

Mark Chapter 7

Mark 7:1 "Then came together unto him the Pharisees, and certain of the scribes, which came from Jerusalem."

“Pharisees ... came from Jerusalem”: This delegation of leading representatives of Judaism came from Jerusalem probably at the request of the Galilean Pharisees.

“Scribes” (see notes on 3:22; Matt. 2:4).

Jerusalem was to Judaism what Rome is to Roman Catholicism. Officials from the city of Zion were sent out to monitor the activities of this miracle-worker in Palestine’s hinterland (see also 3:22).

These scribes and Pharisees were actually spies sent from Jerusalem to find fault with whatever Jesus was doing. They were jealous of Jesus, because He had power in His ministry; and they were afraid that the people would follow Him, instead of coming to the temple.

Verse 2, here, shows that they were just trying to pick up any little thing they could, and make a big issue of it.

Mark 7:2 "And when they saw some of his disciples eat bread with defiled, that is to say, with unwashen, hands, they found fault."

“Unwashen”: The disciples of Jesus were being accused of eating with hands that had not been ceremonially cleansed, and thus had not been separated from the defilement associated with their having touched anything profane.

This had to do with all the ceremonial washings of the Hebrews. This really had nothing to do with physical cleanliness.

Mark 7:3 "For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, except they wash [their] hands oft, eat not, holding the tradition of the elders."

“Wash”: This washing had nothing to do with cleaning dirty hands but with a ceremonial rinsing. The ceremony involved someone pouring water out of a jar onto another’s hands, whose fingers must be pointing up.

As long as the water dripped off at the wrist, the person could proceed to the next step. He then had water poured over both hands with the fingers pointing down. Then each hand was to be rubbed with the fist of the other hand.

“Tradition of the elders”: This body of extrabiblical laws and interpretations of Scripture had, in actuality, supplanted Scripture as the highest religious authority in Judaism (see note on Matt. 15:2).

Certain unwritten traditions had come to be regarded as equal in authority to the Old Testament itself.

It seems that this teaching of washing or rubbing hands together was a tradition and not a law, even though it was included in the Talmud. The "Talmud" is a body of Hebrew civil and canon laws based on the Torah of Moses. The Torah is the first five books of the Old Testament.

Mark 7:4 "And [when they come] from the market, except they wash, they eat not. And many other things there be, which they have received to hold, [as] the washing of cups, and pots, brasen vessels, and of tables."

See note on 6:56.

These Jews were so class conscious, that they felt they needed to wash off the uncleanness of the lower class people they had touched. They were over-concerned about washing the physical and not aware at all of the need to clean up inside.

Verses 5-6: The concern was not with dirty hands, but with how Jesus' disciples were ignoring Jewish tradition and thereby becoming ceremonially unclean.

Mark 7:5 "Then the Pharisees and scribes asked him, Why walk not thy disciples according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashen hands?"

"Why, walk not thy disciples ... ?" The Pharisees and scribes went to the disciples' Master for an explanation of the disciples' allegedly disgraceful conduct. In reality they were accusing Jesus of teaching His disciples to disobey the traditions of the elders.

"Unwashen hands" (see note on verse 3).

Notice here, that they said tradition. It reminds me so much of doctrine. Really, what I call knit-picking. They were majoring on things that were not even God's teachings: not sin in their lives, but formality.

Mark 7:6 "He answered and said unto them, Well hath Isaiah prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoreth me with [their] lips, but their heart is far from me."

"Hath Isaiah prophesied" (Isaiah 29:13), is quoted almost word for word from the Greek translation of the Old Testament (LXX). Isaiah's prophecy perfectly fit the actions of the Pharisees and scribes (See note on Isa. 29:13).

"Hypocrites": Spiritual phonies (see note on Matt. 6:2). They followed the traditions of men because such teaching required only mechanical and thoughtless conformity without a pure heart.

Hypocrites is a strong word, it means they were pretending to be following the Lord, when what they were really doing was pleasing their flesh. This is a good description of what many Christians are doing today. On the one hand, they claim to be Christians, but they are living to please the flesh.

Mark 7:7 "Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching [for] doctrines the commandments of men."

"Howbeit" means "nevertheless".

This sort of Christianity is surface. It is not from the heart. He told them that their doctrines were what served their own desires and really had nothing to do with the wishes of God. Even church doctrines should not be based on one or two Scriptures, but should be taken from Jesus' own Words (written in red in the Bible), and from a balanced look at the entire Bible.

Verses 8-9: Years of tradition, Jesus is saying, had brought some Jewish religious practices into conflict with the far older commands of the Old Testament. Too many were substituting modern religious custom for divinely revealed truth.

