

Mark 7:1-7

“Tradition verses relation”

- I. **Introduction**
- II. **Vs. 1-2 Finding fault**
- III. **Vs. 3-5 The fence of the Pharisees**
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I. **Introduction**

The only link between the first 23 verse of chapter 7 and what we just read about the feeding of the 5000 in chapter 6 is one that is not apparent on the English but is in the Greek. We are told that in verse 2 of chapter 7 that the delegation that had come from Jerusalem to find some thing to accuse Jesus of did so by observing His disciples. It appears that his had happened while watching the disciples eat some of the left over bread that had come from the 12 baskets of leftovers at the feeding of the 5000. It never ceases to amaze me how there are those Parasitical types that can look at a blessing and only see a rules violation. At issue is two opposing views of what constitutes true worship. The religious leader’s views centered around observance of traditions that enabled them to be God’s special people. Jesus views was that of simple loving obedience to the Father who so loved them. There are four stages to this drama that unfolded in the first 23 verses:

1. Vs. 1-5 **Accusation**: The religious delegation was following Jesus around in hopes of finding something they could publically accuse Him of that would discredit Him and cause His popularity to diminish.
2. Vs. 6-13 **Condemnation**: Jesus defended His disciples while exposing the hypocrisy of the religious leaders. In defending their tradition, the Pharisees eroded their own characters and also the character of the Word of God.

3. Vs. 14-16 **Declaration**: Jesus announces to the multitude that living right with God is a matter of the heart and not about merely keeping outward rules. _
4. Vs. 17-23 **Explanation**: Finally, Jesus explains what He had just said to the multitudes.

II. Vs. 1-2 Finding fault

Vs. 1-2 The first thing we notice is that the religious establishment decided to send a delegation to intimidate and antagonize Jesus and His disciples. The washing of hands had nothing to do with personal hygiene, nor were they command by God through the scriptures. Instead they were a part of the traditions added by religious leaders as their way of worshipping. No doubt the primary motivation for this was jealousy at the increasing popularity of the movement. To understand this continual conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees we need to look at their origins. The Pharisaic movement was born during a time of Jewish history in the 4th and 5th centuries before Jesus which we have no biblical record of. It was a time when the religious leaders felt they needed to further protect the people from the encroachment of the world upon their way of life. They were the Puritans of their age against the Babylonian and Greek influences were threatening their way of life that had separated them from other cultures. So these men banded together to establish oral laws that would maintain by all means the Jewish distinction and people from the surrounding nations. These new precepts over time increased and slowly became the authority and interpretation of God's Word. The traditions and interpretations over time need further clarification and more traditions and interpretations were added until they became a barrier between what God said in His word and the people He communicated to. The Pharisees saw themselves of maintaining the religion to the people and in their own writings referred to themselves as those that put a "*fence around the law*". It wasn't until three hundred years after Jesus that these

oral laws were written down in a collection called the Mishnah. There are over 65 pages devoted in the Mishnah to the proper way to ceremonially wash your hands. God had given His people principals of hygiene that averted the spreading of germs and infections. The conflict was not only between God's truth and man's tradition, but also between two divergent views of sin and holiness. Jesus had already made it apparent on the Sermon on the Mount that true holiness is a matter of inward affection and attitude and not just outward actions and associations.

III. Vs. 3-5 The fence of the Pharisees

Vs. 3-5 What bothered the pharisaical delegation was not that the disciples didn't wash their hands before eating but rather that they didn't do so according to the prescribed religious tradition. Their religious practice looked more like a surgeon preparing for and operation than a person preparing to sit down for some supper. The hands had to be held palm up and slightly cupped and water poured over them. Then one hand was used to scrub the other hand, then the fist of the clean hand would be used to wash the other hand. The hands then would have placed out palms down and fresh water poured over them to cleanse the dirty water, then the hands would be lifted up so that the water could drain down the forearms exiting off the elbows. If anything touched the cleansed hands after the process the whole ceremony would have to be repeated. The problem was that the religious establishment took these requirements and began to make them a way to appear religiously superior to everyone around them. It was no longer enough to do the "*right thing*" the people now had to do the "*right thing*" the "*right way*". This kind of self righteousness is not isolated to the Judaism as Paul had to address the same things in the early church in 2 Corinthians 3:17 when he wrote "*where the Spirit of the Lord is there is*

liberty.” Mankind has a propensity towards making rules and religious regulations our sole standard and declaration of being religious and better than others. One of the marvelous aspects of the book of Acts is the indifference the Lord had to these barriers as believers indwelt with the Holy Spirit moved freely in expression and experience as He dictated. **There was spontaneity and variety in the way the church was formed that allowed people to experience more of the presence of the Lord.** But soon these very expressions become regulated, orchestrated and calculated into a liturgy of acceptable forms of worship that claimed authority to be sole basis of how a person was to experience God that stiffened the very work of the Holy Spirit. Looking out over church History is to discover that every renewal where the Holy Spirit has broken free of the stagnant religious tradition has over time become a stagnant tradition that will need to be broken free from!

