

Jesus' Teaching on the Law

Matt 15:1-11, 18-20

SS Lesson for 05/18/2014

Devotional Scripture: Col 2:6-23

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From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

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Introduction

Overview and Approach to Lesson

The lesson reviews **Jesus' Teaching on the Law**. The **study's aim** is to show that God's Word is superior to the writings of men and is the only and final authority for proper thought and action. The **study's application** is to show that we need to know, understand, and apply the Bible to our lives above any other writing or teaching (From the Bible Expositor and Illuminator).

Key Verse: *Matt 15:8-9*

8 'These people draw near to Me with their mouth, And honor Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me. 9 And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.'

Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary

News of Jesus' teaching and His mighty acts had spread throughout the land. The officials in Jerusalem were aware of all Jesus was doing, for a delegation arrived in Galilee from Jerusalem to interrogate Jesus over a matter of Jewish tradition. Their attack was directed against Jesus' disciples, who were accused of failing to observe the elders' tradition of the ceremonial washing of hands before eating. This tradition (Rabbinic, not Mosaic) was an elaborate washing ritual involving not only one's hands but also cups, pitchers, and kettles (Mark 7:3-4). Jesus immediately took the offensive against the religious leaders and asked why they continued to break the direct command of God. He cited the fifth commandment concerning honoring one's father and mother (Matt. 15:4; Ex. 20:12). The Jews considered honoring of parents so important that anyone who cursed his parents was to be put to death (Ex. 21:17; Lev. 20:9). Jesus showed how these religious leaders had in effect nullified this commandment (Matt. 15:6). They could simply affirm that a particular item had been a gift devoted to God. Then the item could not be used by an individual but was kept separate. This was simply a clever way of keeping things from passing to one's parents. The person would of course continue to keep those things in his own home where they had been supposedly set aside for God. Such action was condemned by Jesus as being hypocritical (v. 7), for while it appeared to be spiritual, it actually was done to keep one's possessions for himself. Thus this failure to help one's parents deliberately violated the fifth commandment of the Decalogue. Such action had been described by Isaiah centuries before (Isa. 29:13). Their religion had become a matter of action and man-made rules. Their hearts were far from God and consequently their worship was in vain (*matēn*, "fruitless, futile," an adjective used only here [Matt. 15:9] and in the parallel passage, Mark 7:7; it is a variation of the more common adjective *mataios*, "without results, futile"). Jesus then turned and warned the crowd against the religious leaders' teachings. He said a man is not defiled by what goes into his mouth, but rather his defiled condition is evidenced by what comes out of his mouth. The Pharisees were wrong in thinking their washings kept them spiritually clean. The disciples reported to Jesus that the Pharisees were offended (cf. Matt. 13:21, 57) by what He had just said, sensing that His words were directed against them. Jesus added that since the Pharisees had not been planted by His heavenly Father (another of the many times in Matt. where Jesus referred to God as "Father"), they were headed for uprooting (judgment). Jesus said to leave them alone, for they had chosen their path and nothing would deter them. They were blind guides, trying to lead blind people; they would fall into a pit. Peter asked for further clarification about Jesus' teaching (the parable refers to Jesus' words in 15:11; cf. Mark 7:15-17). So Jesus enlarged on His previous statement. Defilement of a person does not come from the outside. What comes from the outside is simply passed through the digestive system and is eventually eliminated. But what comes out of the mouth represents what is actually inside one's heart, and these may make him (or, show him to be) unclean (*koinoi*, "common, ceremonially impure"). Evil (*ponēroi*' thoughts, murder, adultery (*moicheiai*), sexual immorality (*porneiai*), theft, false testimony, slander—such actions and words rise from within one's evil heart. These matters—not whether one eats food with unwashed hands—reveal spiritual uncleanness.

Approach to the Major Outlines in Lesson

The concept of the outline of the lesson came from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary and from the points revealed by the study of the Scriptural text.

