edifying.

We pray for those in the hospital and ask Thy blessing upon them. We also Lord would remember, especially today, the proclamation of the gospel through the whole church of the Lord Jesus Christ, not only in our immediate area but throughout this land and throughout the world. May today be a great day for the preaching of Thy Word and therefore for the whole church of the Lord

Jesus. Strengthen the whole body, edify it, build it up, prepare us Lord for the future and the glories of heaven itself.

We pray Thy blessing up on the elders and deacons of this assembly and give us wisdom and guidance as we think about the future. Direct us, Lord, in a way that will honor Thee and glorify Thee and enable us to have a part in all that Thou art doing to magnify the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now we commit this meeting to Thee. We pray Thy blessing upon it.

For Jesus' sake. Amen.

[Message] The subject for this morning in the continuation of our exposition of the Gospel of Matthew is “Human Tradition vs. the Holy Scripture.” However difficult and obscure this section may seem, it is nevertheless one of Matthew’s most important ones. It pictures the collision of two views of religion, and also of two views of the demands of God. It is evident from the way in which our Lord Jesus acts when he confronts the scribes and Pharisees that there could be no compromise, for one of these views or the other of the view it was, destroy the other or perish. Is the relation to God by ritual or is our relationship to God by personal relationship? Is our relationship to God one that is maintained by confirmation to outward form, or is our relationship to God one that is maintained by inward faith?

So here we have the clash of two views of the approach in relationship to the Lord. Is it something outward? It is something maintained by ritual and liturgy? Or is it something that is inward? Is our relationship to the Lord personal? Is it maintained by a relationship of the heart with him?

The present day applications of this particular passage are obviously manifold because our age is an age of religious neglect, but where religion does exist, it is an age of religious externalism. One of the things that I thought illustrated this beautifully was a clipping from a magazine that was sent to me by my son who lives in Nashville a few weeks ago. About two weeks ago he sent me a clipping with a little note, “I think this might make a good illustration,” and the title of the article was “Protestants Offer a Ritual to Mark the End of Marriage.”

And it seems that a certain minister—the fact that she was a female does not seem to have any relationship to what transpires—but it was a female minister of the Methodist Church who was the head of the Methodist’s ritual committee, has proposed that since we have a formal service when we begin our life together in marriage, it seemed very reasonable to her that we should have a formal ceremony when we conclude our marriage by divorce.

So she has suggested that we have a divorce ceremony as well as a marriage ceremony in the church, and that this particular ceremony might be might do the couples some good. In fact, a portion of the ceremony reads this way, “I believe that God was with us before we encountered one another, that he was with us when we were married and that now he is with each of separately and there is a purpose to our separation and divorce.” That’s part of the ritual that has been proposed for the ceremony of divorce.

Well we must say that that would qualify for the adjective creative which is so popular today—creativity in religious things to have a new ceremony of divorce. It illustrates the fact that we do live in an age in which there is a great deal of stress upon religious or spiritual externalism. Rabbi Nathan, one of the early rabbis, is supposed to have said, “If the hypocrites were divided into 10 parts, 9 of them would be found in Jerusalem and one in the world beside.” That seems to be a strange thing coming from a rabbi, because you might expect him to think otherwise, but evidently he had come to the realization that even in Judaism, hypocrisy did exist. I know that if he were living today he would change those proportions, and I’m sure he would include the United States of America in his analysis.

Well this is an important section, and it has some important applications for us, and the fact that it was important in the time of the Lord seems to be indicated by the fact that the scribes and Pharisees came from Jerusalem to Galilee in order to ask our Lord the question. “Then came to Jesus scribes and Pharisees who were of Jerusalem.” We are, I think, justified in saying that they probably came from the south in order to ask him this very question. So they regarded it as significant. So it must have been an important thing for them.

Perhaps they were desirous of catching him to find him in some error in order that they might condemn him, but that is not stated in the context, so it perhaps would be wiser and nicer for us to just simply say that they probably were bewildered by the things that they had heard that he was teaching. And so they came to ask him what was for them an honest question: why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? Notice they do not say transgress the Word of God. Although, I think they might have said that, we are understanding the relationship of the tradition of the elders to God’s demands as they did.

