

Mark Chapter 7

Mark 7:1 "Then came together unto him the Pharisees, and certain of the scribes, which came from Jerusalem."

“Pharisees ... came from Jerusalem”: This delegation of leading representatives of Judaism came from Jerusalem probably at the request of the Galilean Pharisees.

“Scribes” (see notes on 3:22; Matt. 2:4).

Jerusalem was to Judaism what Rome is to Roman Catholicism. Officials from the city of Zion were sent out to monitor the activities of this miracle-worker in Palestine’s hinterland (see also 3:22).

These scribes and Pharisees were actually spies sent from Jerusalem to find fault with whatever Jesus was doing. They were jealous of Jesus, because He had power in His ministry; and they were afraid that the people would follow Him, instead of coming to the temple.

Verse 2, here, shows that they were just trying to pick up any little thing they could, and make a big issue of it.

Mark 7:2 "And when they saw some of his disciples eat bread with defiled, that is to say, with unwashen, hands, they found fault."

“Unwashen”: The disciples of Jesus were being accused of eating with hands that had not been ceremonially cleansed, and thus had not been separated from the defilement associated with their having touched anything profane.

This had to do with all the ceremonial washings of the Hebrews. This really had nothing to do with physical cleanliness.

Mark 7:3 "For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, except they wash [their] hands oft, eat not, holding the tradition of the elders."

“Wash”: This washing had nothing to do with cleaning dirty hands but with a ceremonial rinsing. The ceremony involved someone pouring water out of a jar onto another’s hands, whose fingers must be pointing up.

As long as the water dripped off at the wrist, the person could proceed to the next step. He then had water poured over both hands with the fingers pointing down. Then each hand was to be rubbed with the fist of the other hand.

“Tradition of the elders”: This body of extrabiblical laws and interpretations of Scripture had, in actuality, supplanted Scripture as the highest religious authority in Judaism (see note on Matt. 15:2).

Certain unwritten traditions had come to be regarded as equal in authority to the Old Testament itself.

It seems that this teaching of washing or rubbing hands together was a tradition and not a law, even though it was included in the Talmud. The "Talmud" is a body of Hebrew civil and canon laws based on the Torah of Moses. The Torah is the first five books of the Old Testament.

Mark 7:4 "And [when they come] from the market, except they wash, they eat not. And many other things there be, which they have received to hold, [as] the washing of cups, and pots, brasen vessels, and of tables."

See note on 6:56.

These Jews were so class conscious, that they felt they needed to wash off the uncleanness of the lower class people they had touched. They were over-concerned about washing the physical and not aware at all of the need to clean up inside.

Verses 5-6: The concern was not with dirty hands, but with how Jesus' disciples were ignoring Jewish tradition and thereby becoming ceremonially unclean.

Mark 7:5 "Then the Pharisees and scribes asked him, Why walk not thy disciples according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashen hands?"

“Why, walk not thy disciples ... ?” The Pharisees and scribes went to the disciples’ Master for an explanation of the disciples’ allegedly disgraceful conduct. In reality they were accusing Jesus of teaching His disciples to disobey the traditions of the elders.

“Unwashen hands” (see note on verse 3).

Notice here, that they said tradition. It reminds me so much of doctrine. Really, what I call nit-picking. They were majoring on things that were not even God's teachings: not sin in their lives, but formality.

Mark 7:6 "He answered and said unto them, Well hath Isaiah prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoreth me with [their] lips, but their heart is far from me."

“Hath Isaiah prophesied” (Isaiah 29:13), is quoted almost word for word from the Greek translation of the Old Testament (LXX). Isaiah’s prophecy perfectly fit the actions of the Pharisees and scribes (See note on Isa. 29:13).

“Hypocrites”: Spiritual phonies (see note on Matt. 6:2). They followed the traditions of men because such teaching required only mechanical and thoughtless conformity without a pure heart.

Hypocrites is a strong word, it means they were pretending to be following the Lord, when what they were really doing was pleasing their flesh. This is a good description of what many Christians are doing today. On the one hand, they claim to be Christians, but they are living to please the flesh.

Mark 7:7 "Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching [for] doctrines the commandments of men."

“Howbeit” means “nevertheless”.

