

A Study of the Christ

Text

	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
Jesus rebukes traditions of men	15:1-11	7:1-16		
Parable explained in private	15:12-20	7:17-23		
Gentile woman's faith	15:21-28	7:24-30		
Jesus heals a deaf man		7:31-37		
Many healed on a mountain	15:29-31			
Jesus feeds 4,000	15:32-38	8:1-9		

Overriding Principles

- Traditions cannot substitute for God's will.
- Service to God begins in the heart.
- Faith sees the value of the unseen and will not be stopped.
- God can and will provide.

Main Points

- This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. But in vain do they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men (Matt. 15:8-9).
- And He was saying, "That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man" (Mk. 7:20).
- Then Jesus answered and said to her, "O woman, your faith is great; ..." (Matt. 15:28).
- I feel compassion for the multitude ... (Matt. 15:32).

Secondary Points of History, Culture, Words, and Grammar

- The religious establishment had failed to stop Jesus with their accusations of His breaking the Sabbath, now they would resort to other traditions of the elders (Matt. 15:1-2; cf. Gal. 1:13-14).

- The **Pharisees** controlled the synagogues and were the greatest influence on the religious thinking of the common people. The **scribes** were the lawyers who used Moses and traditions of the elders to argue their cases. All of the Jewish sects had their own set of lawyers.
- The complaint against Jesus' disciples for eating with **impure, unwashed** hands had nothing to do with hygiene, but everything to do with ceremonial or outward purity (cf. Mk. 7:14-23).
- **Observing the traditions of the elders** had become more important than obeying God's word (cf. Gal. 1:13-14). An entire division of the *Mishnah* was devoted to ceremonial cleanliness (The Talmud, which included the Mishnah, was the collected traditions of the Jews written down from about A D 500-1000, but reflecting oral teachings often much older than Jesus' day. The *Mishnah* section of the Talmud was the actual recording of those oral traditions. The Gemarah division of the Talmud was a commentary on the Mishnah).
- The **many other things** Mark refers to show how their obsession with the traditions of men went well beyond ceremonial cleanliness.
- So great was the Jewish hatred for non-Jews, that they insisted on a large number of washings to clean them from the dirt of the infidels (**Mk. 7:1-5**).
 - Koinos: v. 2, **impure** "Having come to mean 'ritually unclean,' as also in 7:5.
 - Pugme: v.3, **carefully** "literally, 'with fist,' most likely referring to the way one fist was clenched to wash the palm of the other hand—the "correct" way to wash the hands if you were truly religious.
 - Kratountes: v. 3, **observing**; kratein: v. 4, **observe** "to hold fast, seize," (**Mk. 7:8** has another form of this word, krateite: **hold to**).
- Jesus sharply confronted them with how they had transgressed God's law by preferring their own traditions of men to the truth of the Bible (**Mk. 7:6-16**).
- Hypokrites: v. 6, **hypocrites** "though 'playing a role, as an actor,' thus meaning 'insincere' was a common use of this word, but with the Pharisees it seemed they had gone as far as deceiving themselves, an even more dangerous sin," (cf. Matt. 12:30-37).
- Gegraptai: v. 6, **it is written** "in the perfect tense (past event that influences the present), the force is a strong 'it stands written!'"

- Porro apechei: (**Mk. 7:6**) *far away* "a combination of words meaning 'far, far away' from God." elegen: (**Mk. 7:9**), *saying* "the imperfect tense (continuing action in the past) shows that Jesus kept on saying these things; He was getting on their case."
- Kalos: (**Mk. 7:9**), *nicely* "literally the word for 'good,' here used in a sense of irony commenting on how skillfully they annulled God's word.
- "But you say" (**Mk. 7:11**), sums up the problem well.
- Korban: (**Mk. 7:11**), *Corban* "a word used in a formula to remove something from profane or common use and devote it to God, to be placed under a ban from human use" (cf. Lev. 1:2; Josh. 6:15-19; 7:10-11).
- Traditions of men invalidate God's word (**Matt. 15:6**).
- The multitude, separate from the religious leaders, needed a lesson on what truly defiled a person (**Matt. 15:10-20; Mk. 7:14-23**).
 - Ceremonial defilement and the other outward aspects of Judaism had always been merely outward signs, unable to solve the sin problem (cf. I Pet. 1:18; 3:21).
 - The heart is the key (I Sam. 16:7; Acts 13:22).
- A Canaanite/Syrophenician woman showed Jesus more faith than did the Jews (**Matt. 15:21-28**).
 - Faith in a silent, seemingly unconcerned Christ (**vv. 22-23**).
 - Faith in a Christ whose followers would have her sent away (**v. 23**).
 - Faith in a Christ who rebuked her (**v. 24**).
 - Faith in a Christ who likened her to a dog (**v. 26**).
 - O for such a faith!
 - Kunariois (**v. 26**), refers to puppies—still not very flattering, however.
 - Christ knew the Canaanite woman's heart; He revealed her heart to show true faith (**Matt. 15:28**).
- Jesus continued to demonstrate His power in compassionate actions. The Christlike spirit uses advantage and privilege to help others (**Matt. 15:29-31; Mk. 7:31-37**).
- Similar to the previous feeding of the 5000 is the feeding of the 4000 (**Mk. 8:1-9**).
 - Though following relatively soon after the feeding of the 5000, the disciples show no remembrance of the previous event or any indication that they learned anything from it.