But they say, “Why do your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders because they don’t rinse their hands when they eat their food?” It was the custom for those who were orthodox in their doctrine to rinse their hands before they ate their food, and in fact, many of them rinsed their hands several times as they went from one course to another.

Now the washing of the hands was not the kind of washing of hands that we would do, but it was an official kind of ritual washing by which they took a little bit of water and let the water run over their hands, and then let it run off their hands this way, so they went through this as a kind of ritual. This prohibition was not in the Old Testament, but it arose from the addition to the law of the Old Testament requirements concerning the laws of the clean and unclean things in the book of Leviticus.

No doubt most of you in this auditorium have at one time or another at least attempted to read through the book of Leviticus—I hope you have read through the whole book—but when you came to chapter 11, you probably were puzzled by the way in which it is stated in that chapter that certain things were to be eaten and certain things were not to be eaten. And you probably were disappointed to discover that some things that you have thought were pretty good eating were not allowed the Jews in their eating. I don’t know how they got along without bacon, for example, which happens to be one of my favorite foods. But they did nevertheless.

Evidently, as far as we can tell, this interest in and stress upon the traditions of the elders arose as a result of the disobedience that led to the captivity in Babylon. And during that general

time, there arose a number in Judaism who became very concerned about obedience to the law of God. Ezra, for example, was the leader in a movement to go back to the Scriptures and to listen to them and discover from them what they were really saying.

Now, out of this interest in the Word of God there also arose questions over the interpretation of their various parts of the Word of God and so there arose documents or bodies of tradition which we know by the term, Mishnah. I have made some references to this in the *Believers Bible Bulletin*: the Mishnah, the Gemara, and then finally the Talmuds, the Jerusalem Talmud and the Babylonian Talmud. And in these volumes of books, in this mass of tradition, there is contained a great deal of interpretation of the Old Testament, much of what which went far beyond the Old Testament, and out of this grew what the Lord Jesus refers to here as “the tradition of the elders.”

This was not something that was just true of Israel. This is true of many, many nations. For example, in India today, if you were a high caste Indian, you would regard all who were not of your caste, those in lower castes, as being unclean, and you could not have any fellowship with them, you could not sit down to eat with them. So this is something characteristic of human nature, but it was true also of the Israelites.

In Leviticus chapter 11 it was said that the Israelites could only eat, with reference to meat, those animals that parted the hoof and chewed the cud, and it was necessary for all meats before they were eaten to be cleansed from all blood. That’s where we get the expression, kosher, which means “proper or fit,” so that meat had to be especially prepared before it could be eaten, then it could be called kosher.

There are some strange differences among the things that could be eaten and those that could not be eaten. For example, fish could be eaten, but only under certain only certain types of fish. And lobsters—many of you no doubt like lobsters—but lobsters were considered to be unclean. All insects, with one exception were considered to be unclean. A locust could be eaten, and locusts are still eaten in the East. Now we don’t understand these things but nevertheless that’s true.

Some of these laws were no doubt given for purposes of hygiene, but not all of them. We could not eat if we had been Jews, the pig or the rabbit or the hare. They were subject to parasitic infections. And as you perhaps know, they are also subject to worms of certain types, and no doubt this was part of the reason for the prohibition of the eating of the pig and the rabbit and the hare.

But nevertheless, these things were ultimately ceremonial. They were designed to stress certain spiritual truths which Israel needed to have stressed for them in preparation for the coming of the Messiah. As a result of these laws which God had given, there arose a great mass of interpretation of them, a tradition. Now the words of the elders came to be regarded as weightier than the words of the prophets, and even the rabbis stated this. They said the words of the elders are weightier than the words of the prophets. So you can see there arose a tendency in Israel to pay more attention to the interpretations of the elders of the Law of Moses than of specific teaching of the Word of God.

The Talmud has said that Moses received the oral law at Sinai, that he handed it on through Joshua and the elders, and the prophets to the men of the great synagogue, and they commanded three things: be deliberate in judgment, raise up many disciples, and make a fence for the law. Now the making of the fence for the law consisted of the vast number of precepts and prohibitions to supplement and protect, they thought, the written law. But many of these things became rather ridiculous.

