

The Gospel of Mark

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Chapter Seven

The previous chapters pertained to the gathering of the apostles to the Lord to serve Him. Now Mark records the gathering of enemies of Jesus before Him in confrontation.

Mar 7:1-4 NASB

The Pharisees and some of the scribes gathered around Him when they had come from Jerusalem, (2) and had seen that some of His disciples were eating their bread with impure hands, that is, unwashed. (3) (For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they carefully wash their hands, thus observing the traditions of the elders; (4) and when they come from the market place, they do not eat unless they cleanse themselves; 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.)

These people came from Jerusalem probably on an official mission to confront Jesus. We read that the sending out of the twelve had aroused considerable attention even to Herod. The Galilee movement of Jesus was then spreading and the Pharisees felt threatened so they sent a delegation to confront Jesus. Mark records two opposing ideological forces. The Jerusalem group represented those who tried to faithfully and completely obey the letter of the Law and its elaborations they had developed. The method of Jesus was simple obedience to the commandment of the Father. Verse three was added by someone and does not appear in the oldest manuscripts. However it is valid in that someone added an explanation of how the Pharisees obeyed their traditions regarding eating. Not all scribes were Pharisees and not all Pharisees were scribes but they were usually separate groups of people. The Pharisees were men who had banded together to maintain the distinction between the Jews and the surrounding nations by carefully obeying the Law and all of the amplifications of it they developed. The scribes were to take the law of God, illustrate it, and apply it to local circumstances. The Pharisees and scribes developed their understandings of applications of the Law to such an extent that the commandments of God were almost totally hidden behind their traditions. The traditions of men then replaced the commands of God and Jesus reacted against this movement.

The same happened in the Church as individuals and collections of people met to interpret and apply the commands of God. Thus the church developed its own set of traditions in a similar fashion as did the Jewish religious movement before Jesus. The church traditions developed pertaining to uniformity of dress, modes of common speech, the separation of priests and laity, modes of baptism, basis of forgiveness of sins, etc. until today the Christian churches have traditions that are contradictory and conflicting in ways similar to the Jewish religion at the time of Christ. Today there are many denominations of Christian churches and some churches claiming to be Christian that deviate from the orthodox beliefs of Christianity. Thus there is a lot of similarity between those facing Jesus in this writing of Mark and those that Jesus faces today. Many churches have been spoiled within one generation by making traditions more important

than God's commands. The reasons are usually good initially but soon one sees that obedience to traditions wins and the church is soon steeped in error. Many creeds have been developed when circumstances warranted their existence but any creed is still a development by man and must be carefully studied for compliance with God's commandments.

Mark 7: 5-8

*The Pharisees and the scribes *asked Him, "Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat their bread with impure hands?" (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. (7) 'BUT IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE PRECEPTS OF MEN.' (8) "Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men."*

Verse nine clearly states the condemnation of Jesus that the Pharisees and scribes held firmly to the traditions of men and neglected the commandment of God. Surely Jesus would make the same claim against many church teachings today. The first quarrel between Jesus and these Jewish leaders pertained to the traditions developed regarding the Sabbath. Jesus never violated the Sabbath but He did violate their false conceptions regarding it. Jesus violated the traditions when they violated the Law which it was intended to honor. Although Christians are pure before God because of the double imputation of Jesus Christ, none are holy in their worldly actions since sanctification is never completed while the human heart still beats. Thus all traditions people develop must be carefully tested by the purity of the Word of God. Jesus stated that Isaiah prophesied about the Pharisees when he stated that people were falsely worshipping God when such is only of their lips and not of their hearts. They said that His disciples were sinning when they ate bread with hands that had not been ritualistically cleansed when the Pharisees ate with unclean hearts.

Mark 7:9-13

He was also saying to them, "You are experts at setting aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition. (10) "For Moses said, 'HONOR YOUR FATHER AND YOUR MOTHER'; and, 'HE WHO SPEAKS EVIL OF FATHER OR MOTHER, IS TO BE PUT TO DEATH'; (11) but you say, 'If a man says to his father or his mother, whatever I have that would help you is Corban (that is to say, given to God),' (12) you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or his mother; (13) thus invalidating the word of God by your tradition which you have handed down; and you do many things such as that."

Jesus also accused them of piously claiming that they had no resources left to help their family because they had already dedicated their gifts to the Temple. People today can also be doing the same thing when they say that they have to tithe to the "church" so they do not have enough money left to assist their family. They reject the command of God to keep the tradition of man. People can become slaves to traditions of human interpretations leading to the loss of human compassion and obedience to the commands of God. Paul wrote to Timothy about caring for the family: "But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever." (1 Tim 5:8) Someone also might say

that they could not provide any help for a family member at the time when he was obligated to attend a “church” service. Such false, pious applications of the concept of Corban can find many such applications. Jesus told them that they did many such things and everyone today needs to also carefully examine their obligations to tradition and repent from such.

