

# Clean Hands or Clean Hearts?

Mark 7:1-23

- 1 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'; ; Deuteronomy 5:16 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."
- 14 When He had called all the multitude to Himself, He said to them, "Hear Me, everyone, and understand:
- 15 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.
- 16 If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear!"
- 17 When He had entered a house away from the crowd, His disciples asked Him concerning the parable.
- 18 So He said to them, "Are you thus without understanding also? Do you not perceive that whatever enters a man from outside cannot defile him,
- 19 because it does not enter his heart but his stomach, and is eliminated, thus purifying all foods?"
- 20 And He said, "What comes out of a man, that defiles a man.
- 21 For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders,
- 22 thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness.
- 23 All these evil things come from within and defile a man."

A police officer pulled a driver aside and asked for his license and registration. "What's wrong, officer," the driver asked. "I didn't go through any red lights, and I certainly wasn't speeding."

"No, you weren't," said the officer, "but I saw you waving your fist as you swerved around the lady driving in the left lane, and I further observed your flushed and angry face as you shouted at the driver of the Hummer who cut you off, and how you pounded your steering wheel when the traffic came to a stop near the bridge."

"Is that a crime, officer?"

"No, but when I saw the 'Jesus loves you and so do I' bumper sticker on the car, I figured this car had to be stolen."

In Mark 7:7 Jesus calls a delegation of Pharisees and scribes, hypocrites. The word for 'hypocrite', of course, is derived from a Greek word that described an actor wearing a mask while he was on the stage. A hypocrite is someone who wears a mask, pretending to be something on the outside that he is not on the inside.

Hypocrites are nothing new! In this passage, Jesus has an encounter with a whole group of hypocrites. They have come from Jerusalem. They came to watch Him in order to find fault with Him and His ministry. When they arrive and begin to watch Jesus, it does not take them long to find something to complain about.

These men see the disciples of Jesus eating food without washing their hands and they are offended. They attack Jesus over this issue, but He turns the tables on them. They think the issue is one of clean hands, but Jesus shows them that the issue is really about clean hearts.

The sad reality is that even in our churches today we still have those people who are more concerned about clean hands than they are about clean hearts. Jesus is going to teach us that the inside of a person should match the outside of that person. He is going to teach us that what we are in our heart is what we really are! He is going to teach us that hypocrisy and legalism have no place in our lives. He is going to teach us that true defilement comes from the inside, not from the outside!

Let's watch Jesus as He reveals these religious hypocrites for what they are. As we do, let Him speak to your heart today.

## **I. THE PROBLEM CONFRONTED (v. 1-5)**

As these Pharisees and scribes watched Jesus and His men, they noticed that His disciples were eating without washing their hands. When they saw this, "**they found fault.**"

The word "fault" means "to place blame". They then turned their attention to Jesus, because He was the leader of these disciples. He was their Rabbi, and as such, He was responsible for their behavior.

Now, the disciples were not eating with dirty hands. The problem is brought to light as Mark continues His narrative. According to verses 3-4, the Pharisees and all religious Jews would not eat unless they had washed their hands a certain way. This was especially true when they returned from the marketplace, as they

might have brushed shoulders with a Gentile and been defiled. For these Jews, and all religious people, everything revolves around rules and rituals.

This washing had nothing to do with cleaning the hands. It was a ceremonial cleansing. John MacArthur describes it this way. "This washing had nothing to do with cleaning dirty hands but with a ceremonial rinsing. The ceremony involved someone pouring water out of a jar onto another's hands, whose fingers must be pointing up. As long as the water dripped off at the wrist, the person could proceed to the next step. He then had water poured over both hands with the fingers pointing down. Then each hand was to be rubbed with the fist of the other hand."

It is said that one Jewish rabbi was arrested by the Romans and nearly died in prison because he used up his daily ration of water trying to wash his hands after the prescribed manner. According to verse 4, they not only had rules about their hands, they also had elaborate rules about washing pots, pans, plates, etc. In all, the Jewish Mishnah, a compilation of Jewish oral laws made around 200 AD has over 35 pages of instructions devoted to washing alone.

The problem with their rules is that they were not from God, they were "the traditions of the elders". The "traditions of the elders" came into being with good intentions. The Mishnah says that "tradition is a fence around the Law".

In an effort to protect the Law from people, the ancient Jews added to that Law. They added restrictions that went beyond the letter of the Law. The Jewish leaders believed that their traditions helped people keep the Law better and they believed their traditions protected the Law from the people.

The problem with their rules is they were not from God, but from man. Their rules were not God's rules; they were rules made by men seeking to control other men.

Note: We still have the Pharisees with us today. There are plenty of people who would try to force you to live by their rules. They want to tell you how you can dress; where you can go; what you can do . . . Your hair is too long. Your hair is too short. You can't eat there. You must not dance or watch that movie or listen to that music, etc. Silly rules by silly Pharisees is all they are!

