



# International Bible Lessons Commentary

Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series

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## **Matthew 15:1-9** **English Standard Version** **June 17, 2018**

The [International Bible Lesson](#) (*Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series*) for **Sunday, June 17, 2018**, is from **Matthew 15:1-9**. **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further** follow the verse-by-verse *International Bible Lesson Commentary*. **Study Hints for Discussion and Thinking Further** will help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion: these hints are available on the [International Bible Lessons Commentary](#) website along with the *International Bible Lesson* that you may want to read to your class as part of your Bible study. You can discuss each week's commentary and lesson at the [International Bible Lesson Forum](#).

**(Matthew 15:1) Then Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem and said,**

Reports about Jesus' teaching and healing in Galilee began to concern the most influential political and religious leaders in Jerusalem; including King Herod (who imprisoned and beheaded John the Baptist) and the Pharisees and scribes (who considered themselves enforcers of and experts in the laws and traditions of Israel). A representative group of these religious leaders left Jerusalem to examine Jesus (and they would later condemn Jesus to death).

**(Matthew 15:2) "Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat."**

Rather than direct their attention to the Law of God (the Law of God in the first five books of the Bible) or the Old Testament prophets, these leaders focused on the fact that some of their human traditions (their selfish

interpretations of the Law of God by former religious leaders) were not being followed by Jesus' disciples and by implication Jesus was responsible for their misbehavior. They saw themselves as the recognized and duly appointed religious leaders and teachers, not Jesus.

**(Matthew 15:3) He answered them, “And why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition?”**

In response, Jesus asked them why they set their traditions (their accepted practices and rules), above the Law the God and used their interpretations of God's Law and their traditions to violate the Law of God. Through their traditions, they changed the intention, the correct interpretation, and the right application of God's Law to achieve their own selfish purposes. As the Son of God and Messiah, Jesus interpreted the Law correctly and told His accusers the truth about God and God's Law. He pointed out to them their immoral thoughts that led to their immoral behaviors (which naturally offended them).

**(Matthew 15:4) For God commanded, ‘Honor your father and your mother,’ and, ‘Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.’**

Jesus specifically accused them of using their selfish traditions to break the Ten Commandments and avoid the Bible's explanations or applications of God's Law. Thus, Jesus affirmed the authority of the Scriptures and the Bible's interpretations of the Law of God. The LORD revealed the Ten Commandments in the Law of God through Moses; which included the commandment to honor your parents: “Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you” (Exodus 20:12). In the next chapter of Exodus, God inspired Moses to give some examples of ways some people dishonor their parents and the penalty for doing so: “Whoever strikes father or mother shall be put to death” (Exodus 21:15). “Whoever curses father or mother shall be put to death” (Exodus 21:17).

**(Matthew 15:5) But you say, ‘If anyone tells his father or his mother, “What you would have gained from me is given to God,”**

Jesus revealed that honoring your parents involves more than refusing to do evil things to them (see Exodus 21:15, 17). Honoring your parents involves doing positive good to them, which includes helping them in their old age. The Pharisees and scribes interpreted the Law of God in a way to avoid helping their parents and in a way that would generate additional income for the priests and themselves from those who wanted to selfishly keep as much of their money as they could by not taking positive actions to help their parents. Their gifts to the temple would have been less than the cost of helping their parents. By not cursing or striking their parents and by giving gifts to God, they thought they were obeying God’s law; Jesus said that true obedience involved true loving actions toward God and parents.

**(Matthew 15:6) he need not honor his father.’ So for the sake of your tradition you have made void the word of God.**

Leaders and government officials can make a law void by refusing to enforce a law or by removing a penalty for disobeying the law that the lawgiver intended when the law was made. To honor a law requires the enforcement of the law. God honors His Law by enforcing His Law. To make a law void can also include changing the interpretation or meaning of a law by adding to it or subtracting from it.

The Pharisees and scribes made the Law of God void by adding to it and subtracting from it, and by making their interpretations of the Word of God equal to or the only recognized authoritative interpretations of the Word of God. They interpreted the Word of God in ways that God never intended and refused to do the loving actions that the Word of God commanded.

**(Matthew 15:7) You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said:**

Jesus called them hypocrites because they pretended to be what they were not. They pretended to honor God and obey God’s Law, when actually they

did not honor God by the ways they made the Word of God void and by the ways they mistreated their parents by avoiding their duty (among other ways of using their traditions to set aside the laws they did not want to obey). Because many of the Israelites (and especially these religious leaders) loved money, they created traditions that fit their selfish desires and taught them as God-honoring interpretations that everyone must follow. Some of their traditions were motivated by their selfishness and revealed how people cannot love God and also love money: Jesus taught, “No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth” (Matthew 6:24). These religious leaders loved money rather than God. Their traditions appealed to selfish, self-centered people, which made them and some of their traditions popular with selfish people.

**(Matthew 15:8) “This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me;**

God foretold through Isaiah that many who perform religious rituals do not do so because they love God and want to honor God, praise God, worship God, and draw others into a right and loving relationship with God according to the Scriptures. Their lips profess that they love and obey God, but their actions show the true state of their hearts or desires: their hearts are far from God, and they have no real desire to obey God as God intended because they do not love God or the Word of God.

**(Matthew 15:9) in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.”**

Vain worship is empty worship. Vain worship has no value in the eyes of God and has no benefit to the worshiper. Vain worship does not flow from love for God or obey the Word of God from love for God and others. Vain worship has no desire to honor God, but worships God or “attends worship services” for possible personal benefits from God and others. Teaching manmade laws or rules or mere human conceptions of God that are not true and according to the Scriptures are vain or empty and have no value for drawing someone into a relationship that honors God or helps others

love, honor, and obey God. Some teach manmade ideas as though they were revelations from God and these are vain or have no value (they may often be the creations of human pride and vanity).

### **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further**

1. What teachings from the Bible did the Pharisees accuse Jesus' disciples of breaking? Explain your answer.
2. What did Jesus accuse the Pharisees of doing?
3. What commandment of God did Jesus accuse them of breaking? Why do you think He chose that commandment?
4. In what ways do people make void the law of God?
5. In what ways do people make void the Word of God?

Begin or close your class by reading the short weekly  
*International Bible Lesson.*

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