

"1 The Pharisees and some of the scribes gathered around Him when they had come from Jerusalem, 2 and had seen that some of His disciples were eating their bread with impure hands, that is, unwashed. 3 (For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they carefully wash their hands, thus observing the traditions of the elders; 4 and when they come from the market place, they do not eat unless they cleanse themselves; and there are many other things which they have received in order to observe, such as the washing of cups and pitchers and copper pots.) 5 The Pharisees and the scribes *asked Him, "Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat their bread with impure hands?" 6 And He said to them, "Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: 'THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME. 7 'BUT IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE PRECEPTS OF MEN.' 8 "Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men." 9 He was also saying to them, "You are experts at setting aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition. 10 "For Moses said, 'HONOR YOUR FATHER AND YOUR MOTHER'; and, 'HE WHO SPEAKS EVIL OF FATHER OR MOTHER, IS TO BE PUT TO DEATH'; 11 but you say, 'If a man says to his father or his mother, whatever I have that would help you is Corban (that is to say, given to God),' 12 you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or his mother; 13 thus invalidating the word of God by your tradition which you have handed down; and you do many things such as that." 14 After He called the crowd to Him again, He began saying to them, "Listen to Me, all of you, and understand: 15 there is nothing outside the man which can defile him if it goes into him; but the things which proceed out of the man are what defile the man. 16 ["If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear."] 17 When he had left the crowd and entered the house, His disciples questioned Him about the parable. 18 And He *said to them, "Are you so lacking in understanding also? Do you not understand that whatever goes into the man from outside cannot defile him, 19 because it does not go into his heart, but into his stomach, and is eliminated?" (Thus He declared all foods clean.) 20 And He was saying, "That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man. 21 "For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, 22 deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. 23 "All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man.'" Mark 7:1-23, NAS95

The theme song of the musical "Fiddler on the Roof" is sung by Tevya at the very outset and is entitled, "Tradition." It is a song that speaks of the various traditions of the Orthodox Jews. They have traditions for everything. Their traditions tell them how to eat, how to work and how to play. They touch every area of life.

Traditions are not necessarily bad. We have traditions within the Christian church and some of them are good traditions.

The confessing together of the Apostles Creed.

The singing of the Gloria Patri.

The meeting of Christians in a common place on Sunday morning.

The observance of the Lord's Supper is a tradition given by the Lord Himself.

These traditions are not bad. They reflect our Christian faith. They are a heritage left to us by our spiritual ancestors. And yet, there is a danger. It is the danger of moving from tradition to traditionalism.

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THE DELEGATION AND THE DIRTY HANDS

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For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they carefully wash their hands, thus observing the traditions of the elders; 4 and when they come from the market place, they do not eat unless they cleanse themselves; and there are many other things which they have received in order to observe, such as the washing of cups and pitchers and copper pots. (Mark 7:1-4).

This incident begins with the coming of a group of scribes and Pharisees from Jerusalem. This is not the first time we have seen these two groups in the Gospel of Mark. They were first seen in chapter 2.

The scribes were the official interpreters of the Mosaic law. One of their duties was the copying and preserving of the Scriptures. They had no printing presses and each copy of the Scriptures had to be written by hand. The scribes saw themselves as the protectors of the law. It was their interpretations which formed the basis for the practices of the Pharisees.

The Pharisees were a select denomination which had emerged in the first century before Christ. The title "Pharisee" literally meant "the separated ones." Unlike many

Jews of that era, the Pharisees had remained separate from pagan Greek philosophy and pagan Greek culture. They did this by holding fast to all of the Jewish traditions. They were the evangelicals of Orthodox Judaism. They held to the inspiration of the Holy Scriptures. They believed in the supernatural, in angels, and in a life after death. But their beliefs did not stop there. In an effort to protect and sanctify the law, they had build a great hedge of rules and interpretations around the law.

The Pharisees had already conducted meetings on how they might put Jesus to death. Their official position on Jesus was that He was in league with Satan - that He was using the power of Satan to perform His miracles.

The event that brought about this particular crisis was over the issue of their tradition of ceremonial hand-washing. They saw that some of His disciples were eating their bread with impure hands.