Are you like the Pharisees? In Jeff Foxworthy style: If your religion is a religion of rules and laws, not one of relationships, You might be a Pharisee. If it is more important for you to be right than to have right relationships, You might be a Pharisee. If you think anyone who disagrees with your religious views cannot possibly be a Christian, You might be a Pharisee. If you are more concerned about what to wear to church on Sunday, than about preparing your heart for worship, You might be a Pharisee.

The problem with man's rules is just that. They are man's rules and not the Lord's. When God's Word says something is wrong, then it is wrong without question.

What is the solution to this problem of Phariseeism? ELEVATE GOD'S WORD ABOVE MAN'S RULES.

## **II. THE PROBLEM CONDEMNED (v. 6-14)**

So, these men are upset with Jesus because His disciples do not perform the ritual washings of the Jews. In these verses, Jesus reveals the hypocrisy of their hearts.

In verses 6-9 Jesus condemns their legalism. He accuses these men of being hypocrites. He quotes Isaiah 29:13 and accuses them of elevating their traditions to the point that they carry more weight than the Word of God. History reveals that the Jewish religious leaders came to honor their traditions far above the Word of God. According to Warren Weirsbe, "Rabbi Eleazer said, 'He who expounds the Scriptures in opposition to the tradition has no share in the world to come.' The Mishna records, 'It is a greater offense to teach anything contrary to the voice of the Rabbis than to contradict Scripture itself.'"

In verse 8, He even tells them that they have "laid aside the commandments of God" in favor of their manmade rules and traditions. In verse 9, He tells them they have actually "rejected" the commandments of God so that they can keep their traditions! Jesus condemns their blatant hypocrisy!

These men are rank legalists. They teach the people that the way to be right with God is to keep all the rules. If you can do everything right, God will be pleased with your life and He will accept you. Nothing could be farther from the truth!

Not only does Jesus condemn their legalism, He also exposes the liberties they take with the Law. In verse 10-13, Jesus blows the lid off one of their traditions that allows them to side step a commandment.

Jesus talks about the practice of "Corban". That word means "a gift offered to God". The commandments of God are very clear. God said this in the fifth commandment, **"Honor your father and your mother: that your days may be long upon the land which the LORD your God gives you,"** Ex. 20:12. And, Ex. 21:17 says, **"And he that curses his father, or his mother, shall surely be put to death."**

Part of this idea of honoring one's parents included the necessity of providing for their needs as long as they lived. Most of us still believe in that today. Well, the Jews found a way around it. If they said that their money or possessions was "Corban", "a gift offered to God". They could only use that money or goods in sacred matters. Thus, they were off the hook regarding the care of their parents. They would just tell Mom and Dad that their stuff was dedicated to the Lord and they wouldn't be getting anything. Talk about cold hearts! Jesus tells them that they have made the Laws of God ineffective by their traditions, v. 13.

Another problem with the "rule makers" is that they are the most mean-spirited people in the world! They try to keep all the rules, but they condemn those who don't keep their rules. They are busy crossing their T's and dotting their I's, but they are not too busy to pass judgment on those who don't keep the same rules.

There had never arisen a prophet like Jesus. He spoke with divine authority. He acted with sovereign power. He literally fulfilled the Scriptures. Love, wisdom and power filled everything He did. He performed many amazing and startling miracles. Yet, the legalistic Pharisees could not believe that He was from God because He allowed His men to eat without washing their hands. How utterly hypocritical and spiritually blind they were! Sadly, that same attitude is still with us today!

How do we deal with this problem when it comes up in our church? **ELIMINATE TRADITIONS THAT CONTRADICT GOD'S WORD.**

Jesus is about to teach us that it does not matter what you do on the outside; true spirituality is what you are on the inside!

### III. THE PROBLEM CLARIFIED v. 14-23

In these verses Jesus sheds some much needed light on this subject. First, Jesus tells the crowds, v. 14-16, that it is not what comes into the body, like eating with unwashed hands, that causes spiritual defilement; it is those things that arise from within the heart of a person that defile him or her.

The disciples are confused by this, v. 17, and they ask Jesus about what He means. He gives them a quick lesson in anatomy, v. 18-19 and reminds them that what goes into the body passes through the body. It goes in one end and comes out the other, but it does not affect the heart, or the inner man. It may cause sickness of the body, but it cannot cause sickness in the soul. Jesus is telling us that external things cannot cause spiritual defilement!

In verse 20, Jesus reveals that spiritual defilement is always the result of a defiled heart. Every sin we commit, whether it is a sin of the body or of the mind, has its birth in our heart. We do the things we do because of defilement within.

Keeping external rules will not change the heart. The heart can only be changed, and spiritual defilement cleansed away, by the new birth, John 3:3, 7. Jesus is able to take a defiled sinner and wash them in His blood. He is able to make them a “new creature”, 2 Cor. 5:17.

In verses 21-23, Jesus gives us a partial list of the attitudes and actions that cause spiritual defilement. These are the things that make us unclean in the sight of God, not breaking the foolish rules made up by foolish men. As I read the list, consider what condition your heart is in today.

