



# Mark - Lesson 7A

## Chapter 7:1-13

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- In our last teaching in Mark's gospel, we taught on one of the most well-known signs Jesus performed – His supernatural ability to walk on water.
  - Jesus being able to walk on water is one story that many children learn about in their Sunday school classrooms.
    - However, we discovered that this miraculous sign was done due to the disciples' inability to understand and see who Jesus was.
    - Especially after the miraculous feeding of the five thousand.
  - What should have been a simple computational problem for the disciples to see Jesus' true identity as Messiah, turned into a trial for the disciples.
    - And that trial was to demonstrate who Jesus truly was despite the Messianic confusion found from the crowd at the feeding of the five thousand.
  - It was after that test on the sea that Jesus and the disciples arrive to Gennesaret where Jesus' recognition increased, and faith was demonstrated by many.
    - Tonight, we find ourselves back in a familiar place of scribal and pharisaical scrutiny and skepticism.
    - Only this time, the ministry of Jesus is getting more attraction from the religious leaders in Jerusalem.
  - If I were to put a tag on tonight's teaching it would be, "The trap of Tradition".
    - With that being said, I invite you to open your bibles and turn with me to Mark 7:1-13 for the reading of the Word of God.

**Mark 7:1** The Pharisees and some of the scribes gathered around Him when they had come from Jerusalem,

**Mark 7:2** and had seen that some of His disciples were eating their bread with impure hands, that is, unwashed.

**Mark 7:3** (For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they carefully wash their hands, thus observing the traditions of the elders;

**Mark 7:4** 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 7:5** 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?"

**Mark 7:6** 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.

**Mark 7:7** 'But in vain do they worship Me,  
Teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.'

**Mark 7:8** Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men."

**Mark 7:9** He was also saying to them, "You are experts at setting aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition.

**Mark 7:10** For Moses said, ‘Honor your father and your mother’; and, ‘He who speaks evil of father or mother, is to be put to death’;

**Mark 7:11** 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),’

**Mark 7:12** you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or his mother;

**Mark 7:13** thus invalidating the word of God by your tradition which you have handed down; and you do many things such as that.”

- Let’s Pray.

There was a story that went like this:

- A little girl asked her mother, “Mommy, why do you cut the ends off the meat before you cook it?”
  - The girl’s mother told her that she thought it added to the flavor by allowing the meat to better absorb the spices, but perhaps she should ask her grandmother since she always did it that way.”
    - So the little girl finds her grandmother and asks, “Grandma, why do you and Mommy cut the ends of the meat off before you cook it?”
  - Her grandmother thought a moment and answered, “I think it allows the meat to stay tender because it soaks up the juices better, but why don’t you ask your Nana, after all, I learned from her and she always did it that way.”
    - The little girl is getting a little frustrated, but climbs up in her great-grandmother’s lap and asks, “Nana, why do you cut the ends off the meat before you cook it?”
  - Nana answered, “I don’t know why these women do it, I did it because my pot wasn’t big enough.”
- You see, we have this natural tendency to always do what was done because that’s what we’ve always seen or heard.
  - Yet we fail to ask the question like the little girl, “Where did this come from and what’s behind it all.”
    - When we begin to get to the source of the matter, we will oftentimes find that things aren’t what they were made out to be.
  - Tonight, we find ourselves in an interesting narrative tonight as Jesus and His disciples are confronted with an unorthodox tradition
    - The tradition we will read about was not rooted in the excellencies of scripture, but within the context of distorting the truth because of impure hearts.
  - What began as small detours away from the written word of God, drifted into a way of life that was eventually taught as if it were from the very mouth of God.
    - And all of this passed down from one generation to the next causing the Jewish people to lose sight of the authority of scripture.
    - Let's see just how far tradition took the people of God off on a tangent. Check out verses 1-5.

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**Mark 7:5** 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?”