Verse	Phrase	Commentary
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Verse	Phrase	Commentary
Matt 15:2	Why do Your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders	Jesus Confronted by Accusations
Matt 15:3	He answered and said to them, "Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition?"	Jesus Responds by Rebukes
Matt 15:10	When He had called the multitude to Himself, He said to them, "Hear and understand:	Jesus Clarifies His Teaching

Lesson Introduction and Background

From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

My children came home from a youth group activity excited to teach my wife and me a new game that they had learned. Everyone sits in a circle, and each person writes a phrase on a piece of paper. Each then passes his or her paper to the person on the left, who draws a picture that represents the phrase. After everyone has drawn a picture, the papers are to be folded so that the original phrases are hidden, then papers are passed one person to the left. Each person then writes out a phrase that represents the picture he or she has received. Papers are refolded so that only this phrase is visible, then papers are passed again to the left to repeat the cycle. This process continues until each person receives back his or her original piece of paper. Papers are then unfolded to behold the often comical transformation of the original phrases into something quite different. My wife and I recognized this game as a creative adaptation of the old "telephone game" that we learned growing up. The principle conveyed by these games is that a message often changes over time as it is passed along. This is especially true when the message has been passed across changing cultures over a long period. By the time of Jesus, something like this had happened to the laws that God gave his people on Mount Sinai many centuries earlier.

Today's lesson focuses on a confrontation Jesus had with religious leaders over the meaning of the cleanness laws of the old covenant. Debates regarding these laws were common in the first century. Since the religious authorities tried to pull Jesus into these sharp debates, it is helpful to understand why they occurred in the first place. The best way to understand debates of the first century AD regarding God's law is to sketch the contours of the law's complex history. God first revealed his laws, through Moses, on Mount Sinai; the recipients were the Israelites after their deliverance from bondage in Egypt. These laws were tailored to a people that God was bringing into the promised land to live as free people. Each tribe and family had its own God-given land, and God's law showed them how to use their freedom to reflect his holiness and justice. But the passing of the centuries saw the Israelites refusing to live according to God's laws, so he punished them by handing them over to other nations. Since many of the laws delivered through Moses were directly connected with life in the promised land free from foreign domination, the first-century Jews struggled to know how to apply such laws under Roman occupation. For example, the Sabbath laws stressed the need for everyone to rest—whether slave or free, foreigner or native. Under the Romans, however, the full application of Sabbath laws was not always possible. Therefore, the common people relied on the teachers of the law and Pharisees for interpretation and application of God's law. Problems arose, however, when the religious authorities ended up placing their interpretations on the same level as the laws themselves. Today's text is an example of this. (Mark 7:1-23 is parallel.)

Major Theme Analysis

(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)

Jesus Confronted by Accusations (Matt 15:1-2)

1 Then the scribes and Pharisees who were from Jerusalem came to Jesus, saying,
2 "Why do Your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread."

Accusations from the scribes and Pharisees (1)

Accusations of subverting the government (Luke 23:2)

2 And they began to accuse him, saying, "We have found this man subverting our nation. He opposes payment of taxes to Caesar and claims to be Christ, a king."

Accusations of criminal activities (John 18:29-30)

29 So Pilate came out to them and asked, "What charges are you bringing against this man?" 30 "If he were not a criminal," they replied, "we would not have handed him over to you."

Accusations of breaking the law (John 19:7)

7 The Jews insisted, "We have a law, and according to that law he must die, because he claimed to be the Son of God."

Accusations of disloyalty by Pilate (John 19:12)

12 From then on, Pilate tried to set Jesus free, but the Jews kept shouting, "If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar. Anyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar."

Accusations based on man's traditions (2)

Beware of traditions based on principles of the world (Col 2:8)

8 See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.

Treasure those things that are based on the promises of God (1 Pet 1:18-19)

18 For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, 19 but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.

Even if traditions are based on Scripture, interpretation must be from God (John 5:39-42)

39 You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, 40 yet you refuse to come to me to have life. 41 "I do not accept praise from men, 42 but I know you. I know that you do not have the love of God in your hearts.

Once tradition has been validated by God, be steadfast in it (Deut 5:32-33)

32 So be careful to do what the Lord your God has commanded you; do not turn aside to the right or to the left. 33 Walk in all the way that the Lord your God has commanded you, so that you may live and prosper and prolong your days in the land that you will possess.

Jesus Responds by Rebukes (Matt 15:3-9)

3 He answered and said to them, "Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition?
4 For God commanded, saying, 'Honor your father and your mother'; and, 'He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.'
5 But you say, 'Whoever says to his father or mother, "Whatever profit you might have received from me is a gift to God" --
6 then he need not honor his father or mother.' Thus you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition.
7 Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying:

8 'These people draw near to Me with their mouth, And honor Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me.
9 And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.' "

Rebuke of disobedience (3-4)

Disobedience that comes from the influence of Satan (Eph 2:1-3)

2 As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, 2 in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. 3 All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.