- The negative outcome of the previous event (Jn. 6:15-26, 41, 52, 60, 66), may have caused them to think that Jesus was not going to perform a similar miracle.
- The hearts of the 4000 were different from the 5000; similarity of outward circumstances does not mean that the inner circumstances are the same.

Relationship to the Church

- Christianity must not be based on the teachings of men.
- The church will worship in vain if it looks to men rather than to God for its direction.
- The heart remains the key.
- Jesus was compassionate, so must be His church.
- God provides.

Who is Jesus?

- He is the one who uncompromisingly demands that the Father's will be followed.
- He cuts through the games and distractions of life to stand for what is from God.
- He expects us to pay attention and learn as we walk with Him.

Rabbinic Judaism and Religious Liberalism

1. The religion practiced by first-century Jews was not the religion of the Torah (the Five Books of Moses).
2. The biblical passages that deal with the subject of law must be "harmonized" rather than put in conflict one against another.

The first observation orients us to the necessary historical setting for evaluating the religious conditions faced by Jesus. Without this knowledge, we will be apt to conclude the Jewish religion of the first century was identical with the Jewish religion intended by God under Moses. Such a mistake leads to confusion and contradiction rather than understanding and harmony. The Jews had corrupted their law to such an extent in Jesus' day that the nature of the Torah had been lost and a legalistic, self-righteous, traditionalism had come into existence.

From Jesus' statements in such passages as Matthew 15:1-14 and 23:1-4, we can clearly see the problem created by the traditions and commandments of men. While the Law of Moses was still read and in some measure practiced, the additions and distortions had created heavy burdens never intended by God. The situation was much like that of the more tradition-bound denominations of today. The Bible is still present, but its true intent has become subverted beyond significant recognition.

The nature of the numerous conflicts Jesus had with the religious establishment of His day dispels all doubt but that the Jews had missed the point of their law. The Sermon on the Mount is a classic example of how Moses had been misrepresented by the self-righteous misunderstandings of the Scribes and the Pharisees (Matt. 5:20). Thus, Jesus was not in the Sermon on the Mount giving a new law prior to its time (Matt. 5:17-20) as is the commonly voiced explanation of Matthew 5:21-48. To think that Jesus was contrasting Himself to Moses simply will not stand. By His own words Jesus not only forbade the changing of even a part of a letter of the Law of Moses (Matt. 5:18), He clearly stated that it was the self-righteousness of the religious teachers of Israel that must be surpassed (Matt. 5:20). No, Jesus was not teaching against Moses. He was teaching that the true intent and full meaning of Moses had been lost by the teachings of the Pharisees.

The problem was a difficult one for both Jesus and the Apostles to correct. The name of Moses was still "honored" and the words of the Torah were still were spoken

by the Jews, but the point was missed (Jn. 5:39-47). Bibles were still in pulpits, but the nature of true religion had been lost. Since the Torah was still cited, the situation existed that when the distorted understandings of the Law were spoken against, it might appear that the Torah itself was under attack. In much the same way that today to speak against the abuses of John 3:16 might appear to the uninformed as a repudiation of John 3:16. In the first century to speak against legalism might cause someone to conclude that the Law of Moses was, by its very nature, legalistic.

Such a situation helps to explain some seemingly contradictory terminology in the New Testament (i.e. Rom. 7:12, 14 and II Cor. 3:7). The "spiritual" nature of the law must not be thought to create an unsolvable dilemma with statements that mention the law in the context of legalism. It was the misunderstood, distorted, and veiled Torah that brought death rather than life (Rom. 7:11, 13; II Cor. 3:13-14). Law had become an end in itself to most first-century Jews. It was seen as the basis for earning salvation rather than as the basis for an expression of obedient faith. The attitude of self-trust rather than faith had caused the Jews to find death rather than life in the law (Lk. 18:9-14).

The first-century Jews had taken an element of the Torah, the principle of Halakah (literally: "Walking," but in a derived sense: "a set of rules"), and created a legalistic understanding of the Torah as a whole. The Jews became so "rule" conscious in their distortion of the Law of Moses that they developed what came to be called the "Oral Torah." This was the sum of their traditional interpretations and were said to have originated from Moses himself. This Oral Torah of traditionalism born out of legalism came to overthrow the true intent of even the written Torah (Mk. 7:1-13; Gal. 1:14).