- Mark picks us up directly after the scene at Gennesaret where Jesus has healed many people in the region where much faith has been displayed.
  - We have been observing over time, especially after the feeding of the five thousand, that Jesus’ teaching ministry is continuing to increase.
    - One could assume after word had traveled quickly about what Jesus had done with 2 fish and five barley loaves, that more people would come to inquire about Him.
    - Not only did Jesus’ ministry following increase, but it eventually caused a particular group of people to seek out further information about Him.
    - It will be here in this next scene that the passage moves back from growing curiosity to leadership conflict.
  - The text tells us that the Pharisees and some of the scribes have arrived, presumably back in Capernaum, where they have “gathered around” Jesus.
    - The term “gathered around”, paired with the group in which is encompassing Jesus, speaks to the nature of this assembly.
    - In other words, this is not a “we are so happy to see you moment, Jesus”. This gathering is based upon a more serious inquiry.
  - If you recall in our previous teachings in Mark, whenever there was a gathering of the religious leaders in the region of the Galilee pertaining to Jesus, it was related to an investigative matter.
    - For instance, the Pharisees confront Jesus eating with sinners in Mark 2:15-17. (Matthew becomes a disciple)
    - Or the requirement of fasting of the Pharisees’ “selected days” in Mark 2:18-22. (At Matthew’s celebration feast in his home)
    - We can even recount the Pharisees and their restrictions on the Sabbath in Mark 2:23-3:6. (Jesus and the disciples walking through the grain fields)
    - Now, these Pharisees and scribes have made their way from Jerusalem. It’s like having the Principal come to see you in the classroom.
  - In each instance the issue that Jesus faces is His rejection of the Oral Law (The Mishnah) and its interpretation, versus what the Written Law says (Mosaic Law).

- This situation will be no different only this time, upon the religious leader's arrival, they see yet another issue with Jesus and His disciples.
- Notice what verse 2 states: "the Pharisees and scribes have noticed that Jesus' disciples are eating bread with impure hands."
  - Just as a quick means of observation, it is quite interesting how the Pharisees were so quick to observe what the disciples weren't doing right in their own eyes.
  - This sounds eerily familiar to how legalists today are so quick to inspect what they don't understand or cannot see because if it's not their way it's the wrong way.
- So Mark tells us that according to the Pharisees and their interpretation of the Law (the Oral Law) that the disciples were needing to wash their hands before eating.
  - It becomes clear that the disciples' inaction to wash their hands before eating greatly disturbed the religious leaders.
  - Mark makes this grievance clear by providing his original audience with specific cultural details as to why the Pharisees take issue with the disciples.
- He explains that the Pharisees observed what is known as the "Tradition of the Elders".
  - Interestingly enough, the term "elder" in this phrase and context speaks specifically to the scribes, Pharisees, and other religious leaders in general.
  - In other words, these men were the shot callers, the scholars, the "gate keepers" of all there was to know and be known about God's word.
- So where the Written word of God should have been deemed as sufficient and authoritative in nature, the religious elite took it upon themselves to exalt their interpretation of what "thus saith the Lord".
  - It becomes clear that the reason for the religious leaders' intense scrutiny of Jesus' disciples eating with unclean hands was because they were "supposedly" in direct violation of the leaders' "perceived authority".
  - To the religious leaders, it would seem as though the disciples had violated the very Law of God and Jesus was endorsing it.
  - However, Jesus sees it differently and rightfully so, being that He is the very word of God. (John 1)
- Therefore the question is asked, in verse 5: "Why do your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat their bread with impure hands?"
  - Mark shows us two things to consider at this point in the story:
- First, there is a clear distinction between the Oral Law and what the religious leaders hold to versus the Written Law and what Jesus stands by and has come to fulfill.
  - Secondly, and most importantly: What do the Oral Law and the Written Law have to say regarding ritual washing and cleansing (Clean vs. Unclean)?
  - Since we have a general understanding of where the Oral Law stands on ritual cleansing, we need to see what the Mosaic Law (Written Law) states.
- Interestingly enough, when we examine the Hebrew scriptures, more specifically the Pentateuch, we will find that the only handwashing required for purpose of

ritual purity was ascribed to priests before they offered up sacrifices.

- We see this in Exodus 30:18-21 as well as Exodus 40:30-32.
- Really quickly, check out what Josephus said in his writing: “Antiquity of the Jews 13.10.6” regarding ceremonial practices and the Law.

