

律法主义的丑恶嘴脸——马可福音 7:1-13

The Ugly Truth of Legalism— Mark 7:1-13

Introduction, outline

- Scripture reading: Mark 7:1-23 ; Titus1:15-2:13.
- Teaching text: Mark 7:1-13
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 [a]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.”
- The superficial issue in this passage is purity vs defilement, but in fact the more essential issue is legalism. In short, legalism is to elevate man-made external rules to the level of divine law, and to try to win favor with God by obeying these external rules.
- More important than its outward appearance is the inner mentality of legalism - self-boasting and judgmentalism. Self-boasting and judgmentalism are like twins, one wants to exalt oneself and the other wants to put others down. They were the twin children of pride. In religious cultures, the most common form of self-boasting and judgmentalism is legalism.
- Christian culture is no exception! For example: Christians cannot drink alcohol, and pastors must absolutely abstain from anything containing alcohol. Christians cannot listen to pop songs, and they cannot use drums for worship music. Christians cannot celebrate the Spring Festival, Mid-Autumn Festival, and various festivals that are not directly related to the Bible. True Christians don't talk about politics, don't go to Disneyland, don't get tattoos, don't invest in the market, don't have big houses, sisters can't work outside, and children can't go to public schools. They must read the Bible two hours a day, which must be in the morning, prayer meetings must be attended, Scripture memorization must be to the exact word, and children must be disciplined immediately when they shake their heads.
- Things like this can easily be used for boasting and judging! This is not to say that there are no biblical principles to consider in these matters, but when these external rules rise to the status of inviolability and become legal standards, they will jump from behind Christ to before Christ,

separating you from Christ! The result of loving these outward rules too much is that you'll drift away from your relationship with God!

- Mark 7:1-23 shows us that true faith is completely internal! The relationship between man and God is determined by the inner essence, not by external manifestations.
- Outline:
 - Title: The Ugly Truth of Legalism
 - 1.Its Focus—External Things (vv. 1-5)
 - 2.Its Worship—Rejected by God (vv. 6-8)
 - 3.Its Reality—Forsaking God's Word (vv. 9-13)

Its Focus—External Things (vv. 1-5)

- "The Pharisees and some of the scribes ... from Jerusalem": The Pharisees were the elites of Judaism; the scribes were the Pharisee theologians, the elites of elites; and the scribes from Jerusalem were from their best school, the elites of elites among all elites.
- "had seen": Not seeing by chance, but deliberately watching, always monitoring, and always ready to catch Jesus in some wrong act.
- "impure hands, that is, unwashed": not dirty hands, but "impure hands", or, literally, common hands, hands that are not holy enough. This is not about basic personal hygiene, but about the religious cleansing rituals of the Pharisees.
"the traditions of the elders": These are what they call the "oral laws", of which the most important document we have is the Talmud.

【Challenge】 In church life, can you distinguish which are human traditions and which are biblical principles that are absolutely inviolable? How to distinguish? Is there any other way to make such distinctions except to become very familiar with the Bible ourselves by reading it over and over?

- "carefully wash their hands": Literally "wash their hands with the fist", which may be a metaphor for the effort of being careful and serious, or they may actually require people to wash hands with fists, such as making a fist to scrub up each finger vigorously. The Talmud has stipulations of numerous details of hand washing, such as what vessels should be used to hold water, how much water should be used, what must not fall into the water, etc.
【Example】 Please listen to the conversation between two Jewish rabbis in a Roman prison - "Please give me water so that I can wash my hands." "This water is not enough for you to drink, do you still use it to wash your hands?" "What else can I do? Our laws will sentence me to death. I would rather die of thirst than violate the rules of my colleagues."
- "when they come from the market place, they do not eat unless they cleanse themselves": The Greek for "cleanse" is the same word for baptism which requires full immersion of the whole body, indicating removal of uncleanness from the whole body. There are 10 chapters in the Talmud about such ritual baths, all of which are the whimsical inventions of scribes.

- "There are many other things": such as "the washing of cups and pitchers and copper pots", and there are 30 chapters of such regulations! Their focus is not at all how to wash the dishes clean, but how to ensure that it does not "defile" people.

Titus 1:15-16 “ 15 To the pure, all things are pure; but to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their mind and their conscience are defiled. 16 They profess to know God, but by their deeds they deny Him, being detestable and disobedient and worthless for any good deed.”