Mark 7:14-16

After He called the crowd to Him again, He began saying to them, "Listen to Me, all of you, and understand: (15) there is nothing outside the man which can defile him if it goes into him; but the things which proceed out of the man are what defile the man. (16) ["If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear."]

Jesus then gathered the crowd around Him and told them to not only listen to what He was saying but to also understand what He was saying. Much of what people do is listening rather than understanding. Someone added a sentence that is counted as verse 16 but it certainly is appropriate and does not violate Scriptural intent. It seems to originate from a scribe adding it since it follows 4:9 or 4:23. Jesus is trying to get them to understand that nothing that goes into a man’s body can make him unclean. Even food offered to idols or using utensils that are not ritually clean can make a person defiled. It is what issues forth from the man that causes a person to be defiled, or perhaps reveal that he is defiled. This statement would have been shocking to those listening and we will see in the next verse that His disciples did not understand either.

Mark 7:17-23

*When he had left the crowd and entered the house, His disciples questioned Him about the parable. (18) And He *said to them, "Are you so lacking in understanding also? Do you not understand that whatever goes into the man from outside cannot defile him, (19) because it does not go into his heart, but into his stomach, and is eliminated?" (Thus He declared all foods clean.) (20) And He was saying, "That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man. (21) "For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, (22) deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. (23) "All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man."*

Even though the disciples had been traveling with Jesus for some time and even had been sent on an apostolic mission, they still were not indwelt by the Holy Spirit and were having problems understanding spiritual concepts (1 Cor 2:14). Jesus was a bit exasperated at their lack of understanding although He certainly knew that it was not until much later that they would be capable of deeper spiritual understanding. Only that which enters the heart can transform a person and what issues from the heart will also display a heart that is either defiled or partly defiled. The previous quotation of Isaiah (29:13) shows that God’s people had often had a heart problem that would not really be solved until Pentecost. It is in the heart that the true issues of life are developed as one’s conscience is developed. Matthew also elaborated in this context:

Matt 15:18-20 NASB "But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man. (19) "For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders. (20) "These are the things which defile the man; but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile the man."

The list of sins seems to move from overt sins to sinful attitudes causing some sinful actions. Placing evil thoughts first implies that all other actions come from those thoughts. The items murders and thefts are obvious. Adulteries (moicheia) are sins committed by people in a marriage arrangement and fornications (porneia) covers more general sexual sins. Envy (ophthalmos ponerous) is literally “evil eye” that is a Semitic term for “stinginess” or “envious jealousy”. It is good to meditate on all those sins stated by Mark as a Christian may find some of them creeping into his heart resulting in some outward actions not befitting his discipleship to the Lord Jesus.

What proceeds out of a man can be those obvious sins as stated by Matthew or they can be well-intended creeds that lead to bondage of the soul rather than freedom from rote dependency of traditions. It seems much easier to just listen to advice from someone such as a preacher or priest about what we should do rather than seeking Biblical knowledge for the action. But we must not think that the words spoken by a person are infallible for such only comes from God. Over the many years since this was written the organized church has suffered from a lot of traditions that have been obeyed as though they were God’s directions rather than originating from man. We must be free from man by being a bondslave of Jesus Christ and thus realize our freedom: “So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, *“If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; (32) and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.”* (John 8:31-32).

An example of church-based creeds that are problematic would be the Apostle’s Creed that has an added sentence in it that is not Biblically based: “He descended into hell.” Most people will just read it and not think anything about it but it was added by man and should be omitted. You may read an article I wrote about this at <http://livingtheology.com/ApostlesCreed.html>. The only yoke that a Christian should have is the one placed upon us by Jesus and not any that some organization tries to place upon us:

- Matt 11:29-30 NASB *“Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS. (30) “For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”*
- Acts 15:10 NASB *“Now therefore why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?”*
- Gal 5:1 NASB *“It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.”*

Mark 7:24-26

Jesus got up and went away from there to the region of Tyre. And when He had entered a house, He wanted no one to know of it; yet He could not escape notice. (25) But after hearing of Him, a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately came and fell at His feet. (26) Now the woman was a Gentile, of the Syrophenician race. And she kept asking Him to cast the demon out of her daughter.

This event is also recorded by Matthew with a few different details:

Matt 15:21-28 NASB Jesus went away from there, and withdrew into the district of Tyre and Sidon. 22) And a Canaanite woman from that region came out and began to cry out, saying, “Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is cruelly demon-

possessed." (23) But He did not answer her a word. And His disciples came and implored Him, saying, "Send her away, because she keeps shouting at us." (24) But He answered and said, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." (25) But she came and began to bow down before Him, saying, "Lord, help me!" (26) And He answered and said, "It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." (27) But she said, "Yes, Lord; but even the dogs feed on the crumbs which fall from their masters' table." (28) Then Jesus said to her, "O woman, your faith is great; it shall be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed at once.