It was supposed that there was a demon named Shibta which sits upon men's hands during the night, and if any person touches his food with unwashed hands then that demon sits upon his food and makes it dangerous. That seems too strange to us, and we wouldn't pay much attention to it, but nevertheless you can see how if that was the belief of many that these traditions of the elders became rather important for them.

Now we have this not only in Israel but we even have it in Christianity, as you know, and perhaps the greatest illustration of it is found in the decrees of the Council of Trent, in which it was claimed that the Roman traditions are to be held, I'm quoting from the Council, “Are to be held with



the same powers of affection and reverence as the Holy Scriptures.” So there has in Christianity itself arisen a tradition which takes the Word of God as one source of our authority, and the other the traditional interpretations of the Word of God by the fathers, and one of these or both of these have a kind of equal authority for us, so that we are not simply under the Word of God in this Christian tradition, but under the Word of God as interpreted by the fathers of the church. So in effect, we have a two-fold authority: the authority of the Bible and the authority human interpretation of Scripture.

The Apostle Paul was an individual who had been taught this, and in fact, when he speaks of his former life in the Epistle to the Galatians, he speaks about being zealous for the traditions of the fathers. Beyond his contemporaries he evidently exceeded the other men of his day in the understanding of the Old Testament law and the understanding of the interpretation that had been put upon that law by the interpreters of it. So he knew exactly what the traditions of the elders were.

Well you can see that if this were true in the time of our Lord, when our Lord came and his disciples did not wash their hands, did not observe the traditions, they saw that immediately here we have a movement that is in conflict with orthodox Judaism. So they traveled, I say perhaps bewildered, to the north where the Lord Jesus was and asks asked him the question, why do your disciples transgress the traditions of the elders?

The retort of our Lord which is given in the next section is an interesting retort, because he doesn't really answer their question directly. He does not say to them, now my disciples transgress the tradition of the elders for these three reasons, number one, the tradition of the elders is not Scripture, and number two, there are many misinterpretations in it, and so on. What he does is to show that if one obeys the oral law, then he often will find himself in contradiction with the written law of God. That's his method.

And the first thing that he does, however, is really to accuse them of transgression also. “Why do you also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?” he says in the third verse. Now notice when he says, you also, he acknowledges that his disciples are transgressing the

tradition of the elders, but they are transgressing, but their transgression is not transgression of the elders, it's transgression of the commandment of God. It's in effect as if he should say to them you should talk about transgression. My disciples transgress the tradition of the elders, but you are transgressing the commandment of the Lord. Now I think you can see that the Lord Jesus was not the kind of person who felt that it was always proper to answer in a nice sweet loving way, careful not to give any offense whatsoever. Luther said, “He answered their bolt with a counter bolt.”

Now there are two things that are implied in his answer. He goes on to say, for to explain why you are transgressing the Word of God, for God commanded saying honor thy father and mother. He refers to the Fifth Commandment: “Honor thy father and thy mother that your days may be long while you are upon the earth.” And he said, now God commanded that we should obey the fifth commandment, but you say when someone from your family comes to you who has need, you say that whatever I have which might profit you has been given to God as a gift. You say *corbon*, which is an Aramaic term that means something like “a gift.” It's a gift dedicated to the Lord. And by this you avoid helping those who have a real reason to expect some help from you.

Now he refers to a custom which was evidently very widespread. If, for example, we have a younger couple that has some material possession and their parents are in need, and their parents come to their children and express their need to them, in the light of the fifth commandment they should respond and help their parents. Honor thy father and thy mother.

Incidentally, that's not bad advice. Of course, the Word of God exhorts us in the New Testament to be sure that we do everything to take care of our children if we are parents, and we have a responsibility to our children, but there are occasions in which our parents also have great need. I think it is probably fair to say that it is our responsibility to take care of members of our family.

Well, the family came to the children and they needed something but the children didn't want to help their parents. And they had a way out, and their way out was simply to say *corbon*:

everything that I have has been dedicated to God, and since it's dedicated to God it really belongs to him.