We are not told that this took place at someone's home or at a formal meal. It will not be until verse 17 that Jesus and His disciples will enter a house. They were not sitting down to eat a meal now. They were catching a between-meal snack.

Notice what they were eating. They were eating bread. Where do you think they got this bread? Perhaps it was some of the leftovers from the feeding of the 5,000. They had gathered up twelve baskets full of bread - one for each disciple. And now they are snacking on that bread.

But there is a problem. They have not washed their hands. It is not that their hands are especially dirty. Their hands haven't been anywhere the bread hasn't been. But Jewish tradition calls for a ceremonial cleansing to take place before eating.

When we read that they were eating their bread with impure hands, the Greek text says they were eating with "common hands." Their hands had not been ceremonially sanctified through a ritual cleansing. The requirements for this ritual of cleansing were very exact. The Mishnah devoted 30 chapters to purification rituals.

There must be water enough to fill one and a half eggshells.

The water was to be poured on the hands which must be free of any covering. The hands would then be lifted up so that the water would run to the wrist and thereby make certain that the whole of the hand was washed. The water which ran down to the wrist could not be permitted to drip back to the fingers which were now pure. If anyone performed this rite of handwashing in the morning with the intention that it should apply to the meals of the whole day, it was considered valid. This ritual demanded that the observer sprinkle water on himself both before and after eating. Those who were especially pious would even wash between the main course and the desert.

The rabbis taught that even God must submit to these rituals of purity. They said that Aaron purified the Lord after He had become defiled by going down to Egypt. They also taught that the Lord defiled Himself by touching the dead body of Moses and that He had to cleanse Himself by washing Himself in a bath of fire.

The rabbis told the story of one heroic Jew who had been imprisoned by the Romans and who, when he was brought water in his dungeon, used it for purification rather than for drinking and so suffered dehydration rather than ceremonial uncleanness. It did not matter that not one verse of Scripture taught anything about washing hands before eating.

The Jews took their tradition as being of an equal authority to the written law.

They taught that Moses wrote down one law at Sinai but was also given another "oral law" and that this oral law was passed from generation to generation to become their traditions.

This oral law contained hundreds of interpretations of the written law. For example, when Exodus 34:26 taught that "you shall not boil a kid in its mother's milk," the oral law said that this meant that it was a sin to eat meat and drink milk at the same time. The rabbis had gone on to teach that if a pot of milk boils over and some of the milk drips over into a pot of meat, then the meat is unclean and must be thrown away.

Jesus was facing the entire weight of these traditions as He confronted these scribes and Pharisees.

The Pharisees and the scribes asked Him, "Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat their bread with impure hands?" And He said to them, "Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: 'This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far away from Me. 7 But in vain do they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.' 8 Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men." (Mark 7:5-8).

This delegation of Pharisees and scribes challenge Jesus on the behavior of His disciples. They haven't observed the proper ritual for handwashing. They have broken with tradition. It did not matter that the Bible did not teach this tradition. It was a tradition and they were bound to it and they wanted everyone else to be bound to it.

The problem here is one of LEGALISM. What is legalism? It is a love of the law that supersedes the love of the God who made the law. It is a love of law for the sake of law.

Jesus could have ignored the delegation. Or He could have told them that their oral law was silly and superficial and that they should stick to the Scriptures. But He does much more than that. He goes to the heart of their problem.

Jesus rebukes the delegation. He calls them hypocrites. He does this by quoting to them the words of Isaiah: "Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites." The word "hypocrite" comes from a Greek word that was used to describe an actor. The actors of Greek theater would hold a mask in front of their face while they were playing their part on the stage. A was one who hid his true self under a mask.

Jesus is confronting the theater of piety here

These scribes and Pharisees are doing that. They are not sincere. They are merely playing a part. They are trying to act spiritual with their ceremonies and rituals. They are hiding behind a mask.

But before we judge too harshly the scribe and Pharisees, perhaps we ought to talk about you and me.

Are we hiding behind our own masks? Do we put on our mask of respectability and

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spirituality on Sunday morning as we go to church? If so, then we need to take note
of the words of Jesus.

