

Introduction:

**Matt. 15:1-3, 7-9:** "Then came to Jesus scribes & Pharisees, which were of Jerusalem, saying, (2) Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? for they wash not their hands when they eat bread. (3) But he answered & said unto them, Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?... (7) Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, (8) This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, & honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. (9) But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men."

**A. In verse 2, the Pharisees & scribes asked Jesus, "Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders?"**

1. "The tradition of the elders," signified the religious customs or precepts which had been handed down from generation to generation.
  - a. These traditions were considered to be just as sacred & just as binding as the written law.
  - b. The Jews taught that when Moses was on Mount Sinai, two sets of laws were delivered to him; one, they said, was recorded (the Pentateuch); the other (oral) was handed down from father to son, from generation to generation. They believed that Moses delivered these laws to Joshua before he died, Joshua delivered it to the judges; & they to the prophets, so that it was kept pure till it was recorded in the Jewish Talmud.
  - c. These traditions were strictly enforced & punishment for violation of them was just as severe as the punishment for violating the written law.
2. The scribes & Pharisees had observed that the disciples of Jesus had not washed their hands when they ate bread.
  - a. Their tradition said, "He who eats bread with unwashed hands is as bad as if he were to commit fornication."
  - b. This absurdity was not taught in the law of Moses.

**B. But Jesus drew a distinction between their traditions & the word of God, & replied to their question by asking: "Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?"**

**Matt. 15:3**

1. In the following verses Jesus went on to point out one of many conflicts between God's commands & their traditions.
2. Our Lord clearly taught that the Word of God is to be held sacred above the traditions of men. Their traditions were the words of men, but the law of Moses was the Word of God.

**C. But Jesus went even further & declared that their worship was "vain." Matt. 15:7,8,9**

1. This word "vain" means "empty, worthless, fruitless, to no avail, without force of efficacy."
2. In short, their worship was unacceptable to God.

**D. In what way was their worship "vain"? They had substituted the commandments of men for the commandments of God.**

1. The washing of hands was harmless & commendable. It did not interfere with any part of God's commands; yet when made a religious rite/act it was vain & worthless.
2. It is presumptuous sin to add anything to the service of God, however harmless or commendable in our sight.
  - a. It is infringing upon the legislative prerogatives of God.
  - b. God's part is to give the command; man's duty is to obey.

**E. The lesson is this: If men perform religious acts or service which God has not commanded or authorized, these become "vain" worship or service.**

**F. Many present day applications can be made:**

1. Counting beads.
2. Burning incense.
3. Instrumental music in worship.

## **I. IGNORANT WORSHIP:**

**Acts 17:16-31 (Read)**

**A. In verse 23, Paul said, "I found an altar with this inscription, to the unknown God."**

1. These people were very "superstitious" [religious] (**Acts 17:16,22**). (It's not enough to be religious, one must be religiously right).
2. The Athenians had not only erected altars to all the gods they knew about, but they had even erected one "To the unknown God," just in case they had missed one.
  - a. We have to admire their religious zeal.
  - b. Paul charged them with worshipping in ignorance. **v. 23**
3. This God whom they worshipped, while confessing that they did not know him, was the God whom Paul proposed to make known to them. Since they acknowledged their ignorance of this God, he would tell them the truth about him.

**B. So Paul presented the true character & nature of this God, which distinguished him from other gods.**

1. This God "made the world & all things therein." **v. 24**
2. This God "dwelleth not in temples made with hands." **v. 24**
  - a. Handmade temples were far too small to contain him.
  - b. If the magnificent temple of Solomon in Jerusalem could not contain him (**I Kgs. 8:27**), surely this Athenian shrine could not contain him!
3. This God is not "Worshipped with (i.e., served by) men's hands." **v. 25**
  - a. God is not served with man's hands "as though he needed anything", which they could supply, since **"he giveth to all life, & breath, & all things."** **v. 25**
4. Paul went on to tell them that this God **"hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth."** **v. 26**
  - a. Jehovah is not the God of only one nation -- he created every nation & made them all from one man.
  - b. In this statement, Paul struck down all imagined justification for the belief that the Greeks were superior to the barbarians, as well as all present day claims of racial superiority.
  - c. This also plays havoc with the evolutionary hypothesis.
    - (1) Under the microscope, animal blood & human blood are clearly distinguishable, while there is no distinction between the blood of the various races!
  - d. This same God that made the world & all the creatures in it will likewise judge the world through his Son, Jesus Christ. **vs. 30,31**

