

## Worthless Traditional Religion

Mark 7:1-23

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### Introduction

There is nothing more offensive to God than vain worship because it is lifeless and useless. It is a problem because people were worshipping God, but in the wrong way. God takes worship seriously because God desires to be worshiped from the heart.

**John 4:23** *Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks.*

This is revealed in the Old Testament:

**Deuteronomy 6:5** *Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.*

God hated the superficial, lifeless traditional worship when people sinned but came to God in worship. He hated it.

**Isaiah 1:11-18** *The multitude of your sacrifices—what are they to Me?" says the LORD. "I have more than enough of burnt offerings, of rams and the fat of fattened animals; I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats. <sup>12</sup>When you come to appear before Me, who has asked this of you, this trampling of My courts? <sup>13</sup>Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to Me. New Moons, Sabbaths and convocations—I cannot bear your evil assemblies. <sup>14</sup>Your New Moon festivals and your appointed feasts My soul hates. They have become a burden to Me; I am weary of bearing them. <sup>15</sup>When you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide My eyes from you; even if you offer many prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are full of blood; <sup>16</sup>wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of My sight! Stop doing wrong, <sup>17</sup>learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow. <sup>18</sup>Come now, let us reason together," says the LORD. "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.*

Why did God hate sacrifices? Because they were doing evil, unrepentant sins and God could not accept their worship. Empty worship ensnares people into the destructive false religion. People think that they are right with God, when in reality, they are enemies with Him because they are disobeying and living in rebellion.

Judaism in Jesus' time had become so traditional that it did not look like the Old Testament Judaism. They have taken the Law and built fences around it so people would not approach that boundary and sin. However, they imposed many rules and traditions that have no meaning. Jesus had no regard for traditions and He broke them all. Understand this...He never broke the Laws of God, but He broke the traditions of men because they had no place in the worship of God. Judaism had elevated traditions above the Words of God. In fact, when Jesus talks about how uncleanness comes from the heart and not from the outside, the disciples said that the Pharisees were offended (**Matthew 15:12**). They understood full well what Jesus was talking about.

Jesus points out that this is a heart issue...not something external.

**Mark 7:1-23** *The Pharisees and some of the teachers of the law who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus and <sup>2</sup>saw some of His disciples eating food with hands that were "unclean,"*

that is, unwashed. <sup>3</sup>(The Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they give their hands a ceremonial washing, holding to the tradition of the elders. <sup>4</sup>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.) <sup>5</sup>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?" <sup>6</sup>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. <sup>7</sup>They worship Me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.' <sup>8</sup>You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men." <sup>9</sup>And He said to them: "You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions! <sup>10</sup>For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother,' and, 'Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.' <sup>11</sup>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), <sup>12</sup>then you no longer let him do anything for his father or mother. <sup>13</sup>Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that."

<sup>14</sup>Again Jesus called the crowd to Him and said, "Listen to Me, everyone, and understand this.

<sup>15</sup>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.' " <sup>17</sup>After He had left the crowd and entered the house, His disciples asked Him about this parable. <sup>18</sup>"Are you so dull?" He asked. "Don't you see that nothing that enters a man from the outside can make him 'unclean'? <sup>19</sup>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.") <sup>20</sup>He went on: "What comes out of a man is what makes him 'unclean.' <sup>21</sup>For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, <sup>22</sup>greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. <sup>23</sup>All these evils come from inside and make a man 'unclean.' "

## I. The Tradition (1-5)

- Pharisees
  - From Jerusalem
  - Sent to discredit Jesus—common occurrence
- Hand washing
  - Does not mean they were unsanitary
  - Mark says that they had a specific way of washing things
  - Ceremonial washing—tradition of elders
    - What does this look like? Unknown
    - This was not in Scripture
    - In Mishnah (in Talmud)—30 chapters for ritual cleansing
    - Rabbi Tahaneth--Whoever has his abode in the land of Israel and eats his food with washed hands may rest assured that he shall receive eternal life.

## II. Tradition Over the Word of God (6-13)

- Corban
  - Mosaic law very clear—honor parents, love parents respect parents, take care of parents-failure to do so = death penalty
  - Corban means an offering to God
  - It was a pledge, not a given gift yet
  - Basically, the rabbis were telling people that if you pledge your monies to God, then you do not have to help your parents in need
  - This is the hypocrisy of the religion—trying to find loopholes in God's law and exploit it
- Tradition nullifies the word of God

- This is the indictment against the traditional religion—you ignore God’s word for your convenience
- It can happen to those in church—especially in church
- Hypocrites cannot escape judgment if they hold on to their traditions; they are doomed to hell
- The only recourse is repentance they need to forsake the religion and embrace Jesus

**Transition:** It is the human heart that deceives us into thinking we are right with God. It is the heart that evil comes from—not from outside sources.

### III. Uncleaness of the Human Heart (14-23)

- Nothing outside can make one unclean
  - Jews of Jesus’ day believed that defilement was something outside them
  - Inside they were good and godly
  - Jesus calls the crowd (after talking to Pharisees—and they are listening in the crowd)
  - The point is that spiritual pollution does not come from the outside, but inside
  - Why did God institute rituals of cleaning, feasts, etc?
    - Those were simply pictures of spiritual realities

**Hebrews 9:9-10** *It was symbolic for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience— <sup>10</sup>concerned only with foods and drinks, various washings, and fleshly ordinances imposed until the time of reformation.*

- The idea was that they were the basics...we no longer need them now

**Colossians 2:20-21** *Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules: <sup>21</sup>"Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!"?*

- However, the Jews held on to those traditions—as a result:

**Matthew 23:27** *Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean.*

- Everything inside makes one unclean

**Jeremiah 17:9** *The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?*

**James 1:14-16** *but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. <sup>15</sup>Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death. <sup>16</sup>Don't be deceived, my dear brothers.*

- Evil thoughts—process of what goes in the mind is bad—lust conceived here
- Sexual immorality—sex reigns as king of corruption—look at our society now
- Theft
- Murder
- Adultery
- Greed

- Malice—intending to hurt someone—words and/or deeds
- Deceit—lying, not telling the truth
- Lewdness—dirty mind in speech and in actions
- Envy—evil eye—to look upon someone with hate
- Slander—abusive speech to others
- Arrogance
- Folly—senseless, unthinking—having no sense of morality and just do bad things

**Note:** Hands were washed but their hearts were filthy. No ritual, outward cleansing can remove that defilement of the human heart.

## Conclusion

What is to be done? The heart must be new—must be remade. This is God’s promise of salvation—to give us a new heart!

**Ezekiel 36:25-27** *I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. <sup>26</sup>I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. <sup>27</sup>And I will put My Spirit in you and move you to follow My decrees and be careful to keep My laws.*

It is the transformation of the new heart—it has to be remade inside. Even Jesus told the Pharisees what to do.

**Matthew 23:25-26** *Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. <sup>26</sup>Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean.*

The Holy Spirit gives us the new heart.

**Titus 3:5** *He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of His mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit,*

We are not to fear the pollution on the outside, but we need to fear the pollution that is inside of us. And the only way we can remove the pollution inside us is to place our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit will wash the inside.