

Mark 7:1-23

“The Heart Of The Matter”

This particular passage of scripture deals primarily with 2 topics, *tradition*, and *true cleanliness* before God. You’ve no doubt heard the expression, “Cleanliness is next to godliness.” Many people think that’s a phrase that’s found in the bible, it’s not. However to an extent there’s a bit of truth to the saying; the problem enters in when one begins to define what it means to be “clean.” Because there is an outward cleansing and there is an inward cleansing, the removal of the filth from the flesh means nothing, however the answer of a pure conscience before God having been cleansed of the guilt, the shame and the stain of sin means everything. Being “clean” before God really has nothing to do with you taking a bath (though we’re all thankful that you do), God’s not concerned so much about the filth that’s on our flesh as He is the filth that’s found in our heart and what we’ll discover as we survey this passage is that when you boil it all down the heart of the matter is a matter of the heart.

If you’re one who takes notes or etches in the margins of your bible I’ve broken down this passage like this. In Vs 1 we find The Delegation, in Vs 2-5 we have The Implication or the Insinuation, Vs 6-9 gives us The Accusation, Vs 10-13 we have The Illustration, Vs 14-16 The Exhortation and finally in Vs 17-23 Jesus gives us The Application. Notice with me beginning in Vs 1 of Ch 7 of the gospel of Mark.

Vs1-4

The word “couches” speaking of their dining area, the tables they ate upon and all of that. Now we need to realize right off the bat that this clash, this confrontation that’s about to go down between Christ and the Pharisees was inevitable. Because when we read there in Vs 1 that these boys came *down from Jerusalem* what that means to you and to me is that this was another “official delegation.” and They’ve no doubt been sent to reinforce their previous evaluation of Jesus, after all He’s healing all kinds of people, making front page national and even international news, this has to be kept in check. and These guys are the “super-delegates” of the nation of Israel, members (most likely) of the Sanhedrin, the highest governing body in the nation. Now I’m going to display my political ignorance to you in that I’ve never really understood the idea of “Super-delegates.” I’ve heard the term and just sorta thought, “What in the world is a *super* delegate?” So I looked it up, and I found this, “Super-delegates are designed to act as a check on ideologically extreme or inexperienced candidates. It also gives power to people who have a vested interest in party policies: elected leaders.” You recall that when Jesus fed the 5,000 that they were going to take Him and make Him their leader by force. I’ll guarantee you that ruffled a few feathers up in Jerusalem. So the 1st responders are dispatched, they need to place a check on this *extreme* candidate, after all they have a vested interest in the party policies of the nations leaders.

So don’t think of these guys coming down to evaluate the ministry of Jesus to find out if in fact He is the Messiah according to the scriptures, they’ve already given their verdict of Him. Remember? They said that He was casting out demons by the power of Satan, that He was in fact possessed by the devil and it was by the devil’s power that He was doing all these supernatural feats. They’re simply coming down now to find the “fly in the ointment” to put

question marks in people's minds about the legitimacy of this Man, and this was something that they were masters at.

Now I don't want to give you the idea that it was wrong for them to evaluate the ministry of Jesus. After all *they were* in the seat of the spiritual leaders of the nation, they had a certain duty to affirm and /or protect the people from false prophets, magnanimous claims of Messiahship from people who were fakes/charlatans and all the rest.

and In the same way we don't want to check our intellect at the door just because we come into a church. Oh we don't (or at least we shouldn't) sit there with a critical spirit simply looking to find some fault somewhere in order to justify some previously conceived notion that we might have. Yet at the same time we want to measure what's happening, what's being taught in the balance of the word of God. and We don't want to get behind things that are unbiblical even though they may be exciting or entertaining. We want to find ourselves centered on and being fed from the solid diet of God's Word.

