

## Mark 7:1-23 The Dangers of Legalism

○ **Scripture Reading: Hebrews 9:1-14**

○ **Proposition: What is more important, your traditions of God's Word?**

○ **Introduction**

○ **Communion Misunderstood – Terry Fullam**

- I'm thinking of a small-town church in upstate New York. They'd had a rector in that church for over thirty-five years. He was loved by the church and the community. After he retired, he was replaced by a young priest. It was his first church; he had a great desire to do well. He had been at the church several weeks when he began to perceive that the people were upset at him. He was troubled.
- ✦ Eventually he called aside one of the lay leaders of the church and said, "I don't know what's wrong, but I have a feeling that there's something wrong."
- ★ The man said, "Well, Father, that's true. I hate to say it, but it's the way you do the Communion service."
  - ★ "The way I do the Communion service? What do you mean?"
  - ★ "Well, it's not so much what you do as what you leave out."
  - ★ "I don't think I leave out anything from the Communion service."
  - ★ "Oh yes, you do. Just before our previous rector administered the chalice and wine to the people, he'd always go over and touch the radiator. And, then, he would--"
  - ★ "Touch the radiator? I never heard of that liturgical tradition."
- ✦ So the younger man called the former rector. He said, "I haven't even been here a month, and I'm in trouble."
  - ★ "In trouble? Why?"
  - ★ "Well, it's something to do with touching the radiator. Could that be possible? Did you do that?"
  - ★ "Oh yes, I did. Always before I administered the chalice to the people, I touched the radiator to discharge the static electricity so I wouldn't shock them."
- For over thirty-five years, the untutored people of his congregation had thought that was a part of the holy tradition. I have to tell you that church has now gained the name, "The Church of the Holy Radiator."
- ✦ That's a ludicrous example, but often it's nothing more profound than that. Traditions get started, and people endure traditions for a long time. They mix it up with practical obedience to the living God. – Terry Fullam, "Worship: What We're Doing, and Why," *Preaching Today*, Tape No. 102.
- We may laugh at the absurdity of this example, but it also ought to be careful to examine our own lives for similar things we have made sacred in our lives
- This is exactly what happens in this morning's text with Jesus

- ✦ He is confronted and accused for not observing a Jewish Tradition
- ✦ Jesus has a way of turning such accusations back on their accusers
  - ✦ He does this by asking them and us
    - What is more important, your traditions or God's Word?

## ○ External Emphasis

### ⦿ An Accusation (vv. 1-5)

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?"

- ✦ The Pharisees & scribes see Jesus' disciples eating without observing the hand washing traditions of the Jews
  - ✦ Mark is careful to note that this tradition was observed by the Pharisees & "All the Jews" – Everybody was doing it!
    - ✦ When returning from the market place they cleanse themselves before eating by ritual washing
      - ✦ In addition to hand washing there were many more regulations regarding the washing of cups, pitchers & pots
- ✦ Why do your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with impure hands?
  - ✦ Notice the source of this tradition: The Elders
    - ✦ It was a common practice & probably good advice
      - ✦ But it was not a command from God recorded in the Scriptures
  - ✦ They were guilty of elevating man's tradition to the same level as God's Word
    - ✦ How are we guilty of the same types of offenses?
      - ✦ Traditions we observe in the Church that are not given by God
      - ✦ The emphasis we place on personal preference and opinion
      - ✦ Our unwillingness to do things we do not like

### ⦿ A Rebuke (vv. 6-13)

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."**

△ **Jesus quotes from Isaiah and calls them hypocrites**

✦ **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*,

★ **The honor the Pharisees were giving was only from their lips and not their hearts**

★ **They vainly teach the traditions of men as Doctrines of Faith**

★ **Their measure of godliness was based on traditions not Scripture**

△ **They hold fast to their traditions while neglecting the commandment of God**

✦ **They have become experts in rationalizing away God's commandments**

★ **Jesus quotes God's commandments to Moses**

★ **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.

★ **Exodus 21:17** "He who curses his father or his mother shall surely be put to death.

