

Jesus' Portrait of Man's Wicked Heart

Text: Mark 7:1-23

Introduction:

1. Context: The demonstration of the miracle working power of Christ (Mk. 6:56). The Lord's ministry is progressing, moving forward and expanding in its influence.
2. Now the religious leaders re-enter the scene, sending a special delegation from Jerusalem, the capital city of legalistic Judaism. The last time we encountered the scribes and pharisees in Mark was in chapter 3.
3. In the chapter before us, truth and tradition will again collide, giving occasion for our Lord's powerful declaration concerning the depravity of the human heart.
4. For this message, we will divide our text into three sections:

Consider firstly...

I. The Traditions of the Opposers (Vs. 1-5)

The word 'tradition' occurs 5 times in this section (Vs. 3, 5, 8, 9, & 13)

A. The Criticism based on their Traditions (Vs. 1-2)

1. Their spirit (1)
 - a. 'then' = when was then?! Look at Vs. 56 of the previous chapter. When the work of God is going forward, opposition will be aroused.
 - b. "came together...from Jerusalem" = the purpose of this delegation was to oppose the ministry of Christ.
2. Their surveillance (2)
 - a. "they saw" = they were looking for an occasion to oppose the Lord. "The Lord and His disciples were under intrusive surveillance." (Hiebert)
 - b. "unwashed hands" = "The charge was not that the disciples were eating with grimy hands but that they had not cleansed their hands with the proper rite of purification." (Hiebert) "The objection raised was on ceremonial, not sanitary grounds" (Robertson).
 - c. "they found" = their critical eyes found something with which they thought they could discredit the Saviour. What did they find? They found the harried, busy disciples having a bite to eat on the run without following the prescribed ceremonial washing of the hands.

B. The Commentary about their Traditions (Vs. 3-4)

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Mark explains the Jewish customs in these verses for the benefit of his mainly Gentile audience (the Romans). Three examples of washing traditions are outlined:

1. Hand Washing (Vs. 3)
 - a. “all the Jews” = influence of the Pharisees was widespread
 - b. “tradition of the elders” = the oral laws passed down from generation to generation. To add weight to these oral laws, the claim was sometimes made that God gave them to Moses who then passed them on orally to the elders. The motive behind these traditions was to build a so called “fence around the law” to make sure they did not transgress.
2. Body Washing (Vs. 3a)
 - a. ‘wash’ = this word ‘wash’ is from the Greek word ‘baptizo’ and means “to dip or immerse”.
 - b. It is a reference to the ritual bathing as prescribed by Jewish Law.
3. Vessel Washing (Vs. 3b) (30 chapters in the Mishnah about this)
4. Note: Most man-made religions have some sort of ritual washing or water ceremony as a core part of their tradition. Man senses his need for cleansing but his need is not to be washed in water but washed in the blood!

C. The Confrontation about their Traditions (Vs. 5)

1. ‘walk’ = word used in the Hebrew sense of living or conducting one’s life (Linguistic Key)
2. “according to” = they used their tradition as the standard for measuring the conduct of the disciples (Hiebert)

II. The Truth about the Opposers (Vs. 6-13)

Christ unmask these religious fakes for who they really are. Christ exposes...

A. The Root of their Corruption (Vs. 6-8)

1. The quotation from the Scriptures (Vs. 6-7)
 - a. ‘well’ = excellently. Describes the accuracy of Isaiah’s prediction (Wuest) These religious leaders fit Isaiah’s description to the letter
 - b. “Esaias prophesied of you” = quotation from Isaiah 29:13
 - c. ‘hypocrites’ = the word means actor, stage player. A man who assumes an identity and character different from what he really is (Hiebert). The word literally means “one who speaks from under a mask” and came from the theatre where the actors wore masks to portray a character. (e.g. imagine an actor dressed up like a doctor for a part. It is just an act as he is not a doctor in real life. It is not his real identity)

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- d. “honoureth me with their lips” = they paid lip service to God
- e. “heart is far from me” = the word ‘far’ has the idea of “far, far away!” The same word is translated “a great way off” (Lk. 14:32). It pictures them as “actively holding their heart at a great distance from God.” (Hiebert)
- f. “teaching for doctrines the commandments of men” = they elevated their own traditions to the same level as the Word of God
- g. Illustration: The Roman Catholic Church and tradition

“If anyone says that justifying faith is nothing else than confidence in divine mercy, which remits sins for Christ’s sake, or that it is this confidence alone that justifies us, LET HIM BE ANATHEMA” (Sixth Session, Canons Concerning Justification, Canon 12).

“Sacred Tradition and sacred Scripture, then, are bound closely together, and communicate one with the other. For both of them, flowing out from the same divine well-spring, come together in some fashion to form one thing, and move towards the same goal ... Thus, it comes about that the Church does not draw her certainty about all revealed truths from the holy Scriptures alone. Hence, both Scripture and Tradition must be accepted and honoured with equal feelings of devotion and reverence” (Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, Chap. 2, 9, p. 682).