Disobedience of being deceptive (Eph 5:6)

6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient.

Disobedience that should not even be mentioned (Eph 5:12)

12 For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret.

Disobedience through actions that display the denial of God (Titus 1:15-16)

15 To the pure, all things are pure, but to those who are corrupted and do not believe, nothing is pure. In fact, both their minds and consciences are corrupted. 16 They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him. They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good.

Disobedience that will receive just punishment (Heb 2:2)

2 For if the message spoken by angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment,

Disobedience that keeps one from entering God's rest (Heb 4:6)

6 It still remains that some will enter that rest, and those who formerly had the gospel preached to them did not go in, because of their disobedience.

Rebuke of hypocrisy (5-7)

Hypocrisy through having a form of godliness (2 Tim 3:5)

5 having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them.

Hypocrisy through legalism (Gal 6:13)

13 Not even those who are circumcised obey the law, yet they want you to be circumcised that they may boast about your flesh.

Hypocrisy through stories (2 Peter 2:3)

3 In their greed these teachers will exploit you with stories they have made up. Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping.

Hypocrisy through appealing to human lusts (2 Peter 2:18)

18 For they mouth empty, boastful words and, by appealing to the lustful desires of sinful human nature, they entice people who are just escaping from those who live in error.

Hypocrisy through promises (2 Peter 2:19)

19 They promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves of depravity — for a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him.

Rebuke of vain worship (5-9)

Vain worship that is not done in spirit and truth (John 4:21-24)

21 Jesus declared, "Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. 22 You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. 23 Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. 24 God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth."

Vain worship by those that do not keep a tight rein on the tongue (James 1:26)

26 If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless.

Vain worship by worshipping idols (Ps 97:7)

7 All who worship images are put to shame, those who boast in idols — worship him, all you gods!

Vain worship is not accepted by God (Isaiah 29:13)

13 The Lord says: "These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men.

Vain worship is when there is no listening to God (Eccles. 5:1)

5 Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. Go near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools, who do not know that they do wrong.

Vain worship is not putting lessons learned into action (Ezekiel 33:31)

31 My people come to you, as they usually do, and sit before you to listen to your words, but they do not put them into practice. With their mouths they express devotion, but their hearts are greedy for unjust gain.

Jesus Clarifies His Teaching (Matt 15:10-11, 18-20)

10 When He had called the multitude to Himself, He said to them, "Hear and understand:

11 Not what goes into the mouth defiles a man; but what comes out of the mouth, this defiles a man."

18 But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man.

19 For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.

20 These are the things which defile a man, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man."

Clarification through hearing and understanding (10)

Understanding given by Jesus (1 John 5:20)

20 We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true. And we are in him who is true — even in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.

Understanding through the knowledge of God (2 Cor 4:6)

6 For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

Understanding of the secrets of heaven (Matt 13:11-12)

11 He replied, "The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. 12 Whoever has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him.

Understanding that is hidden in Jesus (Col 2:2-3)

2 My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, 3 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

Understanding that comes from the mind of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 2:13-16)

13 This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. 14 The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned. 15 The spiritual man makes judgments about all things, but he himself is not subject to any man's judgment: 16 "For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ.

Understanding that is taught by God (John 6:45)

45 It is written in the Prophets: "They will all be taught by God." Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from him comes to me.

Understanding through anointing (1 John 2:27)

27 As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit — just as it has taught you, remain in him.

Clarification of the connection between mouth and defilement (11,18)

Power of the tongue/mouth

Power to be like a sword (Prov 12:18-19)

18 Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing. 19 Truthful lips endure forever, but a lying tongue lasts only a moment.

Power of life and death (Prov 18:21)

21 The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit.

Power to gain advantage (Jude 16)

16 These men are grumblers and faultfinders; they follow their own evil desires; they boast about themselves and flatter others for their own advantage.

Power of poison and deceit (Rom 3:13)

13 "Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit." "The poison of vipers is on their lips."

Taming the tongue/mouth

Tame by keeping tongue from evil (Ps 34:13)

13 keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking lies.

Tame by guarding tongue and ways (Ps 39:1)

39 I said, "I will watch my ways and keep my tongue from sin; I will put a muzzle on my mouth as long as the wicked are in my presence."

