

Mark 7:1-23 ~ Scripture Verses

¹ The Pharisees and some of the teachers of the law who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus and ² saw some of his disciples eating food with hands that were “unclean,” that is, unwashed. ³ (The Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they give their hands a ceremonial washing, holding to the tradition of the elders. ⁴ When they come from the marketplace they do not eat unless they wash. And they observe many other traditions, such as the washing of cups, pitchers and kettles.[a])

⁵ So the Pharisees and teachers of the law asked Jesus, “Why don’t your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders instead of eating their food with ‘unclean’ hands?”

⁶ He replied, “Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written:

“These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.

⁷ They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.’[b]

⁸ You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men.”

⁹ And he said to them: “You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe [c] your own traditions! ¹⁰ For Moses said, ‘Honor your father and your mother,’[d] and, ‘Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.’[e] ¹¹ But you say that if a man says to his father or mother: ‘Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is Corban’ (that is, a gift devoted to God), ¹² then you no longer let him do anything for his father or mother. ¹³ Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that.”

¹⁴ Again Jesus called the crowd to him and said, “Listen to me, everyone, and understand this. ¹⁵ Nothing outside a man can make him ‘unclean’ by going into him. Rather, it is what comes out of a man that makes him ‘unclean.’ ”

¹⁷ After he had left the crowd and entered the house, his disciples asked him about this parable. ¹⁸ “Are you so dull?” he asked. “Don’t you see that nothing that enters a man from the outside can make him ‘unclean’? ¹⁹ For it doesn’t go into his heart but into his stomach, and then out of his body.” (In saying this, Jesus declared all foods “clean.”)

²⁰ He went on: “What comes out of a man is what makes him ‘unclean.’ ²¹ For from within, out of men’s hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, ²² greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. ²³ All these evils come from inside and make a man ‘unclean.’ ”

Footnotes:

a. Mark 7:4 – Some early manuscripts: pitchers, kettles and dining couches

b. Mark 7:7 – Isaiah 29:13

c. Mark 7:9 – Some manuscripts: set up

d. Mark 7:10 – Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy. 5:16

e. Mark 7:10 – Exodus 21:17; Leviticus 20:9

Mark 7:1-23 ~ Discussion Questions

1. What are some of your favorite traditions?
2. What were the Pharisees and teachers of the law concerned about? Why? How is washing the dirt off your hands with soap and water different from the type of washing the Pharisees were talking about? (7:2-5)
3. How did Jesus avoid answering the Pharisees' question directly? (7:6-7)
4. Isaiah and Jesus both criticized holding onto the traditions of men. What's wrong with holding onto great old traditions?
5. What example did Jesus give to prove his accusations against the Pharisees? What is *Corban* and how does it enter in to this example? (7:10-12)
6. What did Jesus mean when he said to the Pharisees that "you nullify the word of God by your tradition...?" (7:13)
7. How did Jesus place tradition in the proper perspective? (7:10-19) How did the Pharisees' use of 'unclean' differ from Jesus'?
8. What church traditions either can or do stand in the way of non-believers becoming interested in Christianity?
9. In what ways do you think it is possible to worship the Lord in vain?
10. As he did so often, Jesus referred to the Pharisees and teachers of the law as hypocrites (7:6). What exactly is a hypocrite? In what ways are Christians today hypocrites?
11. Mark adds what important parenthetical comment in Vs 7:19? (Acts 10:9-16)
12. That's quite a list of 'unclean' things that come from within a person's heart in 7:21-22. Which ones have you been guilty of in the past 3 months? Which ones are most troubling to you? What practical steps can you take to eliminate them? What evil attitudes or actions would you add to this list?

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| A. Sexual immorality | D. Theft | G. Greed | J. Slander |
| B. Adultery | E. Murder | H. Deceit | K. Arrogance |
| C. Lewdness | F. Malice | I. Envy | L. Folly |

Other evils that trouble me: _____

Mark 7:1-23 ~ Leader's Guide

1. What are some of your favorite traditions?

Family “Chinese auction” a day or two after Christmas. Annual trail ride and picnic at Sven Johnson’s place. Morris Plains Memorial Day parade and gathering at the VFW afterwards.

2. What were the Pharisees and teachers of the law concerned about? Why? How is washing the dirt off your hands with soap and water different from the typw of washing the Pharisees were talking about? (7:2-5)

The Pharisees were concerned that Jesus and his disciples were eating with ‘unclean’ hands because they did not ceremonially wash them. Jews believed they became ceremonially defiled during the normal circumstances of daily life such as coming in contact with Gentiles in the marketplace. They cleansed themselves by pouring water from large (20 to 30 gallon) stone water jars over their hands.

3. How did Jesus avoid answering the Pharisees’ question directly? (7:6-7)

He quoted scripture from Isaiah 29:13 in the Old Testament, which was always a good way to answer accusations of Pharisees and others.

4. Isaiah and Jesus both criticized holding onto the traditions of men. What’s wrong with holding onto great old traditions?

Actually, nothing is wrong with the traditions of men as long as they do not conflict with the commands of God. Jesus clearly contrasts the two. God’s commands are found in Scripture and are binding; the “tradition of the elders” is not Biblical and therefore not authoritative or binding. The Jewish teachers of the law had written thousands of pages about the law of Moses. Some of this was clarification and interpretation, which is okay. But much of it went beyond that and established new laws and traditions, some of which even set aside the commands of God (7:9) which was absolutely not acceptable to Jesus.

5. What example did Jesus give to prove his accusations against the Pharisees? What is *Corban* and how does it enter in to this example? (7:10-12)

Their traditions subverting the fifth commandment to honor your father and mother which he cited in both its positive and negative forms in 7:10.

Exodus 20:12 – Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you.

Exodus 21:17 – Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.

Corban is a Hebrew/Aramaic word meaning “offering,” which is something that someone voluntarily brings to God as a gift. By using this word in a religious vow an irresponsible or angry Jewish son could formally dedicate to God (i.e., to the temple) his earnings that otherwise would have gone for the support of his parents. The money, however, did not necessarily have to go for religious purposes. The Corban formula was simply a means of circumventing the clear responsibility of children toward their parents as prescribed in the law. The teachers of the law held that the Corban oath was binding, even when uttered rashly. The practice was one of many traditions that adhered to the letter of the law while ignoring its spirit (that is, a gift devoted to God). By explaining this word, Mark reveals that he is addressing Gentile readers, probably primarily Romans.

6. What did Jesus mean when he said to the Pharisees that “you nullify the word of God by your tradition...?”

The teachers of the law appealed to Numbers 30:1-2 in support of the Corban vow, but Jesus categorically rejects the practice of using one Biblical teaching to nullify another. The scribal interpretation of Numbers 30:1-2 satisfied the letter of the passage but missed the meaning of the law as a whole.

Numbers 30:1-2 – ¹ Moses said to the heads of the tribes of Israel: “This is what the LORD commands: ² When a man makes a vow to the LORD or takes an oath to obligate himself by a pledge, he must not break his word but must do everything he said.

7. How did Jesus place tradition in the proper perspective? (7:10-19) How did the Pharisees’ use of ‘unclean’ differ from Jesus’?

The Pharisees were focusing on the tradition of ceremonial washing to define whether someone was clean or unclean. Jesus went much further and said it is not even what goes in a man that makes him unclean, but what comes out.

Jesus replaced the normal Jewish understandings of defilement with the truth that defilement comes from an impure heart, not the violation of external rules. Fellowship with God is not interrupted by unclean hands or food, but by sin.

8. What church traditions either can or do stand in the way of non-believers becoming interested in Christianity?

9. In what ways do you think it is possible to worship the Lord in vain?

10. As he did so often, Jesus referred to the Pharisees and teachers of the law as hypocrites (7:6). What exactly is a hypocrite? In what ways are Christians today hypocrites?

A hypocrite is defined as 1) a person who puts on a false appearance of virtue or religion or 2) a person who acts in contradiction to his or her stated beliefs or feelings. For example, a hypocrite might criticize other people for not voting but then not vote himself.

Jesus spoke out often against hypocrites. Here are some of the types of hypocrisy that he condemned, many of which still apply to Christians today:

- Giving to the poor to be recognized by others. (Matthew 6:2)
- Praying in public to be recognized as “God’s man.” (Matthew 6:5, 23:14)
- Letting everybody know you are fasting to get recognition by others (Mt 6:16)
- Complaining about other's behavior when yours is even worse (Matthew 7:5)
- Pretending to honor God through lip service only (Matthew 15:7-9)
- Judging other people to try to make yourself look superior (Mark 12:16)
- Deceiving people from knowing God (Matthew 23:13)
- Repressing the poor and widows (Matthew 23:14)
- Teaching proselytes to be hypocrites (Matthew 23:15)
- Tithing (giving to the church), but neglecting justice and mercy (Mt 23:23)
- Doing everything for show, while really being self-indulgent and unrighteous (Matthew 23:25-29)
- Treating stock animals better than fellow human beings (Luke 13:15)
- Being able to analyze the weather, but unable to distinguish between right and wrong (Luke 12:56-57)

11. Mark adds what important parenthetical comment in Vs 7:19? (Acts 10:9-16)

Added to verse 7:19 – (In saying this, Jesus declared all foods “clean.”) Mark adds this parenthetical comment to help his readers see the significance of Jesus’ pronouncement for them.

Acts 10:9-16 – ⁹ About noon the following day as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. ¹⁰ He became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance. ¹¹ He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. ¹² It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles of the earth and birds of the air. ¹³ Then a voice told him, “Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.”

¹⁴ “Surely not, Lord!” Peter replied. “I have never eaten anything impure or unclean.”

¹⁵ The voice spoke to him a second time, “Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.”

¹⁶ This happened three times, and immediately the sheet was taken back to heaven.

This is important not only because it allows believers to eat all foods but is also nullifies many, if not all of the traditional Jewish dietary laws. Even today, this is a

huge factor separating Jews from Christians (and others) — the Kosher laws, which are mostly made up by man and not even from the Bible.

12. That's quite a list of 'unclean' things that come from within a person's heart in 7:21-22. Which ones have you been guilty of in the past 3 months? Which ones are most troubling to you? What practical steps can you take to eliminate them?

What evil attitudes or actions would you add to this list?

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Other evils that trouble me: _____

- Lying
- Pride
- Cheating
- Lust
- Bitterness
- Anger
- Rage
- Desire for revenge
- Judgmental
