

## Mark 7:1-13

<sup>1</sup> Then the Pharisees and some of the scribes came together to Him, having come from Jerusalem. <sup>2</sup> Now when they saw some of His disciples eat bread with defiled, that is, with unwashed hands, they found fault. <sup>3</sup> For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash *their* hands in a special way, holding the tradition of the elders. <sup>4</sup> *When they come* from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they wash. And there are many other things which they have received and hold, *like* the washing of cups, pitchers, copper vessels, and couches. <sup>5</sup> Then the Pharisees and scribes asked Him, "Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashed hands?" <sup>6</sup> He answered and said to them, "Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: '*This people honors Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me.*' <sup>7</sup> *And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.*'" <sup>8</sup> "For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men--the washing of pitchers and cups, and many other such things you do." <sup>9</sup> He said to them, "*All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition.*" <sup>10</sup> For Moses said, '*Honor your father and your mother*'; and, '*He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.*'" <sup>11</sup> But you say, 'If a man says to his father or mother, "Whatever profit you might have received from me *is Corban*"--' (that is, a gift to God), <sup>12</sup> then you no longer let him do anything for his father or his mother, <sup>13</sup> making the word of God of no effect through your tradition which you have handed down. And many such things you do.

Well, this week we return to the book of Mark. We have been to church camp and learned about killing sin, which is a logical application of the gospel of Christ in our day to day lives.

Then for two weeks we looked at the qualifications of an elder and the third week we looked at the job of an elder. We are in the middle of appointing 2 elders in training. And we have ridden the roller coaster of dealing with regulations in the building of a meeting place.

I think it would be good to remind ourselves where we are in the context of Mark. We had read about Jesus telling his men that they were headed for **a restful spot**. When they got there, the disciples learned there was work to be done. It was a teaching time for them. Afterward they were sent across the lake only to face a deadly storm. Jesus arranged to act as if he were going to stroll past them in the lake. It had a dramatic effect on the disciples, and it turned the corner for them on realizing just who Christ really was.

When they reached their destination, miraculously and instantaneously, Jesus taught the crowds again. He talked to them about two kinds of bread seekers.

Most of the crowd rejected Him at this point, proving they were seeking the wrong bread.

And now we come to our text.

**<sup>1</sup> Then the Pharisees and some of the scribes came together to Him, having come from Jerusalem.**

We already know that the religious leaders want Christ dead. That is their goal and everything they do is in that regard. Another gospel tells us that Jesus was ministering in Galilee during this time because those in Judea wanted to kill him. It was a bit safer in Galilee. Jesus is going to use the next seven months to train his disciples.

So these religious leaders approach Christ. We can assume that there is nothing sincere in anything they do. When a person seeks to harm you, you don't need to play games with that fact. You don't need to assume that all their questions are sincere. Christ knew where these men were coming from. He knew their hearts. And He is not about to put up with their nonsense.

**<sup>2</sup> Now when they saw some of His disciples eat bread with defiled, that is, with unwashed hands, they found fault.**

When people are looking for fault, you can rest assured that they will find it, real or otherwise. In Christ's case it is always otherwise.

When the Jews came back from Babylonian captivity, they came back with an oral tradition of rules. Eventually these rules were written in the Mishnah. Along with them were added the Rabbi's commentary called the Gemara. The combination is called the Talmud. The Talmud basically says that God appointed men, by the **oral law** that Moses passed down, to **create laws** in order to **protect God's written law**. These created laws were, originally, probably well intended rules for helping people obey God's law. But the original intention doesn't really matter.

We will see some universal problems of legalism displayed in our text.

Any manmade rule that pretends to have the same authority as a God-made rule **will, by its very nature, be used for evil.**

Any manmade rule that pretends to have the same authority as a God-made rule **will eventually supersede God's rule.**

Any manmade rule that pretends to have the same authority as a God-made rule **will eventually be used to punish and exclude those who care most about God's rule.**

Any manmade rule that pretends to have the same authority as a God-made rule **will be used in a process of rejecting the authority of God.**

Any manmade rule that pretends to have the same authority as a God-made rule **will soon be used to evaluate spiritual success or failure.**

These are universal truths. We see them all through scripture. And where such rules exist in churches today, you will see the same thing.

Legalism is the process of adding rules to God's directives, usually in an attempt to help one **live up to** God's directives. But it never works. And it always leads to distraction of God's directives. For us to do such a thing in our own lives is absolutely necessary. But for us to do it to other believers is somewhere between foolish and evil.

The religious leaders pointed out a problem. The disciples were eating without washing their hands. Now this isn't in the order of **what your mother did** when you showed up for lunch with dirty hands. This wasn't something **for your health**. This was a ceremonial cleansing. It wasn't so much intended to wash off germs as it was to wash off any contact you may have had with something that was ceremonially unclean. Maybe someone you touched was an unclean gentile. Maybe they had eaten pork. Maybe they had been around any number of unclean situations. This rule was designed to ceremonially get rid of that impurity.

