

Expository Thoughts On Matthew - Matthew

15:1-9

by J.C. Ryle

Transcript

We have in these verses a conversation between our Lord Jesus Christ and certain scribes and Pharisees. The subject of it may seem, at first sight, of little interest in modern days; but it is not so in reality. The principles of the Pharisees are principles that never die. There are truths laid down here which are of deep importance. We learn for one thing that hypocrites generally attach great importance to mere outward things in religion. The complaint of the scribes and Pharisees in this place is a striking case in point. They brought an accusation to our Lord against his disciples, but what was its nature? It was not that they were covetous or self-righteous. It was not that they were untruthful or uncharitable. It was not that they had broken any part of the law of God. But they transgressed the traditions of the elders. They did not wash their hands when they ate bread! They did not observe a rule of merely human authority, which some old Jew had invented! This was the head and front of their offense! Do we see nothing of the spirit of the Pharisees in the present day? Unhappily we see only too much. There are thousands of professing Christians who seem to care nothing about the religion of their neighbors provided that it agrees in outward matters with their own. Does their neighbor worship according to their particular form? Can he repeat their shibboleth, and talk a little about their favorite doctrines? If he can, they are satisfied, though there is no evidence that he is converted. If he cannot, they are always finding fault, and cannot speak peaceably of him, though he may be serving Christ better than themselves. Let us beware of this spirit: it is the very essence of hypocrisy. Let our principle be, "The kingdom of God is not a meat and drink, but righteousness, and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost." (Romans 14:17). We learn for another thing from these verses the great danger of attempting to add anything to the Word of God. Whenever a man takes upon him to make additions to the Scriptures, he is likely to end with valuing his own additions above Scripture itself. We see this point brought out most strikingly in our Lord's answer to the charge of the Pharisees against his disciples. He says, "Why do ye also transgress the command of God by your traditions?" He strikes boldly at the whole system of adding anything as needful to salvation to God's perfect Word. He exposes the mischievous tendency of the system by an example. He shows how the vaunted traditions of the Pharisees were actually destroying the authority of the fifth commandment. In short, he establishes the great truth, which ought never to be forgotten, that there is an inherent tendency in all traditions to make "the word of God" of none effect. The authors of these traditions may have meant no such thing; their intentions may have been pure. But that there is a tendency in all religious institutions of mere human authority to usurp the authority of God's Word is evidently the doctrine of Christ. It is a solemn remark of Bucer's, that "a man is rarely to be found who pays an excessive attention to human inventions in religion who

does not put more trust in them than in the grace of God. And have we not seen melancholy proof of this truth in the history of the church of Christ? Unhappily we have seen only too much. As Baxter says, "Men think God's laws too many and too strict, and yet make more of their own, and are precise for keeping them." Have we never read how some have exalted canons, rubrics, and ecclesiastical laws above the Word of God, and have punished disobedience to them with far greater severity than open sins like drunkenness and swearing? Have we never heard of the extravagant importance which the Church of Rome attaches to monastic vows, and vows of celibacy, and keeping feasts and fasts, insomuch that she seems to place them far above family duties, and the Ten Commandments? Have we never heard of people who make more ado about eating flesh in Lent than about gross impurity of life, or murder? Have we never observed in our own land, how many seem to make adherence to episcopacy the weightiest matter in Christianity, and to regard churchmanship, as they call it, as far outweighing repentance, faith, holiness and the graces of the Spirit? These are questions which can only receive one sorrowful answer. The spirit of the Pharisees still lives, after 1800 years: "the word of God of none effect by traditions" is to be found among Christians, as well as among Jews: the tendency practically to exalt human inventions above God's Word is still fearfully prevalent. May we watch against it and be on our guard! May we remember that no tradition or man made institution in religion can ever excuse the neglect of relative duties, or justify disobedience to any plain commandment of God's Word. We learn in the last place, from these verses that the religious worship which God desires is the worship of the heart. We find our Lord establishing this by a quotation from Isaiah: "This people draweth near to me with their lips, but their heart is far from me." The heart is the principal thing in the relation of husband and wife, of friend and friend, of parent and child. The heart must be the principal point to which we attend in all the relations between God and our souls. What is the first thing we need in order to be Christians? A new heart. What is the sacrifice God asks us to bring to him? A broken and contrite heart. What is the true circumcision? The circumcision of the heart. What is genuine obedience? To obey from the heart. What is saving faith? To believe with the heart. Where ought Christ to dwell? To dwell in our hearts by faith. What is the chief request that Wisdom makes to everyone? "My son, give me thine heart" Let us leave the passage with honest self-inquiry as to the state of our own hearts. Let us settle it in our minds that all formal worship of God, whether in public or private, is utterly in vain so long as our hearts are far from him. The bended knee, the bowed head, the loud Amen, the daily chapter, the regular attendance at the Lord's table, are all useless and unprofitable so long as our affections are nailed to sin, or pleasure, or money, or the world. The question of our Lord must yet be answered satisfactorily, before we can be saved. He says to everyone, "Lovest thou me?" ().

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/jc-ryle/expository-thoughts-on-matthew-matthew-151-9/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net