But that was the problem here, the fact that they were evaluating Him was fine, however the *means* by which they chose to evaluate Him were all wrong. Because 1st of all as we've already noted their minds were made up before they ever got there, their decision was handed down back in Ch 3. and Anytime you have your mind made up about a person or a particular situation it is *impossible* for you to give an objective evaluation, because you're going into it with a biased resolve. It's impossible for you to see it any different because you don't *want* to see it any different and so you view every word, every action through the distorted lens of biased resolve. Jesus wasn't going to be able to do anything right in these guys eyes; they'd made up their mind. The 2nd problem with their evaluation is that they weren't evaluating His words or His works according to the word of God, but according to the *traditions* of the elders. They weren't considering God's word, only religious rituals and traditions; did you catch that in Vs 2? (Read)

You need to understand that when it speaks here of His disciples eating with "unwashed" hands it's not referencing personally hygiene, but rather ceremonial, ritualistic cleanliness. and Mark underscores this in Vs 3 and 4 (read).

Now I'm going to try to keep this relatively brief because I'm not sure how interested you are in the ceremonial cleansing rites found in ancient Judaism. But suffice it to say that it was a huge deal in the mind of the orthodox Jew in Jesus' day. and It all started from a good enough intent (most traditions do, and not all traditions are bad but when they stifle and smother the word of God it's a problem) the idea of ceremonial washing began with what God had commanded of the priests in Exodus Ch 30 and if it's good for the priests then it surely wouldn't be bad for us right? So they began to adopt these ceremonial rites that kept getting more and more involved and intricate and it began about 200 B.C. so that by the time Jesus was around these customs were well ingrained in the hearts and minds of the people. and About 200 yrs after Christ these oral traditions were penned down in what's called the Mishna which amounts to the Rabbis exposition/application on/of the law. Added to that was a commentary called the Gemara and together these books form the Talmud. Now, these contain 248 Thou shalt, 365 thou shalt nots, and some 30 Ch's dedicated to ritual cleansing. I say all that to sorta give you a grip on how deeply ingrained and important these things were to these people.

and Before they would eat or after they would come from the market place they would always undergo this ritual cleansing of their hands because they may've picked up something, somehow been defiled by brushing against a Gentile, or using money that had passed through Gentile hands. So they had this special way they'd wash with about a ½ cup of water pouring it over their hands beginning with the fingertips pointed up so that the water ran down off their wrists. Then they would place the other fist in their palm and kinda wipe their hand, then they would pour water from their wrist with their hand pointed down and allow the water to run off their fingertips completing the process and they'd say a special prayer as they did this and the whole bit.

and They'd do this several times through the course of a meal, the Pharisees noticed Jesus' disciples weren't doing that, so they found fault. Now in reality the fault was to found with in the Pharisees own hearts. Why? Because what they were seeking to pin on the Lord wasn't something that violated the scriptures, but rather that which they had added *to* the scriptures. The whole idea behind the actual cleansing rites that God had established for the priesthood was to communicate the fact that one needed to be made clean to come into the presence of God. But not *externally*; *internally* God wasn't seeking to tell them they needed to have clean *hands* but rather a clean *heart*.

But they found fault nonetheless; there are 2 categories of people on this planet. Those who will seek to *follow* Jesus and those who will seek to *find fault* with Jesus. Both are represented in this passage, there are those who want to know Him, follow after Him, and lay down their lives before Him, and there are those who want to point out what they believe to be problems with Him in order to justify their own personal position. Which category do you find yourself in? A follower of Christ, or are you looking to find fault with Christ so you can justify your own position?

Vs 5

Now don't miss the subtleties here their problem isn't really with the Lord's disciples, the point is that they're *His* disciples, they're finding fault with Christ. The *implication* is that they're in sin and He's condoning it, guilty of the same.

and You know it's ez to look at this and sorta write this off like, "C'mon guys, you gotta be kidding me? You think a certain way you run water over your hands is what makes you right in God's sight? That's ridiculous! You don't read that anywhere in the bible so why are you so stuck on it?" We're some 2,000 yrs removed and complete cultures apart. Yet how different are we really when it comes to traditions that we're ready to go toe to toe over? Is it biblical to have church on Sunday? Sure it is. But what about the order of service, what determines what time to start, what style of worship songs we use, how long our bible studies are, what comes 1st worship or the word? Those things aren't in the bible. What about communion, is it biblical? You bet, but what about how often we take it, *when* we take, at what point in the service we take it? Those things are tradition. What about baptism, is it biblical? with out a doubt. But how soon should a person be baptized after they say "yes" to Jesus? Should you baptize people once a month, each week, right after they give their life to Christ? Then there are churches that won't even recognize baptism unless you've been baptized by their denomination. and You can't become a member of their church until you're baptized into their church. Show me that one in the bible...But balk at it or take issue with it and see how you fare and what happens with your