The historical setting of this event is not known. The city of Tyre is located in Phoenicia (now Lebanon) and is bordered to the northeast by Galilee. It seems that Mark is stating that, at least from his perspective, Jesus wanted to find a place to go where He could get some rest and not have to interact with people seeking His help. He tried to keep His position secret but His fame had spread into this area also and so He could not escape people recognizing Him. Mark seems to place this event at this point in his narrative for two reasons. One reason is that it demonstrates that Jesus does not limit himself to audiences allowed by the ceremonial cleanness Jewish rules. Jews would not normally associate with any Gentiles, and particularly not a Gentile woman, for such would make the person unclean. Thus He clearly shows that the oral laws are invalid. The second reason may be that Mark wants to clearly show to his Gentile readers that the message of Jesus is also for them.

This Gentile woman had heard of the miracles of Jesus and came to worship Him and to obtain His help with her daughter who was possessed with an unclean spirit. Mark states that she came and fell at His feet in a worship stance. Mark states that she was of the Syrophenician race to emphasize that she was from an area of Phoenicia that was administrated by Syria as opposed to an area under Libyan rule (Libyo-Phoenician) of North Africa. Matthew does not report the details of her origin.

Mark 7:27-30

*And He was saying to her, "Let the children be satisfied first, for it is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." (28) But she answered and *said to Him, "Yes, Lord, but even the dogs under the table feed on the children's crumbs." (29) And He said to her, "Because of this answer go; the demon has gone out of your daughter." (30) And going back to her home, she found the child lying on the bed, the demon having left.*

By both the records of Mark and Matthew we see that Jesus tells the woman that He had come first to the Jews. The Greek word used for "dogs" is kynarioi that can be translated as "puppies" that are kept as household pets. Jesus is comparing the privileged position of Israel with the less-privileged Gentiles. The woman's reply was remarkable for she first admitted her status but refused to be excluded from the benefits offered by Jesus. This was a tremendous show of faith as the Father must have revealed such a relationship to her to allow her to make this statement to such a respected Jewish Rabbi. This revelation is similar to that shown to Peter: "And Jesus said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven." (Matt 16:17) Since Jesus knew that this was an event of the Father's blessing, He immediately told the woman that the demon had left her daughter. When she returned home she then found her daughter lying on the bed as she could not rest from the

demon's grasp and was free. This is the only instance in the writing of Mark where he reports Jesus referred to as "Lord" and that a healing had taken place from a distance.

Mark 7:31-37

*Again He went out from the region of Tyre, and came through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, within the region of Decapolis. (32) They *brought to Him one who was deaf and spoke with difficulty, and they *implored Him to lay His hand on him. (33) Jesus took him aside from the crowd, by himself, and put His fingers into his ears, and after spitting, He touched his tongue with the saliva; (34) and looking up to heaven with a deep sigh, He *said to him, "Ephphatha!" that is, "Be opened!" (35) And his ears were opened, and the impediment of his tongue was removed, and he began speaking plainly. (36) And He gave them orders not to tell anyone; but the more He ordered them, the more widely they continued to proclaim it. (37) They were utterly astonished, saying, "He has done all things well; He makes even the deaf to hear and the mute to speak."*

None of the other evangelists record this event but Mark seems to have recorded it to show another healing of a Gentile and for its relationship with the preceding event. This travel was considerable and Mark does not give any details of the journey or what Jesus did during the trip. Remember from a previous event (Mark 5:20) that Decapolis is not a city but an area of about ten Greek cities under one rule. There was a large population of Gentiles in the area but some Jews lived there also. The speech difficulty (spoke with difficulty) of the man translates a Greek word that is only used here in the NT. Mark probably had in mind a statement by Isaiah where the LXX uses the same Greek word (mogilalos): "*Then the lame will leap like a deer, And the tongue of the mute will shout for joy. For waters will break forth in the wilderness And streams in the Arabah.*" (Isa 35:6). He clearly knew that this was a mark of the age of the Messiah as predicted by Isaiah. Jesus seemed to prefer to deal with people individually as He did with this man. He did not have to touch the man at all but He did so to evidently show that He individually was dealing with the man's problems. By praying to heaven He showed that the power being used was from God. He used an Aramaic word that Mark translates as "be opened". Jesus also used Aramaic in dealing with the peasant people of Palestine (Mark 5:41) as this seemed to be His "native" language although He also frequently spoke Greek. The effect of the command was instantaneous as the man's ears were opened and he was able to speak plainly.

Jesus told them to not spread the word about his miracle but they people continued to proclaim it. Jesus did not want His work of miracles to cause people to think that He was the Messiah that the people were expecting in a political sense. The people were utterly astonished and this Greek word is not used in any other NT book. The statement "He has done all things well" reminds us of "*God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.*" (Gen 1:31). There certainly is a sense in which this is a new creation as God enters His creation and begins the modification that will eventually result in a new heaven and earth. This also reminds us again of the messianic significance of this miracle prophesied by Isaiah: "*Then the eyes of the blind will be opened And the ears of the deaf will be unstopped.*" (Isa 35:5). Certainly Mark understood these events in the territory of the Gentiles to be a sign of the messianic activity of Jesus.