**“but of these matters we shall speak hereafter. What I would now explain is this, that the Pharisees have delivered to the people a great many observances by succession from their fathers, which are not written in the law of Moses; and for that reason it is that the Sadducees reject them and say that we are to esteem those observances to be obligatory which are in the written word, but are not to observe what are derived from the tradition of our forefathers”; (Ant. Of the Jews 13.10.6)**

- So what we have here is a confrontation between tradition and written scripture.
  - What the religious leaders have deemed as authoritative and sacred, Jesus deems as a hinderance and rejection of the truth of God’s Word.
  - Furthermore, the religious leaders’ issue with the disciples had little to do with them and all to do with Jesus and his refutation of Pharisaic interpretation.
    - So in the spirit of making things known in a public format, Jesus avoids getting caught up in the trite questioning regarding the value of the Mishnah and tradition.
    - And He in turn poses a gut-punching statement to them that would put them on notice.
    - Check out the next few verses, verse 6-8:

**Mark 7:6 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.**

**Mark 7:7 ‘But in vain do they worship Me,  
Teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.’**

**Mark 7:8 Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men.”**

- Mark tells us that instead of engaging in a question-and-answer combat with the religious leaders, Jesus simply engaged them with the truth of scripture.
  - He begins by mentioning that Isaiah the Prophet prophesied correctly about them long ago and proceeds to summarize Isaiah’s statement in one word – Hypocrites.
    - The Greek word for “hypocrites” is *hypokrites* which means an actor or pretender.
  - Jesus refers the behavior of the Pharisees and scribes to what Isaiah the prophet prophesied about the children of Israel in Isaiah 29:13. Check out the text:

**Isaiah 29:13** 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,

- ○ Notice that although Isaiah himself was speaking about the children of Israel specifically, Jesus contextualizes what Isaiah’s prophesied.
  - In other words, this pattern of honoring with their lips but not with their hearts was a consistent pattern of the people of God both then and now.
- This brings up a very important matter regarding the Holy Scriptures.
  - Although these words were written down many centuries ago, not only were they timely and valid then, but they are the same for today.
  - The truth of God’s word is relevant both to and for the believer and non-believer, today.
  - The truth of the word of God speaks to the depravity of humanity and shows us the ugliness of our sin-nature.
  - Yet at the very same time, it provides us with the means of hope to overcome our current adversities and trials and leads us to salvation.
- Isaiah’s generation dealt with the “lip service” of the people with hearts that were far from the God they claimed to know and love.
  - And so do we experience this same behavior amongst believers today.
- Ezekiel 33:31 mentions something similar. Check out the text:

**Ezekiel 33:31** They come to you as people come, and sit before you as My people and hear your words, but they do not do them, for they do the lustful desires expressed by their mouth, and their heart goes after their gain.

- If I were to put it bluntly, the worship of the people were empty and fruitless because they pursued and worshipped themselves rather than the Living God.
  - Jesus packages His point beautifully in verse 8 by saying:

**Mark 7:8** Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men.”

- As long as the rabbis and religious leaders had an appearance of godliness, they were most satisfied.
  - And it was their expectation that the people would follow suit and recognize that their interpretation of the Law was just as powerful, if not more, than the written Law, itself.
  - Friends, herein lies the danger of tradition! What begins as a means or an attempt to seemingly honor the Lord, if not tethered to scripture, can easily turn into a disastrous road of improper teaching and misunderstanding.

- Notice that verse 8 starts with the word “Neglecting”
- This means that there has been some sort of abandoning or leaving from the true and proper intent of the Law.
- This abandoning of teaching the scriptures is what caused Martin Luther to write his 99 thesis which led to the reformation.
  - Luther’s work eventually led to the emphasis on one having a high view of scripture versus that of tradition and simply “taking the preacher at his word.”
  - This is why VBVM is a non-denominational ministry, because we do not ascribe to the traditions of other denominations which have a tendency to brush their theological views in a particular way.
  - We stand firmly on the truth of the text and desire the text to inform our lives by the leading of the Holy Spirit, according to the author’s original intent.
- I love what Cyprian of Carthage wrote in the third century regarding the need to adhere to the very commands of Christ. Check out what he stated:

**“For we must inquire whom they themselves have followed. For if in the sacrifice which Christ offered none is to be followed but Christ, assuredly it behoves us to obey and do that which Christ did, and what He commanded to be done, since He Himself says in the Gospel, “If ye do whatsoever I command you, henceforth I call you not servants, but friends.”<sup>3</sup> And that Christ alone ought to be heard, the Father also testifies from heaven, saying, “This is my well-beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him.” Wherefore, if Christ alone must be heard, we ought not to give heed to what another before us may have thought was to be done, but what Christ, who is before all, first did.”**

- Following verse 8, Jesus provides the perfect illustration as to how the religious leaders alter the meaning of the Law to ultimately establish their own.
  - He states that these men are “experts” at setting aside the commands of God in order to keep their own, in verse 9.
  - In other words, these leaders are crafty at twisting the commands of God in a way that appears godly, but simply distorts the truth and intent.
  - And isn’t this relevant for us in today’s context. Friends, there is nothing new under the sun, as Solomon stated in Ecclesiastes.
  - The Pharisees were so good at what they did that they fooled themselves and others into believing that what they were doing was somehow approved by God.
    - Do you see how wicked and evil the human heart is?
    - And if we’re to be honest with ourselves, we too, have been there before, a time or more.
  - We will take a piece of scripture to justify why we behaved in a certain way or why we responded in a certain way, yet not considering the Spirit’s leading in that situation.
    - This type of behavior is what has led to much legalism within the church today.



- Wanting to uphold the holiness of God’s word while at the same time upholding our own piety and self-righteousness.
- Friends, a gospel that is shaped in our likeness is a constantly changing standard that proves to be no gospel at all.
- Jesus paints us a beautiful picture of just how crafty these scribes are. Check out verses 9-13.

**Mark 7:9** He was also saying to them, “You are experts at setting aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition.

**Mark 7:10** For Moses said, ‘Honor your father and your mother’; and, ‘He who speaks evil of father or mother, is to be put to death’;

**Mark 7:11** 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),’

**Mark 7:12** you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or his mother;

**Mark 7:13** thus invalidating the word of God by your tradition which you have handed down; and you do many things such as that.”

- It is here in verse 10 that Jesus illustratively contrasts the commands of God with the commands of men or “traditions of men”.
  - And with this contrast, He will use a familiar commandment regarding that of honor.
    - He uses a combination of Exodus 20:12 and Exodus 21:17 speaking about the fourth commandment which speaks to honoring your parents.
    - Really quickly, turn to Exodus 20:12:

**Exodus 20:12** “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the Lord your God gives you.

- It is in the use of the fourth commandment that Jesus reminds the Pharisees what the Law states regarding one honoring their parents.
  - Within Jewish culture, honoring parents included caring for them in their latter years.
  - And with the caring of the elderly meant that there would be some financial obligations that came with that care. (Keep this in mind as we dive further into this example).
  - Now if there was one thing that the gospel accounts mentioned regarding the Pharisees and money, these men were lovers of it.
    - So it’s not unsuspecting for Jesus to use this example to speak to the matters and issues of the religious leaders’ hearts.
  - One way in which the Pharisees were able to take possession of the people’s money “permanently” would be through what was known as Corban.
    - And Mark kindly makes the effort to explain the meaning of the term for his audience.

- Corban means “to be given to God” or “a gift dedicated to God”.
  - This term originates from Numbers 30 regarding one who makes an inviolable vow to God.
  - Check out what Numbers 30:2 says:

**Numbers 30:2** If a man makes a vow to the Lord, or takes an oath to bind himself with a binding obligation, he shall not violate his word; he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth.

- So with such binding obligations before God, the religious leaders used Corban as a means to restrict the people’s gifts (donations) even when dutiful obligations came about to honor their parents.
  - When Corban (Korban) was established it was often times connected to 3 particular offerings to God which were the following:
    - 1. Food (as a sacrifice to God)
    - 2. Property (as a dedication to God)
    - 3. Or Money (as an offering to God)
  - So when Jesus mentions in verse 11 the example of a man who has Corbaned his finances, his mother and father are in need but the religious leaders do not permit the man to invalidate his vow.
    - Where one would assume that the vow could be altered in lieu of the circumstances, the Pharisees would not adjust to meet the need and therefore that individual has broken the fourth commandment.
  - Understand that for one to not honor their parents in their old age during that time, it was deemed a capital punishment, which was death.
    - So because of the greed and evil intent of the Pharisees’ hearts, they overlooked the need to honor for the sake of their own selves at the expense of others’ right standing with Holy God.
  - What should be overwhelmingly shocking is in verse 13 part b.
    - Jesus states this: “and you do many things such as that”. What was Jesus saying here?
  - In other words, this was just one of the ways in which these men abused scripture, for the sake of “their commands and traditions”.
    - Friends, this means of scriptural abuse was simply an indication of their corrupt hearts.
  - What may have started as a gesture of truly desiring to remain holy and upstanding in their honor of God turned into something completely different.
    - What one may have intended to be a “little white lie” in an effort to protect themselves was always a lie in the sight of God.
  - The true hypocrisy in it all is our ability to downplay the reality that we naturally desire to appear more righteous or Holy than the next person.
    - The problem with any person attempting to be seen as the “standard of holiness” is that it changes the standard from one moment to the next.

- If it's not my way then it's the highway, or if your church doesn't do it like this then you aren't truly a "strong church like we are".
- And therefore, everyone is having to measure up to what you do or how you behave. It becomes performance centered rather than scripture centered!
- But the moment that you mess up or fall short... "Oh there's grace for that"
  - For the legalist, grace is only enough for them when they need it, but never enough for others.
  - Friends, the very heart of the Law of God and its reasoning for being established was to speak to God's standard of what Holy is and for the people of God to see that the only way you can be made Holy is through Him and by Him.
- It was to point people to the reality that every human being was in need to be made clean and right before Holy God.
  - As one rabbi mentioned regarding ritual handwashing: "because of the constant use of our hands on a daily basis, the hands of the priest and people would be in a constant state of defilement."
  - Therefore, there would always be a need to be ceremonially cleansed and made right before God for the priest who goes before Him on behalf of the people.
- The cycle would have never ended which was the point that God was making all along – we need God to make us whole.
  - He is the only one that can move us from defilement to being delivered.
- The woman with the issue of blood was socially deemed unclean according to Leviticus, yet Jesus touched her, made her clean, without Himself ever becoming unclean.
  - Jairus' daughter was dead and was therefore deemed unclean, yet Jesus dealt with her in her defilement and raised her to life.
  - Friends, Jesus Christ is the Only One in whom makes unclean men and women permanently clean.
- It's like the old hymn we used to sing:

**"What can wash away my sins,  
Nothing but the blood of Jesus.  
What can make me whole again,  
Nothing but the blood of Jesus."**

- ○ It wasn't another ceremonial washing that made one right before God.
  - It wasn't another ritual cleansing that made one right with God.
  - It is Christ and Him having been crucified that would make one right before Holy God – moving us from death to life.
- However, the Pharisees' hearts are blinded and too self-focused to see their deliverer before them.
  - Their hearts were far from God because, like every human heart, apart from

being rejuvenated by the work of the Holy Spirit, it was dead.

- A darkened heart must be made spiritually alive and new.
- Next week we're going to see that the true mark of a man or woman is not what they do to maintain an exterior appearance of holiness, but what comes out of them that defiles them.
  - Our petty attempts to seem holy pale in comparison to God Himself making us Holy.
- I pray you join us next week as we cover verses 14-23.
  - Let's Pray.

#### Citations:

- Flavius Josephus and William Whiston, [\*The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged\*](#) (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1987), 355.
- Cyprian of Carthage, "[The Epistles of Cyprian,](#)" in Fathers of the Third Century: Hippolytus, Cyprian, Novatian, Appendix, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, trans. Robert Ernest Wallis, vol. 5, The Ante-Nicene Fathers (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1886), 362.