status in the fellowship. As far as that goes find me the principle of church membership in the bible in the 1st place... You won't find it, it's a tradition that man has adopted. and What about personal traditions, those certain things that we think we need to be about in order to be right with God. Dress code, hair style, if you where a skirt it needs to for sure be below the knees, preferably to the ankles but if your knees are showing you're not pleasing God. If you where your hair down it might be provocative so keep it in a bun, no make up, if you where black it needs to be in the form of a suit because if its in the form of a t-shirt and jeans that's ungodly. On and on it goes, piercings, ears are ok, the nose is out of control. Now we make light of these things but challenge them and you'll have a fight on your hands. Man is always looking to the outward appearance. What's God searching? The heart.

Vs6-9

Jesus didn't even entertain their *implications* He went straight into a personal *accusation* regarding the reality of where they were at in their hearts before God. He said, "Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites." The word hypocrite speaks of an actor, someone who puts on a mask, a façade that gives the appearance of one thing but there's no substance to it. In reality underneath they're something completely different, it's all smoke and mirrors.

What's the smoke screen? The fact that they *honor* God, that's the appearance, it's *not* the actuality. They honor God with their lips, which is to say they offer up lip service, say the right things, give off a spiritual appearance, but the fact of the matter is that in their heart the affection isn't there, it's not real, they're somewhere else. and God rejects the worship of the mouth if it's not an overflow from the wellspring of the heart. God doesn't want our lip service. Paul spoke of a people in the book of Titus and said of them, "*They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work.*" **Titus 1:16** They've got all the right words, things appear so good, but the substance of their lives stands in complete contradiction to what they profess with their mouths. In our modern vernacular we might say it like this, "They go to church every Sunday but their heart is far from Me." "They sing out strong during the worship service but their heart is far from Me." "When the tithe is received they always give generously, but their heart is far from Me." It becomes increasingly obvious doesn't it? God's not interested in our outward works; we can't clean the dish on the outside and think that makes it all good on the inside. God isn't setting up hoops for us to jump through so that we can be pleasing in His sight; He wants your heart, not *far* from Him, but *near* to Him. He doesn't want your games; He wants a grip on your heart.

"In vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men." Of course this is one of the pillars of legalism, taking the opinion of man and giving it weight that's equal to the word of God. and Often times the traditions gain an even greater grip on us than does the word of God, we'll hold to the teachings of man over and above the clear and obvious direction of the scriptures. That's why in the Roman Catholic world even though the bible clearly teaches that Mary had multiple children they still hold her up as a perpetual virgin. Because the word of the pope can supersede scripture; that's why even though the bible is clear that there is only 1 mediator between man and God the Man Christ Jesus, in the Roman Catholic world Mary is held up as a co-redemptrix. That's how even though the bible is clear that Christ is the only acceptable sacrifice for sin and God demonstrated it through the resurrection and ascension the Roman Catholics assert the ascension of Mary, and I don't want

you to go away from here thinking, “Man he really picked on the Catholics today!” I’m simply showing you how easily this can happen, teaching as doctrine the commandments of men. Receiving the word of man, then (Vs 8) laying God’s word aside in order to hold to traditions and teachings of men, then in Vs 9 rejecting God’s word altogether which ultimately leads to what we’ll see in Vs 13 robbing the word of God of it’s power, making it of no effect through the traditions of man. Isn’t it amazing how fast people are willing to fight for the word of man and at the same time reject the word of God and then somehow they think that in so doing they’re pleasing God?

So Jesus makes an accusation, then in Vs 10 He begins His illustration, His example to underscore His accusation, Exhibit A, so to speak.

