

## Mark 7:8-23

### “The Heart of the Matter”

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#### I.     **Introduction**

As we noted this section deals with the religious delegation sent from Jerusalem seeking a charge that they might accuse Jesus of. They found it in the observation of His disciples not ceremonially washing their hands while they ate from the 12 basket of fragments at the feeding of the 5000. The indictment, from my point of view, is far greater towards these religious “*do gooders*” as they were more concerned with religious observances than miracles. Mark presents this section in four-parts as we have noted:

- 1. Vs. 1-5 The Accusation
- 2. Vs. 6-13 The Condemnation
- 3. Vs. 14-16 The Declaration
- 4. Vs. 17-23 The Explanation

We have already commented on the accusation from the religious delegation and the first part of the condemnation from Jesus where He quoted Isaiah 29 in verses 6-7 answering the religious delegations question of “*Why His disciples didn’t walk according to the tradition of the elders*” with regards to ceremonial washing of hands. The simple answer

is that such practices leveled upon the disciples may have according to their traditions been religiously acceptable but it also contributed to their being inwardly arrogant and self righteous. At the heart of the disagreement is the traditions of elders verses the word of God. Some of the religious leaders claimed that the traditions of elders had come from Moses, others said that they came from the elders around Moses but the truth of the matter is neither of these positions was true.

## II. Vs. 8-9 A poor substitute

Vs. 8-9 The word “*laying aside*” in the Greek means to abandon and done so in order to go on to something else. And the word “*hold*” means to powerfully, carefully and faithfully hang on to something. *The religious leaders were zealots when it came to observing their own rules but had done so at the cost of abandoning the Word of God.* And the word “*reject*” means to set aside the affect of something in order to nullify its effect. In this case what they had set aside was the word of God in order to keep their own made up words.

Even the word used here in the Greek for “*tradition*” can mean “*substitution*” as what God want most is us not what we give Him or do for Him. Jesus points out that another danger of traditions is that they tended to replace the Word of God with regards to what is to direct the actions and hearts of people. They become *substitutions* for the word of God and what God really wants. But when we substitute things for the heart we can fall into wrong impression that what we are giving God or doing for God is what is most important and our relationship becomes nothing more than works to obtain what we want. *At the heart of God’s law was never performance it was relationship!* Tradition begins with offering God a substitute, holding the traditions of men, something declared

as “good” but the problem is that what we have declared as “good” is not what God wants us to offer, offer. “Good” can never be the substitute for the “Best”! Jesus points out that the elevation of the traditions of men to that of the Word of God erodes the character of God as well as the character of man. The outward establishment of signs and standards as determining the heart of a person towards God is not based upon man’s ideas but rather upon God’s word. *The fact that religious people attempt to regulate the truth is the surest sign that they are worshipping themselves not God.* And in so doing they were destroying the right influence of the word of God upon human hearts and substituting man’s opinion.

History reveals that the Jewish religious leaders came to honor their traditions far above the Word of God. One ancient Rabbi named Eleazer said, "*He who expounds the Scriptures in opposition to the tradition has no share in the world to come.*" The *Mishna*, (the written collection of Jewish traditions) records, "*It is a greater offense to teach anything contrary to the voice of the Rabbis than to contradict Scripture itself.*"

### III. Vs. 10-13 Side stepping

Vs. 10-13 The word “honor” in the Greek carries the idea of valuing where by a price is fixed upon the evaluation. Thus when you honor your father and mother there is a price fixed upon this that goes beyond merely respecting a person to deeming them worthy of your financial support. The word “*curses*” here means more than to just speak ill of but to abuse and revile. Jesus is indicting those that have placed traditions above the word with regards to the 5<sup>th</sup> commandment with elder abuse. “*Corban*” is a Hebrew word which Mark transliterates and explains it as meaning a gift or offering to God. The rabbinical tradition allowed the adult children to to keep whatever money should have been given

by the son for the support of the parents if he declared it a gift to God, just by saying so. This enabled then to justify not to honor his parents by providing their necessities. Such action invalidated the 5<sup>th</sup> commandment of God.

In using this illustration Jesus demonstrates another problem when traditions are offered as a **substitute** to God's word. Not only do the traditions of man become a **substitute** they enable a person to **side step obedience** to the word of God and by so doing they hurt people. Jesus offers up the illustration of the 5<sup>th</sup> commandment in Exodus 21:17, "*Honor your father and mother, and He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.*" **These men claimed to love God, but demonstrated it by showing that they had no love for their parents!** The commandment meant far more than just being polite and respectful to your parents it meant that there was an obligation to take care of them as they grew older, just as parents had an obligation to take care of their children when they were young. But the traditions of elders had work out a neat way of side stepping this commandment from God as the adult children could take the finances that were to be spent on care for parents and say that it was dedicated to God and by doing so they were now free to spend it as they wished. This commandment had to do with responsibility of distributing benevolence to older parents who without retirement and unable to work need to be cared for by their offspring and not a burden upon society. The tradition of elders in this case enabled the children to create a religious "*tax shelter*" and set aside the responsibility that God had clearly given them to care for their elder parents.

#### IV. Vs. 14-16 Defied or defiled

Vs. 14-16 Jesus now address the crowd to reveal the hypocrisy of the traditions of elders. The Greek word for "*defile*" is the same as verse 2 and means that which is profane and

secular compared to that which is sacred. Having spoken to the religious delegation, Jesus turns His words upon the multitude as He explains the problem with holding the traditions of elders as equal or above the word of God; they don't address the real problem with man. They portray a false view that what is wrong with humanity can be regulated as it is from the outside. But the truth is that what defiles us is not from the outside it is a problem of the heart and thus inside. We are separated from God based upon a heart ailment that not amount of proper diet can correct and instead we need a heart transplant! All the traditions of elders do for humanity is keep us in a state by which we won't turn to the great physician and receive the one thing that will cure us.

V. **Vs. 17-23 A difference in what is clean**

Vs. 17-23 Jesus seems to be disappointed that His own disciples were as caught up in the religious traditionalism as were the multitudes. This understanding wouldn't take its full understanding in Peter until his vision on the roof top in the town of Joppa, where he heard "*What God has cleansed, you must not call common*". Jesus had no illusions about human nature, as do some humanistic teachers do today. He realized that man is a sinner, unable to control or change his own nature.