Of course, I have use of it, and furthermore, remember in the Old Testament in the book of Numbers it says if you make a vow you have to keep your vow? So I have to keep my vow. Therefore, I cannot help you. Now the Lord Jesus said in effect what you are doing is you are using a human tradition—for this was not taught in the Old Testament, this *corbon*—you're using a human tradition in order to evade the responsibility that rests upon you by virtue of the fifth commandment of the ten given by God.

Well it's very clever you see. but it really was a violation of the Word of God. And the sad thing about it is that they were contending that they had to keep the word of man, they had to keep the vow of God, but they were free to violate the law of God, for in the Jewish tradition they were not really required to give what they had promised to God by *corbon* to him.

Now isn't that a strange set of circumstances, that we can say that we must keep our word which is the word of a man contrary to the Word of God, and we can avoid helping those that we ought to help by virtue of the Law of God by using the expression, *corbon*, and in avoiding of it we are not required to keep our vow to God and really give those things to God? Well that, of course, is the depth of the sin and wickedness of human tradition.

One of the ancient commentators who has written a series of books on the relationship between Judaism and Christianity, John Lightfoot, wrote about 300 years ago, “He was not at all bound to dedicate his estate to sacred uses, but he was enviably bound not to help his parent.” And then in sarcasm, John Lightfoot adds, “O excellent doctrine and charity.” So you can see the Lord Jesus' answer is a very telling answer to the Pharisees and scribes concerning the violation of the Word of God. You have asked me why my disciples do not rinse their hands before eating bread, and you have accused them of transgressing the tradition of the elders. I accuse you of transgression of the Word of God. So it really is a case of human tradition versus the Word of God.

Now, you know this has a great deal of practical application. In spite of the fact that we are Protestants, in spite of the fact that we pride ourselves upon the position that we follow the Word of God, we do not follow the traditions of men, we do not even follow the Romanists’ traditions, nevertheless, in Protestantism we have built up our own ecclesiastical system of traditions, too.

Now at this point we could spend the remainder of the morning speaking about the various types of traditions that have been invented within Protestantism, for we have many of them. It is still believed in much of Protestantism that a service of the Word of God cannot be legitimately conducted in the man who is to preach the Word of God is not an ordained man. We also still have the sneaking opinion back often unexpressed that we cannot have a true service of the Word of God in the ministry of the Word or in worship if we do not follow a prescribed liturgy.

It is still believed even within Protestantism that we cannot carry on a work of God if we do not have ordained clergy who are in control and in leadership of the work of the Lord. It is a surprising thing that these ideas have arisen within Christianity. And of course you can think of probably many others that I have not referred to. We are just as subject to the magnification of the traditions of men as Judaism was in the day of our Lord. The tendency of human people, human individuals, is to add tradition to the Word of God, because by our addition of our interpretations, by our addition of tradition, frequently we therefore evade the responsibility to obey the Word of God. We interpret it in such a way that the teeth are extracted from the convicting power of Holy Scripture.

Now the Lord Jesus feels it necessary to document this from the Word of God, and for him the Old Testament was the Word of God, and so he appeals to the Old Testament, specifically to the book of Isaiah. And he addresses them in a rather sharp way: “Ye hypocrites.” Again you notice our Lord Jesus was not an individual who was sweet and nice at all times. He did not feel that it was really truly in accordance with the Word of God to be a namby pamby type of proclaimer of divine truth. He did not hesitate to say directly to individuals who spoke to him, you hypocrites. So he said, you hypocrites.

Now he was not guilty of unlove. Sometimes it is the loving man who says, you hypocrite. It's only by this that some people are awakened from their hypocrisy, and so in this respect, led by the Holy Spirit, he said to them, “Ye hypocrites, Isaiah did well prophesy of you.” Now when he says Isaiah prophesied of them he meant the situation in Isaiah's day was similar to the situation today. In Isaiah's day, Israel had reached the place of backsliding where they did not really enter into a personal relationship with the Lord, but were merely going through the motions of spiritual worship. And Isaiah had said, “This people draw near to me with their mouth and honoreth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.”

He alludes to the fact that the worship of God was still being carried on, the priests were still about their priestly business of making offerings and sacrifices, but nevertheless it was purely of form and ritual, and the great mass of Israel was in a backslidden and apostate condition. And he states that the same condition exists now. You hypocrites, Isaiah prophesied of you and he said this people honors me with their mouth and their lips but their heart is far from me.

