

Message #23

Mark 7:1-13

Perhaps the argument that people use the most for not coming to church is that there are too many hypocrites at church. This very text would agree that there are hypocrites at church; but that should not keep one from going to church. When you hear that argument, there have been about five responses that have been offered:

- 1) Well come to church anyway, having one more there won't make any difference.
- 2) If a hypocrite is standing between you and your relationship with God, then the hypocrite is standing closer to God than you are.
- 3) It is better to spend a few hours in God's church with hypocrites than to spend all eternity with them in hell.
- 4) You are smaller than what you hide behind, so if you are hiding behind a hypocrite, you are smaller in your connection to God than he is.
- 5) You come to worship God even if surrounded by hypocrites because you don't have to be one of them.

The one thing I never want to be called when I get before Jesus Christ is that I was a religious, legalistic, hypocritical Pharisee. I never want Jesus Christ to classify me this way or this church this way.

Religious, legalistic Pharisees are easy to spot because they will always hold on to the religious traditions and teachings of men rather than go after an accurate understanding and application of God's Word.

Jesus had been ministering all over the Palestinian world and thousands of people were responding to His ministry. He was drawing huge crowds.

His ministry was about teaching the truth of God and the majority of the common people loved it and was drawn to it. But this was really upsetting the religious world. According to **verse 1**, some Pharisees and Scribes travelled from Jerusalem to see Him and confront Him. These were an official delegation of "religious hitmen" who were sent to try and trap and ultimately kill Jesus Christ. They had traveled easily 100 miles just to confront him. They were an elite team of religious leaders and experts of O.T. law and tradition.

The problem they had with Jesus is He did not conform to them. He stayed focused on the written Word of God and would not give into their man-made religious traditions. He went against the grain of the religious status quo.

JESUS CHRIST COMMUNICATES THAT THE MOST IMPORTANT DEDICATION WE CAN HAVE IS A DEDICATION TO THE WORD OF GOD AND NOT A DEDICATION TO THE RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS OF MEN.

Now the specific way they were going to attack Christ was to point out law violations. Their planned attack was to confront Him on the matter of cleansing rituals.

The Pharisees and Scribes had invented man-made cleansing rituals that did not amount to anything with God. Jesus Christ is the only one who can make one clean in the sight of God. But the religious leaders rejected Him and they held to their own man-made methods.

According to their teachings, their traditions help to protect the Word of God. They had invented bizarre things. They broke the law down into 613 decrees and then subdivided them into 365 negatives and 248 positives. They attempted to regulate every area of life and made up things that regulated Sabbath days, travel, meals, fasts, trade and other things.

For example, they regulated how you could carry a handkerchief if you had a runny nose. If you had a runny nose on the Sabbath Day, you could not carry a handkerchief, but you could wear one. So if you were upstairs and wanted to take the handkerchief downstairs, you would have to tie it around your neck and then walk downstairs and untie it.

The rabbis even debated about what a man with a wooden leg could do if his house caught on fire. If his home caught on fire on the Sabbath Day, it was debated whether he could carry his wooden leg out of the house because it was bearing a burden.

If you had to spit on the Sabbath Day, you had to be careful where you spit. If it landed on dirt and you scuffed it with your sandal, you would be cultivating the soil and thus doing work. This was some of the nonsense they had invented.

There were 186 pages in the Mishnah, which was a compilation of Jewish oral laws made at the end of the second century, which dealt with the theme of cleanliness and ritual washings. These things were all invented by men. **None of these things were found in the Word of God. The real problem with men's rules is that they are not God's rules.**

Dr. Wiersbe made an interesting and important point when he said, "Before we criticize our Jewish friends perhaps we should examine what influence the church fathers are having on our own Christian Churches. We also can be guilty of replacing God's truth with man's traditions."

Now Jesus came on the scene and He did not follow their traditions; He was given to carefully understanding and applying the actual Word of God. So He did not follow all of their washing rituals and traditions. That became a real point of contention.

Jesus is the most famous Person on earth. He is doing spectacular things that prove He is who He claims to be, the God/Savior/Messiah/King, and He is not following their religious codes. That really upset these leaders.

There are three Pharisaical realities:

PHARISAICAL REALITY #1 – The Pharisees saw that Jesus’ disciples did not conform to their religious washing rituals. **7:2-4**

Now this is not the first run-in Jesus has had with these boys. These are some of the same guys who said He was satanic, casting out demons by the power of Beelzebul (Mark 3:22-30). These were some of the same guys who criticized Jesus for eating with tax collectors and sinners (Mark 2:16).

Now the accusations they are making here in **verse 2** have nothing whatsoever to do with hygiene. This is not about “hygienic cleanliness”; this is about ceremonial religious traditional cleansing. You young people in the crowd cannot use this as a spring board for not washing your hands. Washing your hands is a healthy way to keep away from germs. This is not about hygiene; this is about religion.

These leaders are challenging Christ on ceremonial uncleanness based on their man-made traditions. **Now the O.T. law did not require any ritualistic washing of hands before meals.** We know that when the priests went into the Tabernacle, they were required to wash their hands (Ex. 30:20-21; 40:12, 30-32).

So apparently what the religious leaders had done was made up some washing codes for all the people to follow and then they taught that to the people as if it were the Word of God. In fact, there is a second century B.C. letter that says when the translators of the Septuagint were translating the text from Hebrew to Greek, they washed their hands “as is the custom of all the Jews” (Mark Strauss, *Exegetical Commentary on Mark*, p. 299).