- Evil Thoughts – This is the root of all that follows. When an evil heart conjures up evil intentions, the evil person will carry them out.
- Adulteries – Illicit sexual activity by married persons.
- Fornications – This word translates the Greek word “porneia” and it refers to any illicit sexual activity. The origin of sexual sin is not in the body, it is the result of a defiled heart!
- Murders – The taking of another’s life. By the way, you are guilty of murder if you have hatred in your heart toward another person, 1 John 3:15.
- Thefts – Taking that which belongs to another for your own use. This covers a lot of territory, even the tithe, Mal. 3:8-9.
- Covetousness – An insatiable craving for that which belongs to another.
- Wickedness – This word means “malice” and it refers to all the ways that evil thought manifest themselves in a person’s life. It is deliberate acts of meanness!
- Deceit – This word refers to cunning maneuvers designed to ensnare someone for one’s personal advantage. It is the idea of someone trying to work undercover to bring someone else down. Sneaky, manipulative people fall into this category.
- Lasciviousness – This word refers to unrestrained, shameless behavior. It is an attitude that says, “I will do as I please and I do not care what anyone thinks about it!”
- An Evil Eye – This is a Hebrew expression that speaks of envy and jealousy. It looks at the blessings of another and desires them for itself. It is envious when others prosper.

- Blasphemy – injurious or defaming speech directed at either God or man. Gossip and cursing fall into this category.
- Pride – The boastful exalting of oneself. It's the attitude that says, "What about me? My rights? My things? It's all about me." This is an overbearing attitude that is the opposite of humility.
- Foolishness – This word refers to those who are morally and spiritually desensitized. They cannot see their sins; neither can they sense the Lord working in and around them. With this kind of person, there is no spiritual illumination. There is no spiritual discernment. They do not know God and there is no desire to know Him.

Jesus says even if the outside is right, these things will defile you when they reside in your heart. Here's the problem, slapping a religious patch on a defiled heart will not make things right. The religious Jews did everything by the book, but they were still responsible for sending Jesus to the cross. Outwardly, they were clean, inwardly, they were defiled.

Alan Carr tells about a man he used to work with who drove an old, beat up Firebird. That car smoked like a chimney. So did he. He was always trying everything to stop smoking. He even tried those patches when they first came out. One day, after work, they were in the parking lot and he had one of those nicotine patches on his car. He said, "Well, they are supposed to stop smoking, aren't they?"

His external efforts did nothing to fix the heart of the problem. It would have taken a new engine to solve that car's problem.

The same is true with people. A religious patch will not fix the problem of the heart. A new heart is what is needed, Eze. 36:26. We must **EMPHASIZE INTERNAL PURITY OVER EXTERNAL OBSERVANCE.**

Jesus was not fooled by human nature. He knew that men were sinners and that they were capable of any sin imaginable. Men are still sinners, Rom. 3:10-23; 1:29-32. Every person in this room is capable of every sin in the list we just covered, and more. In fact, some here today are guilty of some of these things and you know it. There are defiled hearts in this room and they need to be cleansed.

If that is to happen, there must be acceptance of the truth of your condition and there must be repentance of your sins. If these things are in your heart today, you are spiritually defiled dirty and in deep trouble today.

Once a grouchy old Sunday School teacher was teaching a boy's class. He wanted to help them understand what a Christian was, so he asked them a question. He asked, "*Why do people call me a Christian?*" There was a moment of silence and then one of the boys said, "Maybe it's because they don't know you."

Just like that little boy, Jesus always told it just like it was. He told the Pharisees and the scribes exactly what they were. He told His disciples exactly what resided within the hearts of men. Right in the middle of our text is verse 16. In that verse Jesus said this, "If any man have ears to hear, let him hear." What has the Lord spoken to your heart today?

The whole point of this passage is this: The problem with mankind is a problem of the heart, Jer. 17:9. That is where the Lord looks upon us, 1 Sam. 16:7. That is

where sin originates, Matt. 12:34-35. That is the part of man that needs to be changed, Eze. 36:26!

Are you a hypocrite? Do you hide behind a mask, pretending to be one thing when, in reality, you are another? You're not hiding it all that well. Your secret is not safe!

Are you a legalist? Do you expect everyone to live just like you do? Do you stand in judgment of them when they don't?

Do you have a defiled heart? What if God were to drag the contents of your heart out into the open today? Would you ever recover from the shame and the embarrassment of being exposed for what you really are?

Have you truly been born again? Has Jesus saved your soul and changed your life? Or, have you just been pretending to be a believer?

"If any man have ears to hear, let him hear." What is the Lord saying to you today? This altar is open, if He has spoken to you. If He has, then you need to come and get it right today. This might be your last warning before the storm of God's judgment breaks on the bow of your life!

Look into your heart right now. What do you find there? Anger? Lust? Divisiveness? Unforgiveness? Pride? Hatred? Deviousness? Or, do you find, love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance? What dwells in your heart is what you really are! Let's obey His voice right now.