Mark 7:8 "For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, [as] the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do."

“Commandment of God ... Tradition of men”: Jesus first accused them of abandoning all the commandments contained in God’s Word. Then He charged them with substituting God’s standard with a humanly designed standard (see note on Matt. 15:2).

Here we see a direct reprimand from Jesus toward these believers in name only. Tradition has nothing to do with real worship.

Mark 7:9 "And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition."

The tradition of men and the commandments of God are two different things.

Mark 7:10 "For Moses said, Honor thy father and thy mother; and, Whoso curseth father or mother, let him die the death:"

“Moses said”: Quoted from (Exodus 20:12; the fifth commandment), and (Exodus 21:17). Both refer specifically to the duty of honoring one’s parents, which includes treating them with respect, love, reverence, dignity, and assisting them financially. The second quotation indicates how seriously God regards this obligation.

Verses 11-12: Jews could evade responsibility to parents by declaring their substance “Corban,” “devoted to God.” Religious leaders evidently condoned this clear circumventing of both the letter and the intent of the Old Testament.

Mark 7:11 "But ye say, If a man shall say to his father or mother, [It is] Corban, that is to say, a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; [he shall be free]."

“Corban”: A Hebrew term meaning, “given to God.” It refers to any gift or sacrifice of money or goods an individual vowed to dedicate specifically to God. As a result of such dedication, the money or goods could be used only for sacred purposes.

Mark 7:12-13 "And ye suffer him no more to do ought for his father or his mother;" "Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered: and many such like things do ye."

“None effect through your tradition”: “Invalidating” means “to deprive of authority” or “to cancel.” The “tradition” in question allowed any individual to call all his possessions “Corban” (see note on verse 11). If a son became angry with his parents, he could declare his money and property “Corban.”

Since Scripture teaches that any vow made to God could not be violated (Num. 30:2), his possessions could not be used for anything but service to God and not as a resource of financial assistance for his parents.

But Jesus condemned this practice by showing that the Pharisees and scribes were guilty of canceling out God's Word (and His command to honor one's parents), through their tradition.

Jesus' quarrel was not with God's word, but with human misuse of it.

Jesus gave one specific Commandment that Moses gave the people from God that they had twisted around for their own convenience. This was not the only thing they had changed, but it was just an example of the many things they had changed to suit themselves.

We see in our day people getting away from the teachings in the Bible by saying, "That was for a long time ago, not our day." Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever. The truth never changes.

One of the worst things happening today is the tearing down of the home and marriage. With God, there are no alternate lifestyles. He ordained one woman for one man, marrying and building a family. Anything else is not God's will.

I too, just gave one example of a society on a down hill run to hell. There are many compromises God will not tolerate. Just because everyone else (tradition), is doing something, doesn't make it right.

Mark 7:14 "And when he had called all the people [unto him], he said unto them, Hearken unto me every one [of you], and understand:"

It is God's will that we all hear and understand. Some people reject the message that Jesus has for us. That is why it says, "Hearing, they will not hear". They must receive the message inside of them for them to truly understand and receive Jesus and His teachings.

Mark 7:15 "There is nothing from without a man, that entering into him can defile him: but the things which come out of him, those are they that defile the man."

Jesus was speaking, here, of eating and drinking really not defiling you. This whole statement was to tell them that the things that were in a man's heart which bring words out of his mouth is really what tells what he really is. Nasty words stemming from an evil heart defile a man. The mouth is an instrument of life or death.

In Romans 10:9-10, you can easily see that what you say is terribly important to salvation.

Mark 7:16 "If any man have ears to hear, let him hear."

This verse does not occur in the best manuscripts.

This is that ear of understanding. Everyone has ears that hang on the side of their head, but the ears Jesus was speaking of are ears to the heart.

Mark 7:17 "And when he was entered into the house from the people, his disciples asked him concerning the parable."

You see, Jesus spoke in parables, so that the lost world who had no love for God could not understand. The Holy Spirit has to open our understanding for us to truly understand. Jesus would teach the disciples while He was with them.

Verses 18-19: Once again Jesus challenges His disciples with searching questions.

Mark 7:18 "And he saith unto them, Are ye so without understanding also? Do ye not perceive, that whatsoever thing from without entereth into the man, [it] cannot defile him;"

“Defile him”: See note on verse 2.

Jesus almost scoldingly says, "Don't you understand this very simple thing".

Mark 7:19 "Because it entereth not into his heart, but into the belly, and goeth out into the draught, purging all meats?"