Verse 3 says that the Pharisees and all the Jews practiced these washing rituals that were not found in the Word of God, but were in fact “the tradition of the elders.” Don’t miss this. **All people were doing this and it was not found in the Word of God. This is why it is so important that we base what we believe and do on the Word of God.**

According to **verse 4**, these legalists had made up a whole variety of things that they taught people as being that which made them clean. For example, if they went out to the market place, where they could come in contact with unclean things and people, they needed to wash before they ate. They needed to cleanse their pots and pans and cups as well. Again this has nothing to do with hygiene; this is all about the religious teachers telling people this is what they need to do to be right with God.

PHARISAICAL REALITY #2 – The Pharisees question Jesus Christ about their non-conformity. **7:5**

It is interesting that when they challenge Jesus Christ, they do not say that they were breaking the O.T. law; what they say is they are breaking the “tradition of the elders.” They also do not say Jesus is doing this, but that His disciples are doing this. It is interesting that they are talking to Jesus about His disciples, but not about Him.

Legalists are snakes, who sneak around doing their diabolical work in many corrupt ways. These guys are weasels. Jesus and His disciples were not living their life in accordance with the tradition of the elders. They were not submitting themselves to their man-made rituals and washings.

PHARISAICAL REALITY #3 – Jesus responds to the legalistic Pharisees. **7:6-13**

Jesus Christ's response is a case study in legalistic Phariseeism. It gets at the heart of their diabolical system. There are six responses:

Response #1 - Pharisaical legalists are hypocrites. **7:6a**

The word "hypocrite" refers to a stage actor who pretends to be something he/she isn't. Hypocrites are pretenders; they wear masks (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 461).

Jesus begins by calling these religious leaders hypocrites and He cites Isaiah as a Biblical text that supports His position. He is basically saying you boys are a bunch of play actors. You pretend to be so pious, so spiritual, so dedicated and so concerned. You know how to play a good public religious game and put on a good public show, but you are not right with God.

Response #2 - Pharisaical legalists honor God with their lips, not their heart. **7:6b**

Legalistic Pharisees do not have hearts right with God. It does not matter how religious they pretend to be. It does not matter what they say. It does not matter how much religious activity in which they are actually involved. The truth is Legalistic Pharisees do not have hearts that are truly right with God.

This is a very important point to see. A person can have clean hands and what appears to be clean works and perhaps even a clean life; but not have a clean heart. They did not have a heart that was close to God. It was all a lie.

Deep in the heart of a person, he knows whether or not his or her heart is close to God. You may be sure God sees it and knows it, too.

Response #3 - Pharisaical legalists worship God in vain. **7:7a**

Don't miss this. Pharisees do worship. They worship regularly but they cannot ever truly worship God, because it is an empty worship. The worship of a Pharisee is pointless and lifeless. It is superficial. God does not accept it and God is not in it. William Hendriksen said his worship is "utterly futile" (*Mark*, p. 275).

This tragedy is paramount today. Many people see the sin in others. Many see the sin in themselves. But they do not see the sin in their worship. They continue to go to places of worship that is unacceptable to God. God does not accept it and He is not in it.

If a church is not given to carefully understanding God's Word, it may be called worship, but it is empty.

Response #4 - Pharisaical legalists teach the doctrines and precepts of men. **7:7b**

Pharisaical legalists are not interested in carefully studying and accurately teaching the Scriptures. They are not given to systematic exposition of the Word of God. They teach their own religious way of thinking.

Response #5 - Pharisaical legalists neglect God's Word and hold to traditions of men. **7:8**

Carefully notice the emphasis that Jesus Christ puts on the Word of God. To Jesus Christ the most important thing in worship is the ministry of the Word of God.

Response #6 - Pharisaical legalists are experts at disregarding God's Word to keep the traditions of men. **7:9-13**

Do not miss this point. These legalists are good at twisting God's Word. These legalists are experts at dodging truth and making up religious things.

In **verses 10-13**, Jesus gives them a good example of what they do and how they do it.

Now in the law of God there are several places where God's Word says one is to "Honor Father and Mother." For example, it is said in Exodus 20:12 and Deuteronomy 5:16. In fact, if one cursed his mother and father, one was to be put to death (Ex. 21:17; Lev. 20:9). So this was obviously a very serious law.

Mark Strauss said, "In Jewish tradition...honor especially meant caring for the physical needs of ones' parents in their old age" (*Mark*, p. 301).

According to **verses 11-12**, the religious leaders came up with a way around this. They said that if you dedicated something as a gift to God, you did not have to take care of your father or mother. So if you decided not to take care of your mother or father, but give the money to religious causes, it was perfectly okay.

The pronoun "you" that Jesus uses is very emphatic, so He is aiming this straight at these religious hypocrites.

Now the word "corban" is a Greek transliteration of the Hebrew word "qorban," which means to make a vow or an offering. According to Jewish rabbis this referred to something that was dedicated to God so that it was not available for human use. It was a vow that one made.

Now according to these religious leaders, if you dedicated something to God that you would have used to help your parents, you are not obligated to help your parents.

So in all reality what was done was that God's Word was no longer the authority; the things invented by religious leaders became the authority.

This is what Pharisees do. They convince people that their man-made invented religious rules and codes are more important than the Bible.

When you go to a church where the band is more important than the Word of God, it is empty worship.

When you go to a church where the denominational traditions are more important than the Word of God, it is empty worship.

When you go to a church where the church rules are more important than the Word of God, it is empty worship.

There are hypocrites that go to church; but don't you be one of them.

There are people who honor God with their lips, but not their hearts.