I wonder if that could be said of any of us in this auditorium. I wonder if we have even thought this was a very bad morning to come out but I came out. Now I must confess, that I would have been happier to stay at home this morning. I wonder if even in our church going if we do not at times reach the state where we just go through the motions. And when we are exhorted to sing, we stand up and sing the hymn. And when we have a time of prayer, we bow our heads and think about our business or our school or our play or other problems that we have. And we sit and listen to the Word of God and we fix our eyes upon Dr. Johnson, but our thoughts are far from what he is saying.

Now the reason I am so able to analyze exactly what may be transpiring is because I have often been in the same position. I had a friend who a long time ago used to say, when a certain man preaches—she was unhappy with certain certain habits that he had in his private life—she said when a certain man preaches, and I have to listen to him, I always add a new room to the house or cut out a new dress.

It is possible for us to draw near to the Lord with our mouths and honor him with our lips but our hearts to be far from him. Now when those things transpire, when that kind of attitude persists, we are in precisely the same condition that these people were here. We sing as we are called upon, “O for a thousand tongues to sing my great Redeemer’s praise”—what a futile kind of hymn to sing anyway. I couldn’t think of anything worse than for us to have a thousand tongues. One tongue does enough damage. But to have a thousand tongues, and then what a futile thing anyway, because most of us are not using the one tongue that we have to speak about the praise of the Lord Jesus at all.

But we get up and sing. Well the tune is nice, and we like the tune. O for a thousand tongues to sing my great Redeemer’s praise. It’s no wonder Matthew Henry speaks about piety but from the teeth outwards. No, we shouldn’t look back upon these Jews and say well they were really bad in those days, but we are different, we have the Word of God and we do not have to follow human tradition, we attend Believers Chapel and we study the Bible and the Bible alone. The Bible is our textbook.

When someone asks us what our creed is we don’t reach down and pull out a printed creed, we just hand them the Bible. Well that’s good, providing that we really do study the Scriptures, and we do make them our true guide and that there is a relationship of the heart to the Lord.

Well this documentation from the Word of God is very important, and I think it was Calvin who said “It is proper to drag the hypocrites out of their lurking places.” I love the way that those men in the 16th century expressed themselves, because they were really right to the point. The Word of God is the means by which we are dragged out of our lurking places. And many of us do lurk in these places where we are protected by the traditions of the elders, the interpretations of men which enable us to evade the clear teaching of the Word of God.

Well having said in vain they worship me teaching for doctrines the commandments of men, meaning simply that that kind of worship is not worship at all, the Lord now admonishes them. And it may well be that for the Jew this was the most startling thing that the Lord Jesus ever said, in

verses 10 and 11. Speaking to the disciples now he concludes speaking to them and he turns speaking to the multitude and he calls to them and he says, “Hear and understand, not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man.”

Now the striking thing about this statement is that what he is saying is that it is the moral defilement that is preeminent, not the ceremonial defilement. When he says not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man, he refers to the physical things that we eat. Why the things that we eat only touch our physical being. We eat them, they pass through our bodies, and that’s the contact that we have with them. But the things that come out of our mouth come from our heart. These are the things that defile us. The physical things do not defile.

Now if you turn over in your New Testaments to the Gospel of Mark, Mark adds a very interesting little clause here that I think is rather significant, and I’m sure that it must have been very significant for those who heard him add these words. In the 19th verse in the context in Mark, this same context, we read, Mark chapter 7, “Because it entereth not into his heart but into the stomach and goeth out into the draft,” and notice this last clause, “purging all foods.” Purging all foods.

Now what is meant evidently by this is that the Lord Jesus by saying it is the moral defilement that counts, not the relationship that we bear to what we eat. When he said that, he in effect swept away all of those sections of the Mosaic Law that had to do with outward. In a sense he wipes out a great part of the book of Leviticus, saying it will no longer be of significance of us. And we know that ultimately when the Lord Jesus was hanging upon the cross at Calvary, and when he finally said “It is finished,” referring to the work of redemption, the Scriptures tell us that the veil of the Temple was rent in twain from top to bottom—incidentally notice it is from the top, not from the bottom to the top but from the top to the bottom—signifying in symbol that it was God who swept away the Levitical ritual because the age of the fulfillment had come.

