

Mark 7:5-13 God's Word, Not Man's

5 And the Pharisees and the scribes asked Him, "Why do Your disciples not walk in accordance with the tradition of the elders, but eat their bread with unholy hands?"

Last week we saw that the scribes and Pharisees from Jerusalem had gathered together at Gennesaret, where Jesus was in order to accused His disciples of violating the Law of Moses by eating with unwashed hands. We made the point last week that this was likely the same miraculous bread, in a miracle of God, that had fed the 5,000, and which the disciples had each taken up a basket of. So, when the Pharisees say and scribes say **Why do Your disciples not walk in accordance with the tradition of the elders, but eat their bread with unholy hands?"** you can see why Jesus is frustrated with them. They completely look past the miracle of God, completely refuse to acknowledge the disciples need for food to sustain themselves, and instead bring up a violation of their own traditions, as if it were more important than what God has said in the Law. Jesus is about to call the Pharisees out on their assumption that there is authority inherent in tradition as such, and show them that the Law of God is the authority that they should be obeying. The "received wisdom of the elders" is one thing, the Word of God is another. But, as with most religious groups, there is an assumption that what has once been established by tradition and custom, and has become normative, it automatically becomes "right", and anyone not conforming to it is "wrong", no matter what the law of God says. We need to be diligent that we aren't blindly following tradition, and causing harm to the Body of Christ in the name of tradition, custom, or conventionality. In the Old Testament, God seems to have gone out of His way to make sure that His prophets were a non-conformist group—staying outside of society, wearing outlandish clothes, doing and saying decidedly bizarre things, and saying them to Kings and Rulers no less.

6 But He said to them, "Rightly did Isaiah prophesy about you hypocrites, as it is written: 'This people honors Me with their lips, But their heart is far away from Me. 7 And in vain do they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.'

Jesus starts with sarcasm, **"Rightly did Isaiah prophesy about you hypocrites,** It's like Jesus is saying, so you want to talk about right and wrong, huh? And, He gives them a picture from the revered prophet Isaiah, and slams them with the accusation that they pay only lip-service to God. So, these guys are not only saying one thing and doing another, but they are the exact kind of people that God condemns in the scripture—while they lie to themselves about doing God's will. Like their ancestors, they had superficial religious trappings of devotion, but no real devotion to God Himself—they wanted to be in charge, so why would they want God's will to be done? This attitude is not extinct today, unfortunately.

The specific statement that the worship described is 'vain' sharpens the accusation, as does Jesus noting that they not only do this, but mis-educate others to do the same! These scribes and Pharisees were supposed to be the religious leaders of Israel, but these blind guides were leading Israel in the wrong direction—toward religion rather than toward God. Their worship was based on external ceremony and tradition, those things of purely human origin, not touching the heart, and drawing it into a right relationship with God. And that is what Jesus is so angry about.

By the way, Jesus is not accusing them of insincerity. They diligently kept the traditions that they had received from the elders. They weren't slackers, nor non-committed. It was just that they were committed to the wrong cause. It was all about them and their tradition, not the Word of God! And Jesus' commitment to God's Law, apart from man's traditions is what kept bringing them into conflict. The disciples were simply eating what they needed to satisfy their hunger. Once again, we see the Pharisees putting the letter of the law, and their interpretation of it, and tradition, ahead of what God had intended, making God's provision of food for the disciples something that they were supposed to feel ashamed of. They were eating their bread—and likely it was the same miraculous bread that God had provided as leftovers from the Feeding of the 5,000. This is what the Pharisees

were worried about as being unclean—a miracle directly from God! Talk about having everything backward! The most clean things like Jesus, the Bread of Life, and the miraculous loaves were the things that the Pharisees were calling unclean!

8 Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men.”

Jesus wanted them to stop neglecting the commandment of God in order to serve the traditions of man. True worship of God is focused on Him, not merely human service to religion. What comes from God has the authoritative character of The Word, which requires obedience; what comes from human authority is merely tradition, which may be a good idea, but is not authoritative and mandatory in the way that scripture is, and should not be treated that way. Yet they have held fast to the latter of their traditions, while allowing the true Law of God to be neglected. , Now this charge would be indignantly denied by the scribes, whose traditions were intended, in a later rabbinic phrase, to be ‘a fence around the Torah’ (m. ‘Abot 1:1; 3:14), so that people would not violate it by accident—and so they claimed verbally that the Torah had the highest authority. But, in their traditions, they were always trying to weasel out of giving God their whole hearts, and letting Him be in charge, and instead performing whatever service THEY thought was best, and claiming that God was pleased with it. Again, this attitude has not died out yet. In 7:8–9 Jesus sets the oral interpretation in acid contrast to God’s will. The “tradition of the elders” (vv. 3, 5, 8) is declared “your own tradition” (vv. 8, 13) in contrast to the revealed “commandments of God” (vv. 8–9) or “the word of God” (v. 13). The verbs in v. 9 are more concrete and forceful than in the NIV translation. The Pharisees do not simply “set aside” God’s commandments, that is, favor something in their place; they “reject” (Gk. *athetein*) them by making a conscious choice against them. Again, the NIV says that the Pharisees do this in order “to observe your own commandments.” If the Gk. *stēsēte* is the proper reading in v. 9, then it is more definite and stronger: the Pharisees do this to erect (*stēsēte*) or cause something to stand in the place of the Torah. Moreover, the present tense of the Greek verbs in vv. 8–9 implies that the Pharisees continue to uphold human traditions and continue to reject the commandments of God. The oral tradition is thus exposed and censured as a willful substitution of human contrivance for the word and will of God.