## **II. WILL-WORSHIP**

**Col. 2:23: "Which things have indeed a shew of wisdom in will worship, & humility, & neglecting of the body; not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh."**

**A. Will-worship means the kind of actions engaged in because they please the worshipper, & not because they were commanded by the Lord.**

**B. This kind of worship is based upon the premise "If it is not expressly forbidden, then it must be alright to do it."**

1. However, this would allow for virtually anything in the name of worship.
2. Animal sacrifices, the burning of incense, instrumental music, etc.
3. It shows no respect for the silence of God---when He tells you what is He doesn't have to tell you what isn't.

**C. Some examples of will-worship:**

1. Cain **Gen. 4:1-5; ( read) Heb. 11:4; Rom. 10:17**
  - a. God rejected Cain's sacrifice. **Gen. 4:4,5**
  - b. Cain wanted to worship God the way he wanted to -- will-worship!
2. King Saul **I Sam. 15**
  - a. God plainly said "utterly destroy" the Amalekites.
  - b. Saul spared the king & some of the animals for sacrifice. His intentions were good – he wanted to worship God.
  - c. However, God through Samuel said: "**Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings & sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, & to hearken than the fat of rams. (23) For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, & stubbornness is as iniquity & idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, he hath also rejected thee from being king. I Sam. 15:22,23**"
3. When man does not do as God commands however good their intentions may be, they are plainly violating the teachings of the New Testament.
  - c. Their only defense is "the Bible doesn't say not to!"This is will worship, plain & simple.

**III. TRUE WORSHIP:**

**Jn. 4:19-24:** "The woman saith unto him, Sir, I perceive that thou art a prophet. (20) Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; & ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship. (21) Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when yeshall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. (22) Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews. (23) But the hour cometh, & now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit & in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. (24) God is a Spirit: & they that worship him must worship him in spirit & in truth."

1. The Samaritans (racially mixed Jews) worshipped him "**in this mountain**" (Mt. Gerizim). v. 20
2. In contrast, the Jews worshipped him "**in Jerusalem**". v. 20

**B. But God is no longer to be worshipped in one particular place. v. 23**

**C. God is to be worshipped "in spirit & in truth." Jesus here sets forth three elements of true worship:**

1. "God" -- the right object of our worship.

**Matt. 4:10:** "Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, & him only shalt thou serve."

**Rev. 22:8-9** " & I John saw these things, & heard them. & when I had heard and seen, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel which shewed me these things. (9) Then saith he unto me, See thou do it not: for I am thy fellowservant, & of thy brethren the prophets, & of them which keep the sayings of this book: worship God."

- a. All worship must be directed to Him.
2. "In spirit" -- the right attitude or motive of our worship.
  - a. Worship must be prompted by the right motive, with a deep desire to meet heaven's approval.
3. "In truth" -- the right way to worship.
  - a. God's word is truth--Jn. 17:17: "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth."
  - b. To worship God in truth is to worship him according to his directions found in the Bible.
  - c. We must do all that he authorizes & requires --nothing more & nothing less.

**D. All three of these elements must be present in our worship today. We can make this test in all of our acts of worship: prayer, singing, preaching, giving & the Lord's Supper.**

Conclusion:

- A. Let us strive to make our worship pure & scriptural.
- B. Let us see to it:
  1. That our worship is not in vain.
  2. That it is not ignorant worship.
  3. That it is true worship of the New Testament order.