

Session 7

January 14, 2018

JESUS CORRECTS

Mark 7:5-15

Traditions have always been fascinating and influential aspects of life. Born over time and repetition, traditions often become so woven into the fabric of life that we can neither name where they came from nor why we continue to observe them. Like Tevye in *Fiddler on the Roof*, we might admit:

“We always keep our heads covered and always wear a little prayer shawl...
This shows our constant devotion to God. You may ask, how did this tradition start?
I'll tell you - I don't know. But it's a tradition!”

We simply do what we do because we have always done it! Unfortunately, in a church setting, traditions can take on a life of their own. And when they begin to carry the same authority as the Scriptures, problems always erupt.

Man's tradition must never take the place of God's commands (vv. 5-8). The first few verses of Mark 7 set the stage for this confrontation between Jesus and the religious leaders. The legalistic Jews raised questions regarding the behavior of Jesus and His disciples. The accusation of eating with “unclean hands” in no way infers the disciples had “dirty” hands. Sanitation is not the issue; ceremony is. While there certainly are some Old Testament laws that require a ritual cleansing after certain “defilements” (see Lev. 15 for instance) the religious leaders had invented a whole set of extra rules and regulations, both to insure their own safety from violating the original laws, and to increase their own personal piety. It was these extra “man-made” requirements the disciples disregarded that brought the ire of the Jews. Jesus' rebuke of them cut to the heart of the matter. Rather than answer in defense of His disciples, He pointed out the real issue: their hypocrisy. Beyond pointing out they were only “play-acting” their devotion to God, Jesus accused them of fulfilling God's prophecy...in a very derogatory way! They said the right things, but their hearts were far from God (vs. 6). The result? Their worship was empty of any meaning (vs. 8). Why? Because they had replaced God's law with a man-made tradition, and then expected everybody else to go along. The lesson for the church: be sure that church practices are biblical and that man-made “we've always done it this way before” traditions do not control people more than God's Word does.

Man's tradition must never manipulate God's commands (vv. 9-15). If there is a loop-hole in a law, someone will find a way to take advantage of it. That's exactly what Jesus was talking about here. The principle of “Corban” is a bit confusing, but basically worked like this: Exodus 20:12 commands the people to honor their fathers and mothers. That includes caring for them in their senior years. But many of the religious leaders had diverted the money needed by their elderly parents to the temple. Like a designated offering, it was “Corban” (which means “gifted to God”). As such, it had to be used for religious purposes. The result was two-fold. Not only was the money taken from the family, but it was now readily available to the religious leaders. So a legitimate law was bypassed, and a temple offering was manipulated. The lesson for the church: You can't do a right thing in a wrong way! Be sure that God's word is honored and obeyed and that rules are not manipulated so that one person (or one group of people) takes advantage of it.

Jesus returns to the dirty hands issue in verse 15, and instructs the people. The outward ritual, ceremony, or religious practice (or lack thereof) does not keep one far from God, but rather the attitude of the heart.