This was not something that the common people were required by the Old Testament law to do. The priests had to wash, but the common people did not. But the Mishnah required the common person to ceremonially wash their hands before eating. This is a description of the ceremony from John MacArthur's commentary.

**First, water was poured from a jar onto both hands with the fingers pointing up, so that the water would run off at the wrists. Then, water was again poured over the hands with the fingers pointing down. Finally, each hand was rubbed with the fist of the other hand. Strict Jews would follow these regulations before every meal and between each course in the meal.**

MacArthur New Testament Commentary, The - MacArthur New Testament Commentary – Mark 1-8.

It is not difficult to imagine the discussion and the thinking that was carried on to come up with such a rule. Maybe it started with a concern that "our young people are not getting the importance of remaining ceremonially clean". They are forgetting what a big deal that is. We need to help them. Let's see. How can we do that? Oh I know, let's make them wash their hands. That way they will be reminded of the uncleanness that surrounds them. Good idea. But when? Well, how about when they eat? First, everyone wants to eat and has to eat. If we couple it with eating we can be sure that they get this important lesson about purity. Yes, and people probably won't do it unless we tell them it is required. So let's make it so that, if you want to really worship God well, you must do this before you eat. This will help our people to live Godly lives.

Can you see how this stuff starts? It looks good. It looks helpful. But what it does is **show a mistrust in the wisdom of God**. If God wanted this in scripture, it would **be in** scripture. I think all of us have ideas of what should be in scripture but it

isn't. There are any number of ways we think we should help God out. But God doesn't need the help. He gave us His word, and it is exactly what he wants us to have. We do very well to limit ourselves to what He said. And we all need to apply it to our lives with **whatever legalism is necessary** for us to obey God. But we must never think that **others** are required to go by **our own** personal legalisms. If I think it is wrong for me to have cable tv because I will waste too much time, that does not mean it is wrong for someone else to purchase it. If someone does not want to drink alcohol because of the harm it may do them, that does not mean someone else must abstain.

What the religious leaders did in Babylon displayed a mistrust of God and His word. And in the end they did a great disservice to God by passing down rules that would eventually become weapons to use against the true people of God. Mark goes on to tell us more about these Mishnah legalisms.

**<sup>3</sup> For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash *their* hands in a special way, holding the tradition of the elders. <sup>4</sup> *When they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they wash. And there are many other things which they have received and hold, like the washing of cups, pitchers, copper vessels, and couches.***

So, we find lots of rules about lots of things. That is always what happens when we make little compromises with the purity of God's word. It always leads to more and more compromises...more and more ways we think to help God out. And the one thing you can trust about a legalist. They will always view it as a fighting offense if you don't comply to **their mutually accepted rules**. They want conformity more than anything. We see that in the Pharisees' next question.

**<sup>5</sup> Then the Pharisees and scribes asked Him, "Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashed hands?"**

Now, this could have been asked by a sincere person with a sincere longing to know. But that was not the case here. These people wanted to kill Christ. So we can assume their evil motives in asking the question. In essence, it was like so many insincere questions. It is **really an accusation**, not a **question**. It isn't like Christ can give them an answer that will satisfy them.

And the issue really isn't with what the disciples are doing. The leaders could have asked the disciples. No, the issue is about Jesus as **the teacher** of the disciples. The problem they are addressing is what **Jesus is teaching** his followers. That is what they are after with their insincere questions.

We can read this assuming that what the Pharisees were really saying was- Jesus, you are blatantly teaching your disciples to sin in regard to ceremonial washings. You are challenging the whole structure of Jewish traditions.

**<sup>6</sup> He answered and said to them, "Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: '*This people honors Me with their lips, But their heart is far from***

**Me.<sup>7</sup> And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.'**<sup>8</sup> "For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men--the washing of pitchers and cups, and many other such things you do."

Jesus is not going to play a game with these men. He is not going to pretend that there is a spec of legitimacy in what these men are doing. He immediately calls them hypocrites. The word means **play actor**. They are one person, while holding up a face representing something completely different, not at all congruent with who they really are.

These men were **God haters** and **self lovers**. They loved what religion provided for them, but they could care less about anyone else. Yet they were talking to Jesus in the pretense of protecting true religion, true worship of God. It is difficult to imagine any act that would be more hypocritical.