Since food is merely physical, no one who eats it will defile his heart or inner person, which is spiritual. Physical pollution, no matter how corrupt, cannot cause spiritual or moral pollution. Neither can external ceremonies and rituals cleanse a person spiritually.

By overturning the tradition of hand washing, Jesus in effect removed the restrictions regarding dietary laws. This comment by Mark had the advantage of hindsight as he looked back on the event, and was no doubt influenced by Peter's own experience in Joppa (See note on Acts 10:15).

Jesus had already taught them that no food was unclean, if prayer was said before they ate it. Food just passes through the body and goes out in the draught, so that could not possibly hurt anyone. The bitter thoughts that originate in the heart and are spoken out the mouth destroy people

Mark 7:20 "And he said, That which cometh out of the man, that defileth the man."

“That which cometh out of the man”: A person's defiled heart is expressed in both what he says and what he does (see note on Matt. 15:11; 12:34-37).

“Defileth” (see note on verse 2).

Many apparently thought that the food itself forbidden by parts of the Old Testament (see Lev. chapter 11), rendered the eater unclean. Jesus is not challenging the accuracy of the Old Testament. He is pointing out that what one produces from, not what he takes into himself, is the essence of human sin.

In context, Jesus is pointing out the futility of seeking spiritual salvation by means of ritual observances, like dietary laws, which are incapable of purifying the heart (i.e., the moral life). A clean heart is something different from a properly cared-for digestive tract.

Mark 7:21-22 "For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders," "Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness:"

“Fornications”: Literally illicit sexual activity.

“Lasciviousness”: Literally unrestrained, shameless behavior.

The heart of man is what he is. We will find as these Bible studies go on, that the heart is either desperately wicked or pure. There are no other ways. In a heart that is wicked, all of these sins that Jesus mentioned stem from this wicked heart.

We have said throughout all of these Bible studies that man is a spirit. He lives in a body, and he has a soul. The spirit of man wants him to live for God, and his flesh lusts after the evils of the world. Man, or mankind, is a free moral agent and can choose to be evil, or choose to follow God. The will of man will follow either the spirit or the flesh. It will not, and cannot do both.

Mark 7:23 "All these evil things come from within, and defile the man."

The sins mentioned (in verse 21 and 22), above, are the call of the flesh. A person who has turned himself over to the lusts of the flesh will do these sins. The heart of the evil man obeys the flesh. This was what Jesus was saying here.

Mark Chapter 7 Questions

1. Where had the scribes and Pharisees of verse 1 come from?
2. Who were they really?
3. What picky little thing did they say the disciples did that was wrong?
4. Washing the hands over and over done by the Jews was not a law, but _____ of the _____.
5. Where is this included?
6. What besides hands did they wash as part of the ceremony?
7. What question did these scribes and Pharisees ask Jesus about the disciples?
8. They were majoring on things that were not even God's teachings. They were _____.
9. What had Isaiah said about these hypocrites?
10. Where in Isaiah is this found?
11. Jesus was really telling them that their doctrines were to serve what?
12. What should church doctrines be based upon?
13. Jesus said laying aside the commandments of God that hold the _____ of _____.
14. What had Moses taught them to do?
15. How had they twisted this to satisfy their own needs?
16. What is Corban?
17. How do people of our day get away from the teaching of the Bible?
18. What is God's plan for man and woman?

19. In verse 14, what plea was Jesus making to the people?
20. What defiles a man?
21. What did He mean by "If any man have ears to hear, let him hear..."?
22. What did the disciples ask Jesus?
23. In verse 18, Jesus scolded them for what?
24. What destroys people?
25. Name five or more sins which proceed from the heart?
26. What two opposite ways can the heart be?
27. What part of man wants to live for God?
28. What part of man wants to live in sin?
29. What controls which way the man goes?
30. The heart of an evil man obeys what?

Mark Chapter 7 Continued

Verses 7:24 – 8:26: Jesus cares for and corrects various people.

Mark 7:24 "And from thence he arose, and went into the borders of Tyre and Sidon, and entered into a house, and would have no man know [it]: but he could not be hid."

“Tyre” (see note on 3:8).

“Would have no man know it”: Jesus did not seek a public ministry in the area. It is likely He wanted time to rest from the pressure of the Jewish leaders and an opportunity to further prepare the disciples for His coming crucifixion and their ministry.

Jesus and the disciples seek the privacy that has already eluded them twice (6:32-33, 53-54).

This was immediately after He had explained to the disciples about the wicked heart. The "He" here is Jesus. He left Galilee for a short time. Tyre was the capital of Phoenicia near Judea. This appears to be when Jesus had left the Jews and had gone to the Gentiles.