- 2. The application from the Saviour (Vs. 8)
 - a. “laying aside” = to leave or forsake. Christ exposes them further. They had done more than just add to the truth. They had deserted the truth in favour of traditions of their own making.
 - b. “ye hold” = has the idea of a powerful grip on something. Here it means to keep carefully and faithfully. (Wuest)

B. The Fruit of their Corruption (Vs. 9-13)

- 1. The assertion of the Lord (Vs. 9)
 - a. “full well” = excellently, finely. “It was biting sarcasm that cut to the bone.” (Robertson)
 - b. “reject...that ye may keep” = reveals that truth and human tradition cannot exist side by side. Its either truth or tradition and where tradition is held to, the truth will ultimately be rejected.
- 2. The illustration from the Lord (Vs. 10-12)
 - a. “For Moses said...But ye say” = Christ gives a specific example as evidence of the assertion made in the previous verse
 - b. “It is Corban” = Hebrew word meaning ‘gift’
 - 1. Wuest explains: “The Hebrew word refers to a gift or offering to God. The rabbis allowed the individual to keep whatever money should have been given by the son for the support of his parents, if he would declare it as a gift to God. He could keep the money and by merely speaking the word, justify his withholding it from his parents. This was in defiance of God’s command by which a son is required to honour his parents by providing for their necessities where they were in need.”

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2. Hiebert explains: “In an argument or fit of anger, the son might declare, “that wherewith thou mightiest be profited from me is Corban!” When the son had once pronounced this vow concerning that from which the parents had rightly expected support, it was henceforth to be regarded as consecrated and not used for the support of the parents. This view was based on the proposition that what has been devoted to God is holy and cannot be used for secular purposes.”
3. The conclusion of the Lord (Vs. 13)
 1. “make of none effect” = to cancel, render null and void, to invalidate. Often used of annulling wills and contracts (Key). Through their tradition they deprived the Word of God of its “force and authority” (Strong’s). According to A.T. Robertson, some sons paid bribes to the religious leaders to come up with such exceptions.
 2. “many such like things do ye” = the example given was only a sample of many other similar things

III. The Teaching because of the Opposers (Vs. 14-23)

Our Lord’s confrontation with the religious leaders formed a springboard to teach on the true source of spiritual defilement.

A. The Declaration to the Multitude (Vs. 14-16)

1. Christ’s call to the people (Vs. 14)
 - a. Christ uses the opportunity to expose the religious leaders before the people.
 - b. “Hearken unto me” = Christ calls for a definite and careful consideration of the statement of truth He is about to make
2. Christ’s counsel to the people (Vs. 15)

Christ declares the maxim that He will expand upon later with His disciples.

 - a. “there is nothing from without” = external, material things such as food to not defile one spiritually or morally
 - b. “the things which come out of him” = the source of man’s defilement is within himself
3. Christ’s charge to the people (Vs. 16)

B. The Discipling of the Men (Vs. 17-23)

1. Christ challenges their spiritual perception (Vs. 17-19)
 - a. Their request (17)
 - b. Christ’s rebuke (18-19)
2. Christ explains the spiritual principle (Vs. 20-23)
 - a. The source of man’s corruption (Vs. 20-21a; 23) Man is the fountain of his own uncleanness.
 - b. The specifics of man’s corruption (Vs. 21b-22) Christ outlines a list of 13 ugly attributes of man’s depravity:

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1. “evil thoughts” = consideration, thought, reasoning. “Not merely evil thoughts but evil devisings which issue in degraded acts and vices now mentioned.” (Taylor) It is “the thinking of a man deliberating with himself, inward reasoning.” (Strongs) “These evil thoughts come from the heart and lead to the dreadful list here given.” (Robertson) (See Prov. 23:7)
2. “adulteries” = the breaking of marriage vows
3. “fornications” = immorality, especially of the unmarried
4. ‘murders’ = taking of another’s life (e.g. what’s reported on the news, abortion)
Note: It is of interest that the first three specific sins mentioned have to do with immorality and violence. Mankind particularly expresses his depraved heart in these areas (e.g. the pre-flood world).
5. ‘thefts’ = stealing
6. ‘covetousness’ = craze for more and more (Robertson). Word is plural in number and “indicates the various ways in which this spirit expresses itself in selfish grasping for self-gratification.” (Hiebert)
7. ‘wickedness’ = evil, depravity. This word also plural.
8. ‘deceit’ = the root word contains the underlying thought to lure or bait. Speaks of cunning, trickery, dishonesty and guile. It includes outright lies but extends beyond to the more sophisticated and clever manipulations for personal gain. “The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies.” (Ps. 58:3)
9. ‘lasciviousness’ = unbridled lust; unrestrained sex instinct
10. “an evil eye” = a Hebrew expression denoting an envious, jealous or grudging attitude.
11. ‘blasphemy’ = evil speaking, injurious speech against God or man. It is “speech injurious to another’s good name” (Key). Wuest refers to it as “malicious misrepresentation”.
12. ‘pride’ = root meaning is to “show oneself above others”. “It pictures an individual who has a swollen opinion of himself, exalting himself above others, whom he regards with scornful contempt.” (Hiebert)
13. ‘foolishness’ = folly. In this context primarily a moral rather than an intellectual problem.

Conclusion: Only Christ’s power can cleanse and change a sinful heart (Ez. 36:25-26)