This sort of Christianity is surface. It is not from the heart. He told them that their doctrines were what served their own desires and really had nothing to do with the wishes of God. Even church doctrines should not be based on one or two Scriptures, but should be taken from Jesus' own Words (written in red in the Bible), and from a balanced look at the entire Bible.

Verses 8-9: Years of tradition, Jesus is saying, had brought some Jewish religious practices into conflict with the far older commands of the Old Testament. Too many were substituting modern religious custom for divinely revealed truth.

Mark 7:8 "For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, [as] the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do."

“Commandment of God ... Tradition of men”: Jesus first accused them of abandoning all the commandments contained in God’s Word. Then He charged them with substituting God’s standard with a humanly designed standard (see note on Matt. 15:2).

Here we see a direct reprimand from Jesus toward these believers in name only. Tradition has nothing to do with real worship.

Mark 7:9 "And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition."

The tradition of men and the commandments of God are two different things.

Mark 7:10 "For Moses said, Honor thy father and thy mother; and, Whoso curseth father or mother, let him die the death:"

“Moses said”: Quoted from (Exodus 20:12; the fifth commandment), and (Exodus 21:17). Both refer specifically to the duty of honoring one’s parents, which includes treating them with

respect, love, reverence, dignity, and assisting them financially. The second quotation indicates how seriously God regards this obligation.

Verses 11-12: Jews could evade responsibility to parents by declaring their substance “Corban,” “devoted to God.” Religious leaders evidently condoned this clear circumventing of both the letter and the intent of the Old Testament.

Mark 7:11 "But ye say, If a man shall say to his father or mother, [It is] Corban, that is to say, a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; [he shall be free]."

“Corban”: A Hebrew term meaning, “given to God.” It refers to any gift or sacrifice of money or goods an individual vowed to dedicate specifically to God. As a result of such dedication, the money or goods could be used only for sacred purposes.

Mark 7:12-13 "And ye suffer him no more to do ought for his father or his mother;" "Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered: and many such like things do ye."

“None effect through your tradition”: “Invalidating” means “to deprive of authority” or “to cancel.” The “tradition” in question allowed any individual to call all his possessions “Corban” (see note on verse 11). If a son became angry with his parents, he could declare his money and property “Corban.”

Since Scripture teaches that any vow made to God could not be violated (Num. 30:2), his possessions could not be used for anything but service to God and not as a resource of financial assistance for his parents.

But Jesus condemned this practice by showing that the Pharisees and scribes were guilty of canceling out God’s Word (and His command to honor one’s parents), through their tradition.

Jesus’ quarrel was not with God’s word, but with human misuse of it.

Jesus gave one specific Commandment that Moses gave the people from God that they had twisted around for their own convenience. This was not the only thing they had changed, but it was just an example of the many things they had changed to suit themselves.

We see in our day people getting away from the teachings in the Bible by saying, "That was for a long time ago, not our day." Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever. The truth never changes.

One of the worst things happening today is the tearing down of the home and marriage. With God, there are no alternate lifestyles. He ordained one woman for one man, marrying and building a family. Anything else is not God's will.

I too, just gave one example of a society on a down hill run to hell. There are many compromises God will not tolerate. Just because everyone else (tradition), is doing something, doesn't make it right.

Mark 7:14 "And when he had called all the people [unto him], he said unto them, Hearken unto me every one [of you], and understand:"

It is God's will that we all hear and understand. Some people reject the message that Jesus has for us. That is why it says, "Hearing, they will not hear". They must receive the message inside of them for them to truly understand and receive Jesus and His teachings.

Mark 7:15 "There is nothing from without a man, that entering into him can defile him: but the things which come out of him, those are they that defile the man."

Jesus was speaking, here, of eating and drinking really not defiling you. This whole statement was to tell them that the things that were in a man's heart which bring words out of his mouth is really what tells what he really is. Nasty words stemming from an evil heart defile a man. The mouth is an instrument of life or death.

In Romans 10:9-10, you can easily see that what you say is terribly important to salvation.

Mark 7:16 "If any man have ears to hear, let him hear."

This verse does not occur in the best manuscripts.

This is that ear of understanding. Everyone has ears that hang on the side of their head, but the ears Jesus was speaking of are ears to the heart.

Mark 7:17 "And when he was entered into the house from the people, his disciples asked him concerning the parable."

You see, Jesus spoke in parables, so that the lost world who had no love for God could not understand. The Holy Spirit has to open our understanding for us to truly understand. Jesus would teach the disciples while He was with them.