Now when that came to pass then the Old Testament ritual law—which were valid and important for a period of time—they were swept away, and by that the Lord Jesus purged all foods. In other words, by these expressions of the reality of the relationship to the Lord as the preeminent

thing, he was laying the foundation for the new age in which all foods would be purged, and that’s why Paul will say in 1st Timothy that we can eat anything. All things are profitable if they are received with thanksgiving.

Philo, who was an Alexandrian Jew and lived just after the time of the Lord Jesus, has said it this way, “The mouth is that by which as Plato puts it, mortal things enter and whence immortal things issue.” So this principle then is a very important principle. It is, the things that come out of the heart that defile. It is the relationship of the heart to God that is important.

Well at this point there was a great deal of offense, so the disciples thought, and they said unto him, “Don’t you know that the Pharisees are offended after they’ve heard this saying?” Isn’t it striking how we always turn to the fear of men? They came to the Lord and said, why Lord, you’ve offended the Pharisees by what you have said.

Now the Lord Jesus reacts as we might expect him to react. He said, “Every plant which my heavenly Father has not planted shall be rooted up and furthermore, let them alone, they are blind leaders of the blind.” Why, in these two or three verses here the Lord Jesus has a word to say concerning the fear of man, concerning sovereign election, and concerning Christian separation. What a mass of truth is condensed here.

The fear of man? He had no fear of man. John Knox, who feared no man, gained his lack of fear from the Lord Jesus. One Friday night, Vernon McGee was speaking in one of the churches of the area. I did not hear him, but someone who did reported to me one of the things that he said. You know, of course, that the term, *agapē*, is a term for Christian love, or it is the term for the love of God in the New Testament. There is a great deal of stress on *agapē* love, the love of the will, self-sacrificing type of love.

And the term love has become extremely popular not only in the Christian church but even in the world. But generally speaking, generally speaking, not always, but generally speaking in the Christian church, unfortunately, is it has come to mean a kind of sentimental type of love, which



does not have the real strength of iron in it that is the strength of the iron of the doctrine of the Word of God.

Dr. McGee the other night said, “I’m tired of sloppy *agapē*.” [Laughter] What a beautiful expression. I’m tired of sloppy *agapē*. That is, the profession of love which avoids the the hard facts of biblical doctrine. There are times when it is necessary for us to speak truth.

On Friday night I was speaking to the college students in one of the homes of one of the members, and since they were beginning a series of studies in false cults, casting around for something to say to them that might be appropriate, I thought that perhaps it would be appropriate to speak to them on 2nd John in which one of the great themes of that little epistle is the theme of loving in the truth, loving in truth.

That is, it is not true love unless it is love in the truth. Every parent knows this. You know it in reference to your children. You wouldn’t send your little children out into play in the field if you knew the field were was full of poisonous snakes. As a matter of fact, most of you wouldn’t even send you children to play out in a garden if there were many poisonous plants out there. You would warn them, now do not chew on the oleander plant, for example. Now in Christian things we are not really loving if we do not point out false doctrine. We are not loving if we do not point out the danger of apostasy and the danger of teaching from apostates. We are not really being loving if we are not. Yes, Dr. McGee, I too am tired of sloppy *agapē*.

Now he went on to say in verse 14, let them alone. In other words, it is the Christian duty of the disciple to have nothing to do with the Pharisees and scribes who seek to lead men astray from the Word of God. Let them alone. I am reminded of the passage in the Old Testament in which we have the same words in the prophecy of Hosea, in which the prophet says with reference to Ephriam, the ten tribes in the north. “Ephriam is joined to idols, you Judah let him alone. So let them alone. There is a time when we must avoid false teachers and false teachings.

Paul in 2nd Timothy chapter 3 and verse 5 speaks about the errors that shall arise in the last days and the false teaching. And then, he says, with reference to Timothy, “From such turn away.”

There is a doctrine of Christian separation. No doubt it has been overdone by some who have made it a kind of Christian isolation. We don't accept the idea that Christians should be isolated from others, but there is a Christian doctrine of separation and we cannot avoid it. We must learn how to harmonize the truths of Scripture with the facts that do face us.