But isn't that danger always with us? How about when we don't like what someone else is doing? Maybe we are secretly envious or jealous. Maybe we wish our conscience would allow us to do the thing that someone else is doing. Maybe it personally offends us simply because we find it distasteful. We can have all kinds of motives, but we **approach the person** or we **talk about the person** like we have nothing but the purest spiritual motives for that person's welfare. We need to learn to spot this deadly seed. It is nothing but hypocrisy, pure and simple. When flesh is the secret motivation for us to confront a brother or sister, that is one of the most harmful forms of hypocrisy. Before you talk about a brother or sister or confront a brother or sister, ask yourself this question. **Is my true goal in my heart of hearts for this person to experience the peace and the blessing of God?** Or is there a motive of punishment or retribution? Our hearts really are despicable. And they are often most despicable when we pretend to care about God and about the person.

Jesus told his questioners that they were the perfect examples of what Isaiah the prophet wrote about. They could pretty well know from the start that this was not about to be complementary. Then Jesus quoted Isaiah 29:13.

**'This people honors Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me.<sup>7</sup> And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.'**<sup>8</sup> "For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men--the washing of pitchers and cups, and many other such things you do."

Jeremiah's first statement is the definition of spiritual hypocrisy. They wear the mask of honoring God, worshipping God, caring about God's glory. Yes, the mask is all about God. The stated purpose with their lips is that they are all about God, they are all about spiritual things. Yep. Their lips say the right things. They have the external all worked out. They give the proper impressions. They say and do the right things externally. But they have a huge problem, a huge disconnect, a huge hypocrisy.

Their hearts and their words don't line up. They are actually at odds with each other. When our lips are saying things that do not represent our hearts, that is hypocrisy. When we posture having spiritually loving motives but we really have very different motives, fleshly motives, that is hypocrisy at its worst.

**True worship is congruence of heart and lips.** True worship is when our hearts truly want to please God and our lips are an expression of that truth. We can know when that is true because we care little about how it is perceived. We don't have to work to appear a certain way or to have people approve of what we are doing or saying. We are doing it as unto the Lord and we know the Lord is watching and we answer to Him. We do not have to worry about how we are perceived.

Congruence of life and heart is what a Christian shoots for. We are the only people who are free to live in truth.

Now, next Isaiah, after defining hypocrisy, tells us the point of failure. In vain they worship me. These incongruent people are trying to worship God. But they have not started where true worship always starts. True worship always starts in humility and repentance. It starts with our hearts adjusting to **who God is** and **who we are**. It tells the truth to God and accepts the truth from God.

But religious people attempt to worship God **as they are**. In their pride they approach God seeking to do something for Him. And they will always find that all of their efforts of worship are in vain. They will think they are doing something that pleases God and helps God, but they are always wrong. Their efforts will produce **nothing** with God.

Now, how were this particular people thinking to help God, thinking to worship God?

***Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.***<sup>8</sup> **"For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men--the washing of pitchers and cups, and many other such things you do."**

This is what the people in Isaiah's day were doing. This is what the people in Jesus's day were doing. And that is what people in our day are doing. They are coming up with rules and teaching them as if they are God's rules. Man, this is a dangerous urge. We need to guard against it in ourselves. It is so easy to think that just one more rule would really help God's people. But it won't. That is just false worship talking.

We see here what always happens. Legalism always ends up replacing **what Man says for what God says**. We start with wanting to help what God says. But what we end up doing is **replacing it with what we say**.

Jesus points out this principle here. You can't have the commandment of God and the commandment of man in any kind of balance or co-existence. They will

be at enmity. And flesh will always prioritize the law of man when both are side by side.

Why? Because the laws of man are usually do-able by the flesh. We can do them. And we can take credit for doing them. And we can assess our spiritual success as a result of our excellent effort. Pride is given the throne. Pride is given the glory. And that is so hard for the flesh to resist.

Now, it is likely those looking on could not see how evil these religious leaders were by simply adding to the law. So Jesus is about to show them.

<sup>9</sup> **He said to them, "All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition."** <sup>10</sup> **For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother'; and, 'He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.'**

OK. Christ is about to give an example of how all this works. A tradition and the law are read side by side. What happens?

He chooses as his illustration a command to Honor your father and mother and what the law says of those who do not honor their father and mother but curse them.

So God has laid out **his wishes, his demands, his mind**. A human who follows God should **honor father and mother**. Part of this honoring is to see that they are taken care of. It is to **look after their needs**. This was common in their culture. The young people took care of the old. Children took care of their parents when their parents could no longer take care of themselves. That was part of obeying God. It was part of loving Him.

Now, didn't Jesus also say **Luke 14:26**

<sup>26</sup> **"If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple."**

This is the beauty of keeping all passages in the context of the whole Bible. We might read this one passage and think that now believers no longer need to fulfill our obligations to fathers and mothers and wives and children. Plenty of people have read this passage in isolation and come to that conclusion. But we see in our text this morning, that abandoning one's family is clearly not what Christ must have meant in the Luke passage. So we must interpret Luke by what we read in Mark. That is how good Bible Study is done.

