

Introduction

1. Today we're going to talk about man-made religious doctrines:
2. Extreme Example:
 - Racing Amish buggy and trying to get a picture of Jonas
 - Old Order German Baptist at Times Union—debates over derby hats and women water skiing, no guitar or solo-singing, warnings over car with chrome
 - Sermon against women in pants
 - Craig's challenge regarding his NIV Study Bible ("That ain't no Bi-bul son!") because it wasn't a King James 1611 version
3. We look at these and see them as extreme—forms of legalism—and they generally are, but none of us are truly free of our own man-made religious practices and traditions:
 - We meet every Sunday for church and do it in a certain way
 - How many of you pray before meals, and feel guilty if you don't?
 - Some won't shop or eat out on Sunday's, drink alcohol, go to movie theaters, or shop at Home Depot because they support the gay community
4. It's not always easy to tell when man-made rules and/or practices cross the line into legalism, or become dangerous rather than helpful in living out our Christian faith
5. However, Jesus has some answers for us

A. The religious rulers accuse Jesus of teaching others to disregard their religious traditions (7:1-5)

1. Mark indicates that a group of Pharisees and Scribes gathered around Jesus (READ 7:1):
 - a. The phrase "**they had come from Jerusalem**" indicates that they were likely a delegation sent by religious leaders in the capital to investigate Jesus
 - b. This delegation was made up of two prominent groups:
 - 1) Scribes:
 - a) Think of these as the scholars—like modern day seminary professors—whose job it was to interpret and teach the Word of God (Ezra was a scribe and is described as "**a teacher well versed in the Law of Moses**" in Ezra 7:6)
 - b) However, in their zeal and commitment to obeying the letter of the Law, by the time of Jesus they had added all kinds of man-made requirements and traditions to the Law which were supposed to prevent the people from breaking the Law
 - c) However, by the time of Jesus, these traditions had become more important than the Word of God
 - d) This is likely one reason God warned against adding anything to His Word when He gave the Law to Moses (Deuteronomy 4:2): "**You shall not add to the word which I am commanding you, nor take away from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you.**"
 - 2) Pharisees:
 - a) Think of these as the pastors or shepherds of Israel—they ran the local synagogues where the Jews regularly met

- b) They were extremely influential and well respected by the people because of their commitment to personal piety (e.g. devotion to religious living)
 - c) However, like the scribes, they focused more on the man-made religious rites and traditions than on the Word of God itself
 - d) As such, they believed that anyone who didn't observe these traditions were in violation of the Law
 - e) And, that's what leads to this confrontation
- 2. The Pharisees and Scribes observe the disciples violating one of their traditions (READ 7:2-4):
 - a. Some of Jesus's disciples were eating bread without washing their hands (2):
 - 1) I know some of you parents right now are freaking out because you've beaten it into your kids' heads since they were born to wash their hands before eating
 - 2) However, the Pharisees weren't worried about germs or the disciples getting sick
 - 3) Rather, the Pharisees believed that eating without washing one's hands defiled them—in other words, it made them morally impure ("**impure hands**" is used twice)
 - b. The Pharisees objected because this violated their tradition:
 - 1) It wasn't an OT Law because there is only one OT law requiring hand washing and it only applies to priests when they prepare to enter the Temple and offer sacrifices (Exodus 30:18-21)
 - 2) Mark, and the Pharisees themselves, refer to the practice as "**the traditions of the elders**" (3, 5)
 - a) Mark even provides a hint here of the actual method for washing the hands that the Pharisees and Scribes expected (3): "**unless they carefully wash their hands**":
 - b) This phrase is literally, "**was their hands with their fists**"
 - c) One scholar describes this as the elaborate practice of first scooping up water with cupped hands, raising them with the fingers pointed up and spread apart just enough to let the water run down to the wrists, then scooping up water and pointed the fingers down, and then finally having someone else pour water over the hands while the person scrubs each hand with a closed fist
 - 3) To emphasize his point that the Pharisees were a group committed to such religious traditions, Mark identifies two other examples (4): "**and when they come from the market place, they do not eat unless they cleanse themselves (lit. sprinkle); 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.**")
- 3. The Pharisees and Scribes accuse Jesus over the disciples' disregard for their traditions (READ 7:5):
 - a. This was not an innocent question; it was an accusation against Jesus
 - b. Remember, this was an official delegation sent from Jerusalem to investigate Jesus
 - c. He was the rabbi and they were his students; therefore, He was responsible for their actions