Well, Peter is having difficulty with this, and so he asks for an explanation, and the remainder of the passage has to do with an explanation in which the Lord Jesus simply points out that the things that defile a man are the things that come from the heart.

Now may I conclude by saying it seems to me that this passage has one or two points that we should not lose. In the first place, one of the great points that is made is the sinfulness of manmade traditions. They shift authority from God to men; they exaggerate the importance of ourselves; and they substitute the hand for the heart. Why is it that people are attracted to form and ritual as over against the reality of worship in spirit and in truth?

Well sometimes it's because they have been educated that way. At other times they have had the example of their parents or of friends. Still others are perhaps that way because it is public opinion that religion is good and it's good to be associated with it. There are life insurance men who move into the community and count it one of their first necessary things to do to join a church in order to make a good impression and also to have a few good prospects.

It is true, too, that there are erroneous teachers who do inculcate the false doctrine that form and liturgy is extremely important and even permit the preeminence of that over the heart relationship. Sometimes it is simply the love of error, because unfortunately we are human beings touched with sin and we want to believe—we believe often what we want to believe, and if deep down within us we really want to believe something we usually can find some rational reason to our minds why we should.

But the Lord Jesus establishes the supremacy of the Word of God over tradition. Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition? Thus have ye made the commandment of God of no affect by your tradition? So if you want to walk in the presence of the Lord Jesus and

keep his company, then you must put the Word of God above human tradition. In other words, all of our activities both in the church and in our personal life are to be tested by the Word of God. It is in this way that we keep the company of the Lord Jesus.

Well let me just conclude by making a lengthy sentence. Do we accept the Mass? Well, no we don't; that, tested by the Word of God does not hold up. Do we believe in the confessional? No, tested by the Word of God that does not stand. Do we accept the doctrine of papal infallibility? No, by the test of the Word of God that does not stand. Immaculate conception? No, we accept the virgin birth but not the immaculate conception of the Virgin Mary; that does not stand the test of the Word of God. Mary's bodily assumption into heaven? No, we do not accept that, that's a tradition of men.

Do we accept Protestant ecclesiasticism such as, well what about lent, does that stand the test of the Word of God? Confirmation? Does that stand the test of the Word of God. The worship of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus one day out of the year—Easter—how does that stand with reference to the teaching of the Word of God? What about the tithe and the principles of giving; does the tithe stand the test of the teaching of the Word of God? Do we want to keep the company of the Lord Jesus here, or shall we follow other traditions? What about the pledge system of giving, does it stand the test of the Word of God? What about the system of having one man as a pastor, as an administrative head of the church, does that stand the test of the Word of God, or shall we keep the company of Jesus by following what we see to be the teaching of Holy Scripture?

Well, we don't have time to speak of all of the kinds of traditions to which we are subject. We can even make traditions out of good things, like the Bible should be read in the morning before breakfast, and it should be read every morning, and if it's not read every morning then we should confess our sin. What about the movies and smoking and even putting on lipstick? It's amazing the taboos that a Christian church has invented down through the years not found in Holy Scripture, which have become traditions that are often binding upon congregations. You see, the important

thing, as the Lord Jesus puts it, is the relationship to the Lord in the heart—the heart, the heart, the heart. That’s the important thing.

And the Word, the Word, the Word—what does Scripture say? If we are truly to keep the company of the Lord Jesus then this Holy Scripture is to be our guide, and our relationship to the Lord is not the relationship of form and ritual, but a relationship of the heart. May God help us to have our priorities right and to remember to worship God according to his own Word in the spirit and in the truth. May we stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] We are grateful Lord for these sections of Holy Scripture which so often remind us of our faults and failures. How often it is that even having been warned of the traditions of the elders we fall into traditions that are just the same type.

O God, help us to be subject to Holy Scripture. And enable us, O God, to have a relationship to Thee that is not a relationship of form and ritual, not of the outward only, but that is truly one of an inward nature by which we worship Thee in spirit and in truth from cleansed and redeemed heart through the blood of Christ. May grace, mercy and peace be with us as we part.

For Jesus’ sake.