【Warning】 When anyone has such a fanatical enthusiasm for external appearances, you know he has gone far away from the true worship that is acceptable to God. What God requires is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and strength; what they love with all their strength is the outward rules they invented. The object of worship is completely wrong. This is pure idolatry.

【Example】 Check out some of the sayings in the Talmud - "The words of the scribes are more lovely than the words of the [biblical] Law... It is a greater crime to transgress the words of the school of Rabbi Hillel than the words of Scripture... My son, attend to the words of the scribes more than the words of the law." "Anybody permanently in the Land of Israel who eats his food in purity, speaks in the holy language (Hebrew), and recites the Shema [Deut 6:4] mornings and evenings is assured to participate in the life of the World to Come." Such are the things written on their "traditions of the elders"!

Its Worship—Rejected by God (vv. 6-8)

- "as it is written": Quoted from Isaiah 29:13.
- "Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you": The principle of this text spans the ages. Hypocrisy is the basic characteristic of sinners in all times and in every place!
- "hypocrites": literally "hiding under a mask." Right before Cain killed Abel, he was making a sacrifice to God! False worship!
- "But in vain do they worship Me": It is utterly in vain and God does not accept it. By the way, is there any point in worship if God doesn't accept it? If God doesn't accept my worship, but I do it enthusiastically and feel very satisfied myself, is this kind of worship meaningful, do you think? Many people think worship is good as long as you enjoy it, and guess what? The Pharisees are those who "enjoy" their worship the most!
- "Teaching as doctrines the precepts of men": This is the very reason why God rejects their worship!
- "Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men": Would the Pharisees accept this charge? Absolutely not! They will say these traditions are what we do to protect God's law and to prevent people from violating God's law. But when they pile up these traditional teachings layer upon layer into a huge mountain of traditions, God's Word is then completely buried underneath.

Its Reality—Forsaking God's Word (vv. 9-13)

- "You are experts": "experts" literally means "beautifully". Jesus literally says: See what a beautiful job you have done! You have successfully discarded God's commandments in order to keep your traditions. This is extremely sharp sarcasm!

【Supplement】 Here's their step-by-step process of forsaking God's law. Step 1: First, they say, we love God's law so much that we must do our best to protect them from being violated. Step 2: So we must explain in exact specific detail what the law requires us to do and not to do. Step 3: Let's be extra careful to stay far away from the edge of foul play, so we add a lot of rules and call them the traditions of the elders. These traditions are the circle-upon-circle fences around the law to prevent people from accidentally breaking the law. **The result is: People are completely shut outside and cannot even see what's inside! All they see are fences! Inside the fences is actually the only fountain of living water that can give people life; but they say, don't go in, there's a big pit inside, and you'll be shattered to pieces if you fall in!** How about that? What a "beautiful job"!

- "Honor your father and your mother": The fifth of the Ten Commandments. Key point: This is not some man-made moral code, not someone's tradition, not the Talmud, it's the Word of God! Obviously, honoring parents must be out of the heart, and from that heart must also flow concrete expressions. That's why cursing parents was a capital offense in the Old Testament (Exodus 21:17), for it expresses a heart that completely dishonors the parents.
- "Corban": Just a simple word, and the whole law of honoring parents is easily abandoned. This word is a transliteration from Hebrew, a term for swearing. If something is sworn to be dedicated to God, others cannot touch it.

【Ponder】 Why did Mark retain the Hebrew word instead of directly translating it? Answer: Because this is their religious jargon! It's a slogan! Why do they use jargon? Obviously to add to the appearance of their piety! The more pious they appear, the more they can cover up the despicable nature of the reality! An outsider can't even understand their jargon. Only the experts can see how "pious" they are!

【Self-examination】 If you find yourself using religious terms a lot, you must carefully examine how much of that is for appropriate situations and motives, and how much of that is more like the "Corban" here, where you just use it to put on a godly appearance in order to cover up the inner truth so you can "legitimately" avoid God's Word.

Summarizing application:

The beginning of corruption for the Jews was doubting the sufficiency of God's Word! They saw the Bible as insufficient to guide them to fully know God and please God in their lives. So what did they do? The first step was to add rules outside the Bible; the second step was to elevate these rules to an equal status as the Bible; and the third step was to pile up these rules higher and higher, so as to completely replace the Bible. Beware of making the same mistake! Once you begin to doubt the sufficiency of the Bible and start adding man-made rules as laws to manage your life, it is very easy to go down the road to corruption! We must admit that we have all been guilty of legalism. What should we do? What's the solution? It's the same with the solution to all other sins, that is, repentance.