To better put the process of traditionalism in perspective, a brief historical overview of "Judaism" would be useful. In a technical sense scholars often distinguish between the religion of Moses and "Judaism." Here Judaism is defined as a distortion of the Torah that began in the Babylonian Captivity and led to modifications and reinterpretations of the Five Books of Moses.

No doubt aided by the rapid arrival of legalistic Persian influences (cf. Dan. 6:15; Esth. 8:8), the captives and later the returnees soon developed an entirely different emphasis. This led to many changes in the Jews' religious understandings and practices. The study of the Torah and good deeds became rivals to the temple and to the various priestly functions. The problem was not that these rivals were wrong in themselves, but that they became ends in themselves. Through this distortion, once well-intended efforts led to many legalistic interpretations.

The "Oral Torah" was the name given to the traditional legalistic interpretations of the Torah. The Jews claimed that the Oral Torah contained what Moses taught but did not write. Soon these traditions came to be regarded even more highly than the Books of Moses since they interpreted and applied religion to the contemporary life of the Jews (Mk. 7:8-13).

These traditions that comprised the Oral Torah initially were probably attempts to keep the Jews from falling into the ways of their captors. However, these "hedges around the Torah" grew so great in number that they actually took men farther and farther away from the real meaning of the law. The hedges designed to keep men from breaking the law soon became barriers that prevented them from keeping the law. A classic example is the Jewish hedge that prevented the speaking of the name *Jehovah*. While this tradition was no doubt intended to keep Jews from taking God's name in vain, it, in effect, prevented Jews from using the name Jehovah in ways Jehovah Himself actually approved and desired.

By allowing the hedges around the Torah to crystallize into the Oral Torah, the Jews set the stage for later developments that have survived even to our age. Today the Jews have written down the Oral Torah and it is known as the "Mishnah." They have written down a commentary on the Mishnah known as the "Gemarah." These two, compiled between AD200-500 AD, are known as the "Talmud." The Talmud was then joined by the "Midrashim" (rabbinic devotional literature) to graphically demonstrate the unending path of digression men take when first they substitute man's rules for God's law.

Understanding something of the nature of the Jewish religion in Jesus' day, we can now better understand the nature of the conflicts Jesus had with His fellow Jews. The debates were not about the failings of Moses, but over the distortions to Moses that traditionalism had produced. Further, we can see how this created a situation where Jesus, in addressing the abuses of the Torah, could sometimes *seem* to be attacking the true teaching of the Torah.

This brings us to our second necessary understanding for the study of law and liberalism. The teaching of the Bible as a whole must be harmonized if we are to understand the place of law in general and the Law of Moses in particular. For example, if we compare Galatians 3:10-22, Romans 7:8-14 and 9:30-33 we can see two different types of comments made relative to the Law of Moses. We could choose one passage and build a distorted covenant theology or we can use these and other Scriptures to develop a complete biblical covenant understanding.

In view of what we have already discussed, we should be able to see that we do not need to think that a hopeless contradiction exists in the way the New Testament views the Law of Moses. Romans 9:30-33 shows that the basic problem was not at all with the Law of Moses, but with the way the Jews chose to keep the Law. Rather than choosing to keep the Law "out of faith", they chose to keep it "out of works."

The law was designed to be kept in faith. Habakkuk 2:14 shows clearly that the place of faith was understood as the way of life to those who saw the Law without a veil (cf. II Cor. 3:12-16). Hebrews 11:32-40 gives examples of those who died under the Law of Moses and yet found life through faith. Jesus, Himself is bold to declare that not only was faith a part of the Law of Moses, but that it was one of the "weightier" parts of the Law (Matt. 23:23).

A word of caution is very appropriate at this point. If we are not careful, the Law of Moses will be misunderstood to have been given by God to produce death, when in fact nothing could be further from God's intent (Rom. 7:10). To quote Galatians 3:23 without considering all of Hebrews 11 and Romans 9:30-33 can only create contradiction and confusion. When the Law of Moses was served in faith, as God intended, grace abounded (Rom. 5:20). However, when the Torah was kept in a self-righteous manner, trusting in self rather than God (Lk. 18:9-14), death was the sure result.

The system known today as Rabbinic Judaism represents the same principle that was at work in the first century. If good deeds significantly outweighed the bad—if the basic tenor of life was good, a man would win acceptance before God. This is the way of thinking that Jesus and the Apostles condemned. Nothing we can do of and by ourselves can earn our salvation. To trust in self is to be doomed to death no matter what the prevailing law might be. To trust God through an obedient faith to the prevailing standard of law always allows the gift of God's grace through the Cross (Rom. 3:24-25).