Tame by ensuring the words of the tongue are guided by God (Prov 16:1)

16 To man belong the plans of the heart, but from the Lord comes the reply of the tongue.

Tame by guarding mouth (Prov 21:23)

23 He who guards his mouth and his tongue keeps himself from calamity.

Tame by bridling the tongue (James 1:26)

26 If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless.

Clarification of cause of defilement (19-20)

Defilement comes from planning iniquity (Mic 2:1)

2 Woe to those who plan iniquity, to those who plot evil on their beds! At morning's light they carry it out because it is in their power to do it.

Defilement comes from my own evil desires, not from being forced to do anything (James 1:13-15)

13 When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; 14 but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. 15 Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.

Defilement comes from pretending to be clean, but at the same time being actually defiled (James 3:9-10)

9 With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. 10 Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be.

Defilement starts with some desire from within (James 4:1-3)

4 What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? 2 You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. 3 When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.

If the heart is defiled, it cannot be hidden for long (Matt 12:33-37)

33 "Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognized by its fruit. 34 You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks. 35 The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him. 36 But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. 37 For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned."

Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Concluding Thoughts From Allen Ross

From the series: An Exposition of the Gospel of Matthew

The passage unfolds step-by-step. First there is the challenge by the teachers and the response to them by Jesus (1-9). Then there is the report that Jesus turned to teach the crowd on the real source of uncleanness (10, 11). Third, the disciples ask about offending the Pharisees, and Jesus answered them with a parable that then had to be explained (12-20). In effect, then, the teachers raise the question, and Jesus answers them, explains his answer to the crowds, and explains his dealings with the teachers to the disciples. There was one occasion, but Jesus has three separate audiences to address, with separate issues. In the study it will be important to learn about the traditions of the elders on the subject of washing or purifying the hands. For this you may start with a good book on the backgrounds to the Gospel, but may in fact go to the primary source, the Mishnah. While tracing down that issue in early Judaism, you will also want to learn more about the issue of "Korban" that Jesus discusses here—how they got out of supporting parents by making a dedicatory offering. A second important issue to be studied in this passage concerns the citation from Isaiah. The

meaning of the passage is clear, and certainly appropriate here. But in what way did Isaiah prophesy about them, and not his own generation? This will open up your thinking on the way prophesy was used. A third matter to think about is Jesus' interpretation of the laws of uncleanness from Leviticus. Was he making a radical break here from the laws of the Bible, or was he looking at the spirit of the law and not just the letter? This will lead finally to Jesus' use (again) or parabolic style to explain to his disciples what He was doing. Once again, though, you will see that some of the main principles of Bible study will be brought forward and used in this passage as well. Here we will not see so much interplay between story and speech, since this is mostly speech. But the content of the speeches will show how they relate to the story line, and the speeches reflect the culture and teaching of that century, as well as the message of the Old Testament. There will be some key words that will need clarification here: "the traditions of the elders," "korban"—its a gift, unclean, and in the citation honor as well as the contrast between lips and heart, and then the image of blind guides. Of course the words for the different sins should not be too hard to study at this point.

The passage focuses on the main idea that spiritual uncleanness is in the heart, the will, the mind, or whatever term is used for the spiritual nature of the person. It does not come from eating without washing the hands. The keeping of external regulations was to have directed the faithful to focus on inner spirituality, but it did not do this. And so external ritual replaced inner spiritual reality. And so Jesus took this opportunity to teach that truth—at the expense of the teachers' reputation. As far as He was concerned, they had failed in their task because they misunderstood the Scripture, and so they were useless as guides. They would be rooted out and destroyed. One clear lesson, then, for this passage would concern external rituals. If people participate in Church services and follow all the ritual perfectly, religiously, that may represent a heart of faith, but it may not. Unbelievers can have the appearance of being devout, but if there is not faith their ritual will not help. Ritual without the reality of faith is worthless. It is more important for people to get their hearts right with God than to get the order of the ritual down; and getting the heart right with God begins with faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, finding forgiveness and cleansing from God through Him, and following faithfully His teachings about the spiritual life. Even true believers in Christ can at times go through ritual performances without it affecting the heart. God sees past the worship service, the footwashing service, the season of lent, the bowed head at the confession, or whatever other external routine is followed, to the heart. And if the heart is not cleansed, the forms of religious mean nothing. One particularly telling witness of uncleanness in the heart comes from this business of Korban. If people are trying to legitimize ways of not fulfilling their spiritual duties then the heart needs cleansing. Before we come down too hard on the Pharisees for focusing on externals and outer show, we need only to remind ourselves that week in and week out we spend far more time getting the outer body ready for church than we do the heart. A second lesson is that there is a real danger to replace the true meaning of the word of God (the letter and the spirit of it) with traditions. Traditions can be very helpful, but they have a way of crowding out the basic Christian standards. You do not have to look very far to see that the attitude of these teachers appear in our churches. So many traditions have grown up over the centuries that many of them have become sacrosanct. We are more concerned that people might violate our man-made rules for the running of the church, the institutions of baptism and communion, or the set of rules that our particular group follows in the name of holiness, than we are about righteousness. We are more concerned about which way to stand at the communion rail than we are about meeting the needs of people in the community. If we are not careful, these traditions quickly achieve the level of canonicity, and we might even forget what the word of God actually says about some of those things we do. Then, when someone comes along who keeps tradition in its proper place (you do not sin against tradition—you sin against God and His word), we are offended if not outraged. But then we remember the teaching of Christ that God is more concerned with what we actually are than what our outward performance looks like. I am not saying ritual and tradition should be shelved; I am saying, however, they must retain their proper place.