B. Jesus rebukes the religious rulers for clinging to their traditions and neglecting the Word of God (9-13)

1. He begins by calling them out for their personal hypocrisy (6-8):

- a. They honor God with their lips, but not their heart (READ 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.’”**
 - b. Their worship of God was empty because they taught their own traditions as if they were God’s Word (READ 7): **““BUT IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE PRECEPTS OF MEN.””**
 - c. In spite of their claims of being committed to God’s Law, they actually neglected it (READ 8): **“Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men.”**
2. As if their own hypocrisy wasn’t bad enough, Jesus accuses them of cancelling out God’s Word (READ 9-13):
 - a. He calls them **“experts”** for their skill in setting aside God’s Word in order to protect their traditions (9)
 - b. He gives just one example: the Pharisees tradition of Corban (10-12):
 - 1) God’s Word stipulates that children are to honor their parents, which includes carrying for them financially if and when the need arises (10)
 - 2) However, the Pharisees permitted people to get around this requirement by declaring that all their belongings (e.g. possessions, wealth, finances) were “Corban” which means dedicated to God
 - 3) They didn’t actually give them to God; they retained possession of everything and could use it for their own purposes and pleasure—so in essence, it was a future gift or offering to God that He got only after they were gone
 - 4) However, because it was officially God’s, and not theirs, they could no longer use it to care for their parents
 - 5) Once an individual did this, if he changed his mind later and decided to support his parents, the Pharisees considered it sin and a violation of the law
 - c. Such man-made traditions effectively cancel out God’s Word (12-13):
 - 1) As a result of this tradition, they would no longer permit the individual to obey God’s Word (12): **“you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or his mother,”**
 - 2) Their tradition **“invalidated”** the Word of God (13): **“thus invalidating the word of God by your tradition which you have handed down”**
 - a) Most English translations render this as **“nullifying”** the Word of God or making it **“void”**
 - b) In other words, their tradition of Corban had cancelled out God’s command to honor one’s parents
 - 3) This was just one example, but Jesus could have gone on and on (13) **“and you do many things such as that.”**

<p>C. Jesus teaches His followers about the real nature and source of defilement (14-23)</p>
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1. Jesus warns the multitudes by repudiating the teaching of the Pharisees (READ 14-15):
 - a. It’s not the things which go into a person that defiles him or her (14):
 - 1) The Pharisees and Scribes taught that certain foods, or not performing ceremonial washings, made one morally impure
 - 2) But Jesus declares such teaching to be false

- b. It's the things that come out of the person that defile him or her (15):
 - 1) The Pharisees and Scribes were more concerned with external things
 - 2) But Jesus declared that it's ultimately internal things that we should be concerned about
- c. Jesus's repudiation of the Pharisees and Scribes is even more direct in Matthew 15: 12-14:

"Then the disciples came and said to Him, 'Do You know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this statement?' But He answered and said, 'Every plant which My heavenly Father did not plant shall be uprooted. Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind. And if a blind man guides a blind man, both will fall into a pit.'"
- 2. Jesus explains to His disciples that the real source and nature of defilement is what comes out of the heart of man (17-23):
 - a. What a person eats cannot defile him because it simply gets eliminated (READ 17-19)
 - b. What truly defiles a person is what **"proceeds out of"** or comes out of his or her heart (READ 20-23):
 - 1) The heart can harbor all kinds of evil like wicked thoughts, sexual immorality, stealing, murder, coveting, deceit, envy, slander, pride, foolishness
 - 2) And when the heart harbors these sorts of things, they ultimately **"proceed from within"** or come out of the heart by way of actions and behaviors
 - 3) This—what comes out of the heart in terms of sinful actions and behaviors—is what actually defiles a person

Conclusion

- 1. Obviously, Jesus isn't really talking about hand washing and food here
- 2. The emphasis throughout this passage is on how man-made religious rules and traditions are often diametrically opposed to God's Word
- 3. Paul warned the Colossians about this when he confronted them over their submission to man-made religious rules and regulations (Colossians 2:20-23): **"If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, 'Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!' (which all refer to things destined to perish with use) — in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men? These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence."**
- 4. Not only are such man-made rules useless, but they are outright dangerous because as Jesus said, they invalidate the Word of God
- 5. Rather than paying attention to outward rites and rituals, we should be paying attention to what's in our heart and what proceeds from it