IV. Vs. 6-7 The problem with traditions

Vs. 6-7 Here we see Jesus’ initial response which He will go onto further illustrate in verse 8-23. And we see that He wastes no time in addressing the reason why, “*His disciples didn’t walk according to the tradition of the elders...*” **The problem**, Jesus said, **was not in the observance of the traditions of the elders but rather in what their observance produced in those who adhered to them, “hypocritical arrogance”!**

According to Matthews account in chapter 15:12 such blunt speech by Jesus caused the disciples to come to Him afterward to inform Jesus that the religious delegation had been offended by His comments. But Jesus was fully aware of offending them and in fact did so deliberately. In quoting Isaiah 29:13 Jesus points out two things about “*walking in the*

traditions of elders” that produces “***hypocritical arrogance***” does in destroying true worship:

1. Vs. 6 “*This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me*”: The first thing Jesus says that it does in destroying true worship is that places ***right words with wrong attitudes***. All of the emphasis in this is upon the outward action but it doesn’t consider the inward heart or attitude. Such action Jesus says is hypocrisy as it only looks worshipful and devotional while inside the attitude is completely different. This is often the observation of folks who look at the church as they say, “*You use all the right words but you don’t really mean them. You talk about love, but you don’t love. You talk about forgiveness but you don’t forgive.*” When everything becomes “externalized” and outward and as long as we are fulfilling our acceptable tradition we are right with God. Someone has well said that: **The most dangerous situation facing the church today is thinking that because we use the right words and believe right doctrines we are pleasing to God.** It can be difficult to determine if have become a church or an individual that places “***right words with wrong attitudes***” but one of the ways you can determine this is to ask yourself this question: “*If you became tangled up in some sin, overcome by some horrible failure in your life, embarrassed by some gross behavior; where would you feel you would receive the greatest amount of love and help to overcome your situation in the church among people like you or in a bar?*” **The truth is everyone of us at some time are going to need to run some where to receive help for what we have done to ourselves, my prayer is that we will run to God and His people our brothers and sisters and not the local bar!** It is at the church amongst God’s people that I will find folks who have done dumb things just like me and will help me recover by pointing me to Jesus just as someone had done for them!
2. Vs. 7 “*And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men*”: The second thing that the traditions of elders do is ***clothe the worlds wrong words in right sounding attitudes and traditions***. Here according to Isaiah this was another hypocrisy as the religious leaders as they took the concepts of the old nature and made people self righteous and self centered attitudes. Jesus had addressed this very issue a year earlier John chapter 4 verse 24 with the woman at the well. There Jesus told here that “*God is spirit and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and in truth.*” There to that woman by the well Jesus outlined **three essential elements of what true worship** of God entails:
 - a. ***First worship must be genuine***: It can not be superficial or shallow, it can not be something that you go through the motions on or repeat actions without the emotion behind it. There is no such thing as auto pilot when it comes to true worship. Worship in its purest form is spontaneous, an expression full of wonder and amazement that bursts forth in enthusiastic praise. Far too much of what passes of genuine worship is nothing more than a repeated liturgy or a contrived response to a structure of practice. What Isaiah was referring to was

that people had added traditions and worldly attitudes to be expressions of devotion and in essence killed any possibility of there being any true worship.

- b. ***Second worship is individualistic:*** That is not to say that we can't have or experience true worship of God corporately but that corporate worship is made up of individual expressions. Again Isaiah was writing against the establishment of rules that sought to regulate all into the same list of worship and expression. There may very well be similarity in our expression but there will always be individuals doing so. The posture or activity in which we are participating in must never supplant the individual's expression of their devotion and love of God.
- c. ***Third worship is growing:*** To worship God in spirit in truth requires and demands continual growth other wise it will become stagnate and hinder that what at one time it enhanced. No church creates worship by our traditions and structure all we can do is offer the opportunity for people to enter into their expression of devotion publically.

That was the problem with the teaching as doctrine the commandments of men as it removed true worshipful expression from the people. This is a difficult subject to talk about, "*the power religious tradition has over us*". How we perceive what is acceptable before God and what we deem as outside the realm of acceptance.

All sorts of things that we now conclude as being ok at one time in a previous generation was considered taboo. Everything from the day we worship, to the way we worship has been debated and new groups forming that took it outside the realm of what previously accepted. _