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Concluding Thoughts from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator

The Jewish Aspect

Jesus put the case to the scribes and Pharisees regarding the difference between the Word of God and the traditions of the elders (Matt. 15:2-3). It is no different today. In the evolution of the Jewish Law, the Jews recognize the Torah, the first five books of the Bible, as "written law." This divine record is honored as it is read from every Sabbath morning in the synagogue in a plan designed to complete the reading in one year. However, in the Scripture text this week, we see that the process of undermining the written law in favor of man-made commandments was well underway in Jesus' day. This oral law, as it is called, continued to grow as the Bible became more and more neglected. The Mishnah, a

collection of these oral laws, was published two hundred years after Christ. The Mishnah, in turn, became part of the Babylonian Gemara, published by Jews in Babylon in the fourth century A.D. This was called the Babylonian Talmud, or simply Bavly. Another collection, called the Jerusalem Talmud, was produced in Jerusalem but lacked the honor bestowed on the Bavly. A page of the Talmud requires a knowledge of Hebrew, of course. In an effort to systematize the reading of opinions accumulated over eighteen centuries, a method of reading the Talmud was set forth in 1520. It is still in use today. The page will show the Bible passage to be interpreted in the center of the page. On the left side of the passage will be the key words under discussion by Rabbi Rashi (1040-1105). Then the balance of the page will be opinions pro and con rendered through time (Nemitoff, ed., *A Basic Jewish Reader*, Congregation Beth Israel). A Jewish physician related that he hosts a Talmud study each week in his home. They have a very scholarly Jewish rabbi who leads the discussion, but he really does not like the Talmud. He conducts the study to please his friends. In general, the study mostly includes boring, nonsensical situations that rarely affect the way a pious Jew should deal with life as he finds it. It is clear that Talmudic studies serve the purpose of keeping the Jew out of the Old Testament and, particularly, away from the writings of the prophets, for they are rich in messianic prophecy that would be devastating to anyone obsessed with issues and problems that are largely irrelevant. Jesus cited the failure of the religious elite to observe the requirement of the Ten Commandments, especially the fifth—"Honour thy father and mother" (Matt. 15:4). Tradition held that it was proper for the pious to withhold support from parents in order to give to their religious practice—in other words, to use a parent's money for a gift that brought honor only on themselves. In Matthew 5:21-48, Jesus pointed out particular issues in which the leaders of Israel added to Scripture in such a way as to change its substance or its purpose. For example, the seventh commandment forbids adultery, but it must also include looking upon a woman with lust (vss. 27-28). Similarly, divorce is a violation of God's one-flesh principle, but Jewish leaders allowed for putting away a wife on the provision of a bill of divorcement. American rabbis lament the fact that roughly 50 percent of Jewish marriages are with non-Jews. This demonstrates clearly that Judaism has not made its case as a true faith to the Jewish people.

Practical Points from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator

1. Finding fault with others prevents us from concentrating on loving and serving God (Matt. 15:1-3)
2. When we avoid following God's Word, we miss its blessings (vss. 4-6)
3. If we lack a close relationship with God, we often feel lost and helpless just when we need Him most {vss. 7-8}
4. Substituting our own ideas for God's Word implies we want to be independent of Him (vs. 9)
5. Unkind words are often the result of harboring envious and jealous thoughts (vss. 10-11)
6. Even when we fail, God is always ready to forgive us (vss. 18-20)