9 He was also saying to them, “You are experts at setting aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition. The disciples were simply eating what they needed to satisfy their hunger. Once again, we see the Pharisees putting the letter of the law, and their interpretation of it, and tradition, ahead of what God had intended, making God’s provision of food for the disciples something that they were supposed to feel ashamed of. Jesus brings this point up to them **10 For Moses said, ‘Honor your father and your mother’; and, ‘The one who speaks evil of father or mother, is certainly to be put to death’; 11 but you say, ‘If a person says to his father or his mother, whatever I have that would help you is Corban (that is, given to God),’ 12 you no longer allow him to do anything for his father or his mother; 13 thereby invalidating the word of God by your tradition which you have handed down; and you do many things such as that.” Well, what the Pharisees are doing in our verses today falls under the category of “many things such as that”** Well, what the Pharisees are doing in our verses today falls under the category of “many things such as that”—tradition above what God had said in the Law. And, it’s interesting that the thrust of all these things done by the Pharisees were to make God’s Law more constraining, and strict. Why is that? Because they were trying to impress each other on how much holier that they were by denying themselves even more things! God didn’t say “let’s see how much you can suffer for me”, or “let’s see how miserable you can make your life”. He said “follow the Law that I have given you” and “do not add to it”. Why? Because in their multiplying restrictions and prohibitions, they made it more and more difficult for people to follow the Pharisees interpretation of the Law. That’s what Jesus meant when he said in Matthew 23:13 **13 “But woe to you, scribes and**

Pharisees, hypocrites, because you shut the kingdom of heaven in front of people; for you do not enter it yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in. Their impossible burden was too much, and people just gave up trying follow what they thought was an impossible law. But it wasn't God that put that burden on them, it was the Pharisees. Jesus brings this up in Matthew 23:2-4 **2 saying: "The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses. 3 Therefore, whatever they tell you, do and comply with it all, but do not do as they do; for they say things and do not do them. 4 And they tie up heavy burdens and lay them on people's shoulders, but they themselves are unwilling to move them with so much as their finger.** They couldn't keep their own interpretation of the law that they were telling everyone else that they had to keep in order to see God, and go to heaven. And, the Pharisees weren't even being honest about their ability to keep the law. They couldn't do it either, even though they wanted everyone else to believe that they did. Matthew 23:27-28 **27 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. 28 So you too, outwardly appear righteous to people, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.** So, the people gave up. And the Pharisees had no mercy or compassion on what they were doing to the people, because to change their ways would mean to admit that they themselves were hypocrites! Which is exactly what Jesus called them in Matthew 23:23-25 **23 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the Law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others. 24 You blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!** God desires Mercy and not sacrifice. God wanted them to teach the people about the love and compassion and mercy of God, not about these multiplied rules. He wanted to bring them to the place of understanding that they couldn't keep the law perfectly, and to admit that they needed His help. The text is the fifth commandment from Ex. 20:12; Dt. 5:16; **Honor your Father and Mother.** the addition of Ex. 21:17 illustrates the seriousness of the basic commandment by specifying an extreme case of dishonoring father or mother and the death penalty. Yet scribal tradition had found a way of relieving a son of the responsibility of 'honoring' father or mother, not in the area of disrespectful speech but at the more practical level of financial support (which was assumed to be inherent in the 'honor' required by the commandment), by means of the qorbān provision. It was possible for the son's resources from which the parents might reasonably expect to receive support to be declared corban with the result that they became technically 'divine property' and so were no longer accessible to the parents. Corban was similar to the concept of deferred giving. Today a person may will property to a charity or institution at his or her death, though retaining possession over the property and the proceeds or interest accruing from it until then. In the case of Corban, a person could dedicate goods to God and withdraw them from ordinary use, although retaining control over them himself. In the example of v. 11, a son declares his property Corban, which at his death would pass into the possession of the temple. In the meantime, however, the son retains control over the property—and his control deprives his parents of the support that otherwise would have been derived from the property in their old age. An unambiguous moral good, " 'Honor your father and mother,' " is not simply nullified but actually reversed by forbidding a child to do " 'anything for his father or mother.' " Not only is it a human contrivance, but it is also a distortion of the law.