Jesus is very much endorsing a believer's taking his responsibility for his parents welfare very seriously. Now Jeremiah and Suz, I don't just have a selfish motive for saying this. It truly is what Christ is saying in Mark.

Now to see just how strongly Christ meant this, we have to look at the application he makes and how strongly he denounces the abuse.

OK, so God said, honor your mother and father. What do you say? What is your improvement on the law?

<sup>11</sup> **But you say, 'If a man says to his father or mother, "Whatever profit you might have received from me is Corban"--' (that is, a gift to God), <sup>12</sup> then you no longer let him do anything for his father or his mother, <sup>13</sup> making the word of God of no effect through your tradition which you have handed down. And many such things you do."**

Here is an interesting tradition. It isn't hard to see what might have been the motivation behind it. Try this one out for moral slight of hand.

Suppose I have a lot of resources. And my aged mother has a disease that will require a lot of resources. Now **God's word** would require that I use those resources to take care of my mother. That would be honoring her in the way that God requires. Paul told us that those who do not take care of their families are worse than infidels. So we get the picture. Only a scoundrel would withhold help to their parents. That is according to God.

But suppose I want a loophole. Suppose I want to accomplish 2 things at once. I want to keep those resources for myself, and I still want to appear spiritual. I want to keep my membership in the Jewish club.

At the same time, the religious boys want to keep their coffers full. They would like at least **a cut** of those resources. They would like to **administer** some of that cash.

Well, the religious boys came up with a perfect solution. They said that a person could dedicate his resources to God. He would declare them "Corban". At that point they are dedicated to God's service. Now, isn't service to God a higher, more lofty, more spiritual priority than service to mom and dad? That is the thinking that allowed this scam to continue. When a person declared Corban, at least some of the funds were likely to make it into the coffers of religion. And at that point, the tradition would **not even allow** the man to use his funds for his parents because that was not **a spiritual** function.

But the rule was that a person essentially was allowed to keep the money and use it at their discretion for spiritual purposes. And in the future they could even **toggle the Corban off** by announcing the resources "**not Corban**". So after the death of a parent a person can toggle Corban off and they still have kept most of their resources.

What a pile of deceit. But the religious leaders stood by it. And by standing by it they were endorsing the **overt sin** of dishonoring one's parents.

And what does Jesus say?

<sup>13</sup> **making the word of God of no effect through your tradition which you have handed down. And many such things you do."**

You see, this is the ultimate danger of legalism. We can only focus on so many things. And when there is a **law of God** and **a human legalism**, our flesh always drifts toward the legalism. And when it does, the word of God has less and less



effect. Sometimes it is because, as in **this case**, the legalism actually **negates** God's law. But often it simply distracts us, in our pride, **to focus on the external things and miss the internal things**. We focus on the religious "to do" list and the scriptures that **address the person that we are inside** are made of no effect. Don't ever allow yourself to think that manmade laws regulating the behavior of God's people are **harmless**. They are deadly dangerous. So should the church come up with rules about what is modest and what is immodest? No, we shouldn't. But we should have loving conversations about such things. We should seek God's heart and read God's word about such things. Should the church make artificial laws about anything that God is silent about? No, we shouldn't. We should love one another. We should ask loving and concerned questions when appropriate. We should lay out what God **HAS** said on any matter.

But we do our Savior and His Word great harm when we add to the Word. It is a great irony that those who are quickest to add human traditions to help people "obey" God's word are usually the same church's that describe the authority of scripture most glowingly and with the most adjectives. We have got to get it through our heads. **God's Word does not need our help**. It does not need our bright ideas. It does not need our suggestions. What it mostly requires is **our humble submission** to that which has come from the heart of God.

Now we as Christians will need help. We will need loved. We will need Godly examples. We will need personal legalism to avoid falling into our weaknesses. But we don't need to add anything to the Bible. It is sufficient.

So in making application, we must avoid the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. We as believers do not need to play act. When we are working hard to win the approval of other Christians, or to create a spiritual impression with others, we should look at our hearts. On any number of fronts we must ask, Why am I doing this? What is going on in my heart? What do I REALLY want for my brothers and sisters? What is really driving my actions? We would do well to ask God to help us in this introspection. Ask Him to show us the truth about ourselves. Because we can know for sure that He knows it.

Another application is to see legalism for what it is. It is often a sinister evil hidden under the wrapper of good intentions. But it displays a mistrust in the Word of God. I have some personal legalisms. They serve me well. They help me to not sin. But it is only pride that would cause me to tell you that **my legalisms** should be **your legalisms**. In the church, we cannot make rules in order to avoid ministering to each other. We can't set up artificial standards to avoid discussing things with other believers about their conduct or apparel. At the end of the day we must trust and obey what God has said and love His people. And that is enough. God doesn't need any more assistance.