Verses 18-19: Once again Jesus challenges His disciples with searching questions.

Mark 7:18 "And he saith unto them, Are ye so without understanding also? Do ye not perceive, that whatsoever thing from without entereth into the man, [it] cannot defile him;"

“Defile him”: See note on verse 2.

Jesus almost scoldingly says, "Don't you understand this very simple thing".

Mark 7:19 "Because it entereth not into his heart, but into the belly, and goeth out into the draught, purging all meats?"

Since food is merely physical, no one who eats it will defile his heart or inner person, which is spiritual. Physical pollution, no matter how corrupt, cannot cause spiritual or moral pollution. Neither can external ceremonies and rituals cleanse a person spiritually.

By overturning the tradition of hand washing, Jesus in effect removed the restrictions regarding dietary laws. This comment by Mark had the advantage of hindsight as he looked back on the event, and was no doubt influenced by Peter's own experience in Joppa (See note on Acts 10:15).

Jesus had already taught them that no food was unclean, if prayer was said before they ate it. Food just passes through the body and goes out in the draught, so that could not possibly hurt anyone. The bitter thoughts that originate in the heart and are spoken out the mouth destroy people

Mark 7:20 "And he said, That which cometh out of the man, that defileth the man."

"That which cometh out of the man": A person's defiled heart is expressed in both what he says and what he does (see note on Matt. 15:11; 12:34-37).

"Defileth" (see note on verse 2).

Many apparently thought that the food itself forbidden by parts of the Old Testament (see Lev. chapter 11), rendered the eater unclean. Jesus is not challenging the accuracy of the Old Testament. He is pointing out that what one produces from, not what he takes into himself, is the essence of human sin.

In context, Jesus is pointing out the futility of seeking spiritual salvation by means of ritual observances, like dietary laws, which are incapable of purifying the heart (i.e., the moral life). A clean heart is something different from a properly cared-for digestive tract.

Mark 7:21-22 "For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders," "Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness:"

"Fornications": Literally illicit sexual activity.

"Lasciviousness": Literally unrestrained, shameless behavior.

The heart of man is what he is. We will find as these Bible studies go on, that the heart is either desperately wicked or pure. There are no other ways. In a heart that is wicked, all of these sins that Jesus mentioned stem from this wicked heart.

We have said throughout all of these Bible studies that man is a spirit. He lives in a body, and he has a soul. The spirit of man wants him to live for God, and his flesh lusts after the evils of the world. Man, or mankind, is a free moral agent and can choose to be evil, or choose to follow God. The will of man will follow either the spirit or the flesh. It will not, and cannot do both.

Mark 7:23 "All these evil things come from within, and defile the man."

The sins mentioned (in verse 21 and 22), above, are the call of the flesh. A person who has turned himself over to the lusts of the flesh will do these sins. The heart of the evil man obeys the flesh. This was what Jesus was saying here.

Mark Chapter 7 Questions

1. Where had the scribes and Pharisees of verse 1 come from?
2. Who were they really?
3. What picky little thing did they say the disciples did that was wrong?
4. Washing the hands over and over done by the Jews was not a law, but _____ of the _____.
5. Where is this included?
6. What besides hands did they wash as part of the ceremony?
7. What question did these scribes and Pharisees ask Jesus about the disciples?
8. They were majoring on things that were not even God's teachings. They were _____.
9. What had Isaiah said about these hypocrites?
10. Where in Isaiah is this found?
11. Jesus was really telling them that their doctrines were to serve what?
12. What should church doctrines be based upon?
13. Jesus said laying aside the commandments of God that hold the _____ of _____.
14. What had Moses taught them to do?
15. How had they twisted this to satisfy their own needs?
16. What is Corban?

17. How do people of our day get away from the teaching of the Bible?
18. What is God's plan for man and woman?
19. In verse 14, what plea was Jesus making to the people?
20. What defiles a man?
21. What did He mean by "If any man have ears to hear, let him hear..."?
22. What did the disciples ask Jesus?
23. In verse 18, Jesus scolded them for what?
24. What destroys people?
25. Name five or more sins which proceed from the heart?
26. What two opposite ways can the heart be?
27. What part of man wants to live for God?
28. What part of man wants to live in sin?
29. What controls which way the man goes?
30. The heart of an evil man obeys what?