He possibly went to a friend's home to rest for just a little bit, and perhaps, He thought the scribes and Pharisees would not follow Him there. His fame had already spread here as well, and there would be no way for Him to get away where no one knew Him.

Mark 7:25 "For a [certain] woman, whose young daughter had an unclean spirit, heard of him, and came and fell at his feet:"

“Unclean spirit”: A demon (see note on 1:23; Matt. 15:22).

The woman’s behavior indicates both reverence and desperation.

This woman was not a Jew. She loved her daughter more than she feared being run off. Most mothers would have been terribly concerned about a daughter with an unclean spirit. This woman humbled herself by falling at the feet of Jesus.

Mark 7:26 "The woman was a Greek, a Syrophenician by nation; and she besought him that he would cast forth the devil out of her daughter."

“Greek”: A non-Jew in both her language and religion (see note on Rom. 1:14).

“Syrophenician”: The region of Phoenicia at that time was part of the province of Syria. (Matthew 15:22), adds that she was a descendant of the Canaanites.

This is one of Jesus’ few known dealings with a Gentile. The woman is from Phoenicia.

We see from this, that this was a Gentile; a Syrophenician. She knew what she wanted: Jesus to cast out this devil from her daughter.

Mark 7:27 "But Jesus said unto her, Let the children first be filled: for it is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast [it] unto the dogs."

“First”: The illustration Jesus gave was in essence a test of the woman’s faith. Jesus’ “first” responsibility was to preach the gospel to the children of Israel (Rom. 1:16; 15:8). But that also implied there would come a time when Gentiles would be the recipients of God’s blessings.

“The children’s bread, and to cast it unto the dogs”: “The children’s bread” refers to God’s blessings offered to the Jews. This picture indicates that the “dogs” (Gentiles), had a place in the household of God, but not the prominent one (see note on Matt. 15:26).

“Dogs”: This reference is to dogs that were kept as pets. Jesus was referring to the Gentiles, but He did not use the derisive term the Jews usually employed for them that described mangy, vicious mongrels.

Jesus’ reply is not a cruel dismissal but a test of the woman’s resolve, persistence, and faith.

“Children” would be either Israel (See Matt. 15:24), or the disciples. If the latter, Jesus is saying “Can you not leave us in peace? The disciples are weary.”

“Dogs” is literally “doggies,” household pets that would spend mealtimes beneath the table.

Jesus was speaking to her about coming to the Jews first. He didn't come out and say no, but He told her that He was to take care of the Jews first. Every non-Jew was thought of by the Jews as a dog at the time of this writing. He was just saying, "I can't neglect the chosen children to help those away from God".

Mark 7:28 "And she answered and said unto him, Yes, Lord: yet the dogs under the table eat of the children's crumbs."

“Yes, Lord”: Indicative of the woman’s humble faith and worshipful attitude. She knew she was sinful and undeserving of any of God’s blessing. Her response was characterized by a complete absence of pride and self-reliance, which Jesus answered by granting her request (verses 29-30).

The woman responds with insight into Jesus’ patient grace. She turns His own words back on Him.

This was a very wise woman. She did not argue with Him, she in fact agreed. Then she admitted to being unworthy. She was humble. She was willing to take the crumbs that fell from the table, knowing that even this would be the most powerful food she had ever eaten.

She was saying: "Lord, in the face of all the wonderful miracles, this is just a crumb compared to that". Her humbleness and faith won Him over. In another Scripture He said, "Woman your great faith". Here we see Jesus moved by this.

Mark 7:29 "And he said unto her, For this saying go thy way; the devil is gone out of thy daughter."

Her reply was evidence of the quality of her faith.

This Scripture tells us so much. First, that one person can stand in for another to be prayed for. The one being prayed for does not have to be there. We see here also, that devils dwell within people and sometimes must be cast out.

The Scripture nowhere says that the daughter prayed. You can pray for another's deliverance. There need not be any great lapse of time, this was done immediately.

Mark 7:30 "And when she was come to her house, she found the devil gone out, and her daughter laid upon the bed."

The devil had no choice, he had to leave. The daughter was free but exhausted and resting on the bed. The mother expected a miracle and got one. It was almost as if Jesus came there to do just this one miracle.

Mark 7:31 "And again, departing from the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, he came unto the sea of Galilee, through the midst of the coasts of Decapolis."

“Departing from the coasts of Tyre ... Sidon ... Sea of Galilee”: Jesus traveled 20 miles north from Tyre and passed through Sidon, which was deep into Gentile territory. From there He went east, crossed the Jordan, and traveled south along the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee.

