

Lesson 6: *Human Traditions Versus God's Commands* Sunday, August 4, 2024

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Inside Out

Memory Text: “ ‘There is nothing that enters a man from outside which can defile him; but the things which come out of him, those are the things that defile a man’ ” (*Mark 7:15, NKJV*).

Human Traditions versus God's Commands Sunday

Read Mark 7:1–13. What relevant truths are presented here?

Then the Pharisees and some of the scribes came together to Him, having come from Jerusalem. ² Now when they saw some of His disciples eat bread with defiled, that is, with unwashed hands, they found fault. ³ 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. ⁴ *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.

⁵ 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?”

⁶ 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.

⁷ And in vain they worship Me,
Teaching *as* doctrines the commandments of men.'

⁸ 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.”

⁹ He said to them, “*All too well* you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition. ¹⁰ For Moses said, ‘Honor your father and your mother’; and, ‘He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.’ ¹¹ 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*), ¹² then you no longer let him do anything for his father or his mother, ¹³ making the word of God of no effect through your tradition which you have handed down. And many such things you do.” —**Mark 7:1-13**

Then Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to His disciples, ² saying: “The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat.³ Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, *that* observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do. ⁴ For they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay *them* on men’s shoulders; but they *themselves* will not move them with one of their fingers. ⁵ But all their works they do to be seen by men... ¹³ “But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither go in *yourselves*, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in... ¹⁵ “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel land and sea to win one proselyte, and when he is won, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves... ²³ “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier *matters* of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone.²⁴ Blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!... ²⁵ “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-

indulgence. ²⁶ Blind Pharisee, first cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also.

²⁷ “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead *men’s* bones and all uncleanness. ²⁸ Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. ***Matthew 23:1-5, 13, 15, 23-28***

One can imagine children studying this passage in Sabbath School and coming home to tell their mothers that they do not have to wash their hands before eating because Jesus said so. However, this story is not about hygiene.

In Jesus’ day, many people in that land were very concerned with ritual purity. During the time between the testaments, the idea of washing hands in order to remain ritually pure was extended to common people, even though these rules originally applied only to the priests in the Old Testament (*Exod. 30:17–21*). It is in keeping with this concept that the religious leaders complain to Jesus about His disciples.

Jesus does not directly answer the question asked of Him. Instead, He defends His disciples in a two-pronged response. First, He quotes Isaiah’s strong words rebuking a nation that honors God in word, but whose heart is far from Him (*Isa. 29:13*). The quotation from Isaiah continues with the condemnation of putting human traditions in the place of divine commands.

The second part of Jesus’ reply plays off the Isaiah quotation. The Lord cites the command of God to honor one’s parents (*Exod. 20:12*); that is, to take care of them in their old age, and contrasts this with a religious tradition where one could give something to God (a gift, *corban*), still use it for oneself, but deny its usage to elderly parents in need. One can just imagine the encounter, “I am sorry, father. I would love to help you, but I gave the money to the temple.”

It is this type of hypocrisy that Jesus attacks uncompromisingly. They have placed human tradition above the Word of God and, in so doing, have sinned.

So what was the answer to the Pharisees’ question? The response of Jesus implies that He does not find convincing their insistence on hand purification as necessary to be in accordance with the will of God. Instead, His response clearly supports the commandments of the Law over against human tradition. (*See also Mark 1:44; Mark 7:10, 11; Mark 10:3–8; Mark 12:26, 29–31.*)