Vs10-13

“Many” is exactly accurate, we’ve already spoken in times past about the unbelievable restrictions and rituals they tied to the Sabbath, now we’re seeing these things regarding ceremonial cleansing.

and Here Jesus brings up another tradition regarding their giving. The scriptures plainly teach (it’s the 5th commandment) “Honor your father and your mother.” and Jesus plainly understood this to go beyond (though certainly including) being respectful and cordial. They didn’t have retirement plans or 401k (not that that undermines the point here either). But when your parents got older if they were in a place where they couldn’t take care of themselves you were to help them. Help support them financially if the need be. But they had concocted a little tradition that said, “Well, if you devote your finances to the temple, then you keep them and do whatever you want with them until you die, then the temple gets them.” and They’d use that to get around the responsibility plainly placed upon them by the word of God to take care of their folks because the scribes had said that if you gave your resources to the temple (or to God) that trumped needs of your folks, you don’t have to do that. So their parents would be hurting, or in need but you’d simply declare “Corban” and it was a legal loophole. “Sorry mom, my stuff is God’s I can’t give it to you.” and It was this heir of spirituality, giving all you had to God, in reality you just didn’t want to kick down for your folks. and In doing that you made the word of God of no effect, and gave more credence to the word and ways of man.

Vs14-16

You kinda get the idea that when these guys stepped into the ring that the crowd moved back. Jesus calls them to come closer so that they can all hear and wants to make something very clear to them. and We do well to note the importance to the Lord that we get this. He makes a special effort to call them to Himself, exhorts them to both hear and understand and then repeats the need to understand it in Vs 16. Understand what? That there’s nothing that enters a man from the outside which can defile him; but the things which come out him, those are the things that defile a man.

and I want to be careful to re-emphasize the context here lest someone draft a wrong conclusion. He’s talking here about things we eat for our sustenance, food. He’s not saying that nothing that enters you from the outside can defile you so there’s no worries absorbing that porn, or smoking that weed, or drinking all that alcohol, or taking various narcotic drugs after all they come in from the outside so they must be safe. He’s saying that you don’t have to worry about sin rubbing off on you like cooties. You can eat a ham sandwich and not have to worry

about it defiling you because you shook hands with an unbeliever before you ate it. It's not what goes into your mouth that's really important, it's what comes out of your mouth that you need to worry about.

But this statement about go ahead and eat what you want was radical, it was revolutionary, Jesus fulfilling the law freed them with this one statement from dietary restrictions. Again because the idea of unclean foods was ultimately pointing to the need to be clean inwardly, that's what Jesus does for us, it's not the letter of the law, the ritual, it's the spirit, the heart of the matter is a matter of the heart, notice.

Vs17

It didn't really seem like a parable to me, seemed pretty straight forward really. But the concept was so mind boggling and revolutionary to them that they thought, "What's He really trying to say? There's got to be some deep meaning here." and It wouldn't really be until Acts Ch 10 that Peter got it, it was so deeply ingrained in them.

Vs18-23

What's the application? That it's not really about what goes into your mouth.

When a steak hits your stomach it goes through the digestive process and what can be used is used, the rest is discarded. What you eat hits the stomach, not the heart, but what comes out of your mouth flows forth from your heart and that's where we get into trouble. You've heard me say it before, what's in the well of the heart is drawn out through the bucket of the mouth.

and Jesus gives this list of things (not exhaustive by any means) yet repulsive nonetheless and yet who among us can say that none of these things have never been swimming around in our heart and /or mind? Evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders (or even seething anger), thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye (or envy), blasphemy (slandering God), pride, moral foolishness?

These things originate with in the heart of man, you'd like to think that your child was perfect until he/she was influenced by that other child. Sorry mom, sorry dad, that other person didn't place anything in your child, oh they may've drawn it *out* of them, but they didn't place it *in* them. You can't draw out what isn't there. You'd like to think that your wife is the reason you got so angry, sorry. Oh she may've drawn the anger out of you, but it was already residing in you. These things originate in the heart, there are none that are righteous, no not one.

Jeremiah 17:9 declares, "*The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked;*" The proverbs exhort us, "*Keep your heart with all diligence, For out of it spring the issues of life.*" Proverbs 4:