Peter's home was next to the Sea of Galilee. He went near there often. Whether to rest or because it was familiar territory, I cannot say. It seems He didn't go straight back but took a little side trip.

Mark 7:32 "And they bring unto him one that was deaf, and had an impediment in his speech; and they beseech him to put his hand upon him."

This person was not totally dumb but, because of the impediment in his speech, we know that he had been deaf for a long time and had what we call tongue tied.

Just one touch of Jesus' hand would make him whole. These people were aware of Jesus' ability to heal. His fame had spread throughout the land; and they knew for sure that if the Lord would touch him, he would be made whole and able to hear and speak clearly.

Mark 7:33 "And he took him aside from the multitude, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spit, and touched his tongue;"

“Put his fingers into his ears”: Because the man could not hear, Jesus used His own form of sign language to tell him that He was about to heal the man's deafness.

“And he spit and touched his tongue”: Also a form of sign language in which Jesus offered the man hope for a restored speech.

This was a very dramatic healing. Jesus, in each instance, touched the problem area. This healing was not for the others, this was for this one individual. Jesus heals one at a time. He deals with us on an individual basis. In this, Jesus recognized where the problems were and dealt with the problems one at a time. This prepared the man to receive in both these areas.

Mark 7:34 "And looking up to heaven, he sighed, and saith unto him, Ephphatha, that is, Be opened."

“Ephphatha”: An Aramaic word that Mark immediately defines.

The word for “sigh” appears also (in Romans 8:23 and 2 Cor. 5:2). It reflects Jesus' inner emotional and spiritual fervor as He beseeches God to undo this evil.

This "looking up to heaven" lets this man know where his help came from. Perhaps, the "sigh" was to let the man (and all who read of this in the years to come), know that Jesus truly had compassion for those who were suffering for any reason. He suffers with us.

We know that Jesus is Lord of lords and King of kings and that everything in earth must bow to Him. He commanded these ears and tongue to be opened and not stammer.

Mark 7:35 "And straightway his ears were opened, and the string of his tongue was loosed, and he spake plain."

“String” would be simply that which had inhibited his speech.

We see here, that whatever kept this person deaf and dumb had to obey the voice of Jesus, and this person was made whole.

Mark 7:36 "And he charged them that they should tell no man: but the more he charged them, so much the more a great deal they published [it];"

“Tell no man”: Although Jesus ministered to Gentiles as the need arose, His intention was not to have a public ministry among them (see note on 1:44).

There was no possible way this man could keep it a secret that he was made totally whole. Suddenly he could hear the birds chirp and the rustling of the leaves when the wind blew. He could hear a baby cry or hear a mother sing a lullaby. His tongue was loosed as well, and you know he talked without stopping.

His praises of the God who did these wonderful things for him had to keep him talking constantly. Those who knew him before constantly asked how this all happened; and of course, he was so proud that he spread the word.

Mark 7:37 "And were beyond measure astonished, saying, He hath done all things well: he maketh both the deaf to hear, and the dumb to speak."

Here we see the reaction of those who saw and heard of the wonderful miracle performed in someone they knew. Possibly, many of these people had been going to worship regularly, but had never seen anything like this before.

This one miracle here could cause thousands to flock to Jesus to bring their sick and deformed to be healed. There would certainly be no place for Him to go now where they had not already heard of Jesus' miracles.

Mark Chapter 7 Continued Questions

1. In verse 24, where did Jesus go?
2. Why did He go to this house?
3. What country was this near?
4. What faith background did these people have?
5. What was wrong with the woman's daughter that came to Jesus?
6. When the woman fell at Jesus' feet, what did it show her as?
7. What was the woman's nationality?

8. What did the woman want Jesus to do?
9. What did Jesus answer her at first?
10. What were non-Jews thought of at this time?
11. What humble remark did the woman make to Jesus calling herself a dog?
12. What caused Jesus to answer her prayers?
13. What did Jesus tell her that He had done for her daughter?
14. Does the person being delivered have to be there?
15. What condition did the mother find her daughter in?
16. Where did Jesus go by when he went back to the Sea of Galilee?
17. Who lived near the Sea?
18. What was wrong with the man brought to Jesus?
19. What did they want Jesus to do?
20. What two visible things did Jesus do before He prayed for him?
21. What expression did Jesus make when He looked toward heaven?
22. What does Ephphatha mean?
23. How soon was the man healed?
24. What did Jesus tell them not to do?
25. What did they do?
26. Name some things that he could hear that he had not heard before?
27. How was the astonishment of the people described?
28. What effect would all this fame have?