The quote is taken from Isaiah 29:13. It is a passage of condemnation spoken against
the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

Then the Lord said, "Because this people draw near with their words and honor
Me with their lip service, but they remove their hearts far from Me; and their reverence
for me consists of tradition learned by rote, 14 therefore behold, I will once again deal
marvelously with this people, wondrously marvelous; and the wisdom of their wise men
shall perish, and the discernment of their discerning men shall be concealed." (Isaiah
29:13-14).

Isaiah wrote in the days of the divided kingdom. The nation of Israel was a nation
divided. The Northern Kingdom of Israel had built its own temple and ordained its own
priesthood. They would soon find themselves destroyed.

But this passage was not written to the Northern Kingdom. It was written to the
Southern Kingdom. It was written to the people who had the true temple of God and
the true priesthood and the true sacrifices. Because of what they had, they looked
down their arrogant noses at the Northern Kingdom.

But the Lord challenged their false worship. He said that it was all a sham. They were
worshiping on the outside, but their hearts were not in it.

The contrast that Jesus presents is between the commandments of God versus the
doctrines of men. God's Commandments Men's Traditions

"But in vain do they worship Me" (7:7) "Teaching as doctrines the precepts of men"
(7:7). "Neglecting the commandment of God" (7:8). "You hold to the tradition of men"
(7:8). "You are experts at setting aside the commandment of God" (7:9). "In order to
keep your tradition" (7:9).

There is nothing wrong with tradition until you elevate your tradition over the
commands of God and try to impose them upon others. The problem with the legalist
is that he attempts to bind other people with his own laws and traditions as if they
were God's.

You might be thinking, "That doesn't apply to me. I don't hold to any traditions that
aren't in the Bible."

Really? What would be your reaction if someone came into your church next Sunday in a T-shirt and a pair of cutoffs? How about if a major portion of the church funds were taken and given to the poor? Or what if the pastor announced that from now on he would preach 2-hour sermons?

I have found things like this to shake churches to their very foundations. The reason is because legalists usually hate change.

A PROFANE PRACTICE

He was also saying to them, "You nicely set aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition. 10 For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother'; and, 'He who speaks evil of father or mother, is to be put to death'; 11 but you say, 'If a man says to his father or his mother, whatever I have that would help you is Corban (that is to say, given to God),' 12 you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or his mother; 13 thus invalidating the word of God by your tradition which you have handed down; and you do many things such as that." (Mark 7:9-13).

The hypocrisy of the scribes and the Pharisees was seen in their practice of the tradition of Corban. The word "Corban" is a Hebrew term. It is the Hebrew word for "offering." It describes something that has been dedicated to God as an offering.

The Jews had developed a tradition in which a man would declare his money to be Corban - it would be dedicated to God and the temple ministry. This does not mean that he would give the money to the temple. He would keep it and spend it as necessary. But when he died, it would then go to the temple.

Thus, if a man's parents became needy and came to their son for financial help, he would tell them, "I would like to give you some money, but I cannot because all of my money has been dedicated to God."

They would use their tradition as an excuse not to honor their father and mother - an undermining of one of the Ten Commandments.

There is heavy irony in the voice of Jesus as He says, "You NICELY set aside the commandment of God..." (7:9). The scribes and Pharisees prided themselves on being experts in the law. Jesus commends them for being such experts. He says, "You guys

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are doing a great job in setting aside the law of God so that you can guard against any
infringement on your own tradition.”

There is something about hypocrites which make them strive for the praise of other
men. And so, Jesus gives them praise. But it is the praise of irony. It is not that Jesus
is against all tradition. It is that He is against the misuse of tradition.

There is a principle here. If you do everything the way other people have always done
it, then you are blind. The corollary is that if you do nothing the way other people have
always done it, then you are a fool.

Tradition starts with a reality. Then there is a response to the reality. This is what
worship is. And then there is a repetition of the response. This is tradition.

The danger only comes when you begin to have the repetition without the reality.
Sometimes you need to stop in the middle of your worship and ask, “Why am I doing
this?” And if you don’t have an answer, then you need to stop and go back to the
reality.

A PARABLE OF PURITY

After He called the crowd to Him again, He began saying to them, “Listen to Me, all of
you, and understand: 15 there is nothing outside the man which can defile him if it
goes into
him; but the things which proceed out of the man are what defile the man. 16 If
anyone has ears to hear, let him hear.” (Mark 7:14-16).

Having dismissed the scribes and the Pharisees, Jesus returns to the multitude.

Apparently they had retreated from the presence of the delegation. Perhaps they had
been intimidated by these pious

Jerusalem officials. Now as Jesus speaks to the multitude, it is concerning the false
ideas of the scribes and the Pharisees.

We would probably say to Jesus, “You shouldn’t use the pulpit as a platform for your
disputes with the scribes and the Pharisees unless you are willing to give them equal
time.”

We would be wrong. The scribes and the Pharisees had come on the scene, spreading their false traditions. Jesus now speaks against them. Why? Because it is always the duty of the shepherd to protect the sheep from wolves. Jesus had a shepherd's heart for the people. And He would not stand by quietly and permit false teaching to go unexposed.

Jesus points out that "there is nothing outside the man which can defile him if it goes into him; but the things which proceed out of the man are what defile the man" (7:15).

The Pharisees and the scribes put all of the emphasis on which outside thing went into a man. They wouldn't touch something that was deemed unclean. They wouldn't eat without going through an

elaborate ritual. When they traveled abroad, they would even stop at the boarder of their homeland and shake off the Gentile dust from their clothes. Their emphasis was upon the outside. They should have been more concerned with what was on the inside.

THE PARABLE EXPLAINED

17 When he had left the crowd and entered the house, His disciples questioned Him about the parable. 18 And He said to them, "Are you so lacking in understanding also? Do you not understand that whatever goes into the man from outside cannot defile him, 19 because it does not go into his heart, but into his stomach, and is eliminated?" (Thus He declared all foods clean.) 20 And He was saying, "That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man. 21 For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, 22 deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. 23 All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man." (Mark 7:17-23).

The disciples still had not understood. They come to Jesus and He further elaborates.

That which is Outside That which is Inside Goes into the man. Comes out of the man.

It does not go into his heart, but into his stomach and from there is eliminated.

Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and The reason you sin is because you are a sinner. wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. Does not defile him. Defiles him.

There are several ramifications of this teaching. These ramifications are found in the explanation of Jesus.

1. It means that all foods are clean.

This is a precursor of what shall be revealed to Peter in Acts 10-11. It means that the Old Testament dietary laws were only designed for that particular period to set apart the people of God - but what really sets apart the people of God is what is on the inside.

2. It means that you are not what you eat.

One of the popular saying today is, "You are what you eat." But that isn't so. What you are is determined by what comes out of you, not by what goes into you.

Verses 21-22 presents a list of things that come out of people: evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness.

The point is that the reason men do these deeds (and notice that they are not all OUTWARD deeds) is because of what is on the inside. The heart is at the seat of what you DO. If your

heart is wrong, then what you do will also be wrong.

We use the expression, "Freudian slip." What we mean is that the truth of what was on the

inside slips out.

The problem with the legalist is that he says if you will only stop doing certain things then you will be okay. But that fails to take this principle into account. Cleaning up the outside is never enough. Real change must come from the inside out.

You can take a pig and dress him up in sheep's clothing, but he will still be a pig. You can wash him, paint his toenails, give him sheep lessons, and even teach him to say,

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“Bahhhh.” But he will still be a pig. Let him loose near a slop pile, and his little piggy nature will reassert itself.

To be a sheep he has to be born as a sheep. That is why God gives you a new birth. You are born again so that you can have a new nature. And this begins a process within you called

SANCTIFICATION. It is a process which works its way form the inside out. And it results in a changed life.

Have you been trying to change your life from the outside in? Maybe you have been going to church and hanging around with Christians, hoping that some of it might “rub off” onto you. It won’t work. Just because a mouse crawls into a cookie jar, it does not make him a cookie.

Joining a church and hanging around Christians will not change you. It takes a miracle of God to change you. It takes a resurrection. And that is okay, because God is in the resurrecting business.