★ **Jesus quotes their twisted tradition**

★ **I would help you mom and dad, but I have dedicated all my wealth and possessions to God**

□ **Corban - A gift devoted to God**

▣ **The Pharisees would declare all their wealth devoted to God, so they could not share any of it with family or friends because it was dedicated as a gift to the temple and God**

✦ **Jesus exposes how they used spiritual sounding traditions to break God's commandments**

★ **It was a terrible sin to neglect their parents**

★ **Their greater sin was invalidating God's Word while justifying their traditions**

□ **This tradition was a thin veil for selfishness and neglect**

□ **Jesus says they were doing many things like this**

▣ **Are we guilty of such things today?**

▣ **Are we holding onto traditions that only honor our comfort?**

▣ **Are we neglecting God's commands because of our traditions?**

○ **Internal Emphasis**

⦿ **Jesus teaches the crowd (v. 14-16)**

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."

△ **He calls them to really hear what He is teaching – to understand**

✦ **Nothing outside a man can defile him if it goes into him**

★ **Jesus is talking specifically about food here**

✦ **There are many things that can defile us, but food is not one of them**

✦ **Whether you wash your hands or not is a matter of good hygiene, but it is not a matter of honoring the Lord**

✦ **It is what comes out of a man that defiles him**

★ **The words and actions of a man are what defile him**

★ **His secret inwards thoughts, plans & schemes are what defile him**

○ **The Disciples do not understand (vv. 17-23)**

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."

△ **After they left the crowds, the disciples begin to question Jesus**

✦ **Jesus asks: Do you not understand like the Pharisees?**

★ **What goes into a man cannot defile him**

✦ **Because it does not go into his heart, but his stomach, then he eliminates it**

□ **By this Jesus declared all foods clean**

★ **What comes out of a man, that is what defiles him**

✦ **Out of the heart of every man, woman & child...**

□ **Proceed evil thoughts**

□ **Fornications – sex outside of marriage**

□ **Thefts**

□ **Murders**

□ **Adulteries – sexual violation of your marriage vows**

□ **Deeds of coveting – greed**

□ **Deeds of wickedness**

□ **Deceit – intentional scheming and deception**

□ **Sensuality – seeking personal pleasure in an ungodly manner**

□ **Envy – our pain & discontent at another's success or excellence**

□ **Slander – malicious words spoken to hurt another**

□ **Pride**

□ **Foolishness**

★ **All of these things proceed from within and defile us**

□ **This is why James explains our condition as this...**

▣ **James 1:14-15 But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. <sup>15</sup> Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.**

▲ **This reminds us that each of us needs the redemption and forgiveness only Jesus can give**

✦ **This gives weight to Paul's words in Romans**

★ **Romans 3:10-12 as it is written, "THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE; 11 THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS, THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD; 12 ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS; THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD, THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE."**

✦ **Paul also gives us great hope**

★ **Romans 5:8-10 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. 9 Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. 10 For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.**

✦ **All this is a work accomplished by God in us through His Son Jesus Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit**

★ **We need to take care that we do not compromise this truth by adding on our traditions and rituals**

○ **Therefore: Jesus is calling us to honest evaluation of our practices**

◎ **Good that Is Evil – Blaise Pascal**

▲ **Men never do evil so completely and cheerfully as when they do it from religious conviction. – Blaise Pascal in *Lettres Provinciales*. *Christianity Today*, Vol. 30, no. 15.**

◎ **The Holiness of Jesus – Mark Galli**

▲ **The difference between Jesus' holiness ethic and that of the Pharisees is this: the Pharisees refuse to touch any unclean thing. Jesus aims to make the unclean holy. – Mark Galli, *Jesus Mean and Wild: The Unexpected Love of an Untamable God* (Baker, 2006), p. 44**

### ○ [Findings from Survey of Nearly 30,000 High School Students](#)

The Josephson Institute, a Los-Angeles-based ethics institute, conducted a character survey of nearly 30,000 students at 100 randomly selected high schools nationwide. Among the findings:

- Sixty-four percent of students said they had cheated on a test in the past year.
- Thirty percent had stolen from a store.
- Forty-two percent said they would lie to save money.
- Eighty-three percent said they had lied to their parents about something significant.

Despite their transgressions, 93 percent of the students surveyed said they were satisfied with their personal ethics and character, with 77 percent adding, "I am better than most people I know."

*Hugh Poland, Kingwood, Texas; source: David Crary, "Students lie, cheat, steal, but say they're good," www.chron.com (11-30-08)*

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The difference between Jesus' holiness ethic and that of the Pharisees is this: the Pharisees refuse to touch any unclean thing. Jesus aims to make the unclean holy.

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### ○ [Tim Keller: We Can't See Our Own Greed](#)

Some years ago I was doing a seven-part series of talks on the Seven Deadly Sins at a men's breakfast. My wife, Kathy, told me, "I'll bet that the week you deal with greed will be the lowest attendance." She was right. People packed it out for "Lust" and "Wrath" and even for "Pride." But nobody thinks they are greedy.

As a pastor I've had people come to me and confess that they struggle with almost every kind of sin. Almost. I cannot recall anyone ever coming to me and saying, "I spend too much money on myself. I think my greedy lust for money is harming my family, my soul, and people around me." Greed hides itself from the victim. The money god's modus operandi includes blindness to your own heart.

*Timothy Keller, Counterfeit Gods (Dutton, 2009), p. 52*

### ○ [Religion Doesn't Equal Faith](#)

**"One can love religion like anything else in life: sports, science, stamp collecting. One can love it for its own sake without relation to God or the world or life," wrote Orthodox theologian Alexander Schmemmann in his journals.**

**"Religion fascinates; it is entertaining. It has everything that is sought after by a certain type of person: aesthetics, mystery, the sacred, a feeling of one's importance and exclusive depth, etc. That kind of religion is not necessarily faith."**

***Mark Galli, "The Thirst of the 24/7 Fan," Christianity Today (3-28-05)***

### **○ Marx's Truth**

**When all the political foundations of religion are wiped out, when the organization and the institutional structure of the church are destroyed, then normally religious faith, the Christian faith, would have to disappear. But it is not out of the question that the Christian faith will survive anyhow. This would mean that there is a religious reality that does not depend solely on the sociological and the institutional; and under these conditions, we would have to heed this reality, which is not in the category of traditional religion.**

***Karl Marx, in a letter to his friend Max Ruge (quoted by Jacques Ellul in Perspectives on Our Age). Christianity Today, Vol. 34, no. 15.***

### **○ Bitter Envy**

**There is an ancient tale about two people, one of whom was envious of the other. The envious person was once given an opportunity to ask a favor from the king, with the proviso that his rival would get twice as much of whatever he requested. This put the envious person in a difficult position. After much consideration, he asked that one of his eyes be plucked out.**

***Adin Steinsaltz, Simple Words: Thinking About What Really Matters in Life (Simon & Schuster, 1999), p. 126***

### **○ Lying for Money**

**Years ago, the story goes, a San Diego bank hired a private investigator to track down a bank robber and retrieve stolen funds. The search led to Mexico. The investigator crossed the border and then, realizing he would need a Spanish interpreter, opened up the telephone book and hired the first interpreter listed in the Yellow Pages.**

**After many days, he finally captured the bandit and, through the interpreter, asked him, "Where did you hide the money?" In Spanish, the thief replied, "What money? I have no idea what you're talking about."**

**With that, the investigator drew his pistol, pointed it at the suspect, and said to the interpreter, "Tell him that if he doesn't tell me where the money is, I will shoot him where he stands."**

Upon receiving this message, the bank robber said to the interpreter, "Señor, I have hidden the money in a coffee can, under the fourth floorboard, in the second-floor men's room of the Palacio Hotel on Via Del Rio in La Paz."

"What did he say?" the investigator asked the interpreter.

"Señor," said the interpreter as he thought for a moment, "he says he is prepared to die like a man!"

*Ivan R. Misner, The World's Best Known Marketing Secrets (Bard Press, 1994), p.41*

### ○ **Man Donates Kidney but Ignores Family**

Rob Smitty donated one of his kidneys to a stranger. It was a noble and generous sacrifice. While browsing the Internet, Smitty developed an interest in people needing organs. He said his motivation involved doing something that would make his children proud.

But his 10-year-old daughter wasn't impressed by his sacrifice. Amber said her father never comes to see her and never calls, not even on her birthday. "I don't think he's much of a hero," she said.

Tennessee records show Smitty had not made child support payments to Amber's mother in nine months.

Just as Amber is not impressed with her father's sacrifice, God is not impressed with sacrifice that takes the place of obedience.

*Bill Poovey, "Child-Support Issue Clouds Man's Organ Donation," The Courier Journal (11-15-04)*

### ○ **Plane Engines Destroyed by Defective Paint**

At Seattle's Boeing Field, brand new commercial jets leave the factory and enter service. Boeing uses the airfield to do a final flight test and provide customers with a first flight upon delivery.

In 2004, engine problems developed in 10 new planes being tested. While inspecting the engine intakes with a flashlight, mechanics found glass beads coating the inside of the engines. The tiny beads—about the size of granulated sugar—were identified as the reflective ingredient in the paint used on runway lines. Officials walked out to the tarmac and found one section where the beads were separating from the paint. The reflective runway stripes had been recently repainted. A defect in the paint allowed the beads to be sucked into the jet engines as they powered-up for their initial takeoffs. Ten planes had ingested the beads, which necessitated all engines be scrapped.

That single paint job carried a \$50 million price tag.

*Dominic Gates, Seattle Times (12-18-04);*

### ○ **Psychiatrist "Discovers" the Reality of Evil**

Psychiatrist Scott Peck wrote of meeting with a depressed 15-year-old named Bobby, who was increasingly troubled after his 16-year-old brother killed himself with a .22 rifle.

Peck tried to probe Bobby's mind, but got nowhere. Searching for ways to establish a bond, he asked what Bobby had received from his parents for Christmas. "A gun," Bobby said. Peck was stunned. "What kind?"

"A .22."

More stunned. "How did it make you feel, getting the same kind of gun your brother killed himself with?"

"It wasn't the same kind of gun." Peck felt better.

"It was the same gun."

Bobby had been given, as a Christmas present, by his parents, the gun his brother used to kill himself.

When Peck met with the parents, what was most striking was their deliberate refusal to acknowledge any wrongdoing on their part. They would not tolerate any concern for their son, or any attempt to look at moral reality.

Two decades later and after his conversion to Christianity, Peck wrote about this encounter:

One thing has changed in twenty years. I now know Bobby's parents were evil. I did not know it then. I felt their evil but had no vocabulary for it. My supervisors were not able to help me name what I was facing. The name did not exist in our professional vocabulary. As scientists rather than priests, we were not supposed to think in such terms.

Interestingly enough, although Peck often worked with convicted prisoners, he rarely found evil there. He finally decided ... "The central defect of evil is not the sin but the refusal to acknowledge it." This definition is reflective of Jesus' far greater severity in dealing with religious leaders than with prostitutes and tax collectors.

*John Ortberg, "[Fighting the Good Fight](#)," Leadership Journal (Spring 2012)*

### ○ [Tim Keller on the Rats in the Cellar](#)

Pastor Timothy Keller paraphrases an analogy originally used by C.S. Lewis (in his book *Mere Christianity*) to demonstrate the nature of sin in our hearts.

Now if you want to know if there are rats in your basement, you don't walk to your basement door, clear your throat, and say, "I think I'll go down and see if there are rats in my basement," then jiggle the knob, open the door and in a very leisurely way turn on the light, clear your throat, and walk down the steps loudly and slowly. When you get to the bottom you look around and say, "Well, what do you know: I have no rats in my basement."

If you want to know if you have rats in your basement, you sneak up to the door, silently open the door, flick on the switch, jump to the bottom of the steps, and look around and they'll all be scurrying away. And then you'll know if you have rats.

Based on this analogy, Lewis wrote:

The excuse [for most of my sinful moments] that immediately springs to my mind is that the provocation was so sudden and unexpected; I was caught off my guard [like a rat who didn't get enough warning] ... Now that may be an extenuating circumstance as regards those particular acts: they would obviously be worse if they had been deliberate and premeditated. On the other hand, surely what a man does when he is taken off his guard is the best evidence for what sort of a man he is? Surely what pops out before the man has time to put on a disguise is the truth?

*Timothy Keller, Sermon, "The Two Great Tests" (1-23-2005);*

### ○ **Sin In the Heart of Every Man**

Michael Shermer, publisher of *Skeptic* magazine and author of *The Science of Good and Evil*, writes:

I once had the opportunity to ask Thomas Keneally, author of *Schindler's List*, what he thought was the difference between Oskar Schindler, rescuer of Jews and hero of his story, and Amon Goeth, the Nazi commandant of the Plaszow concentration camp. His answer was revealing. Not much, he said. Had there been no war, Mr. Schindler and Mr. Goeth might have been drinking buddies and business partners, morally obtuse, perhaps, but relatively harmless. What a difference a war makes, especially to the moral choices that lead to good and evil.

Shermer goes on to quote Russian writer Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn: "If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?"

*Jerry De Luca, Montreal West, Quebec, Canada; source: Michael Shermer, "Something Evil Comes This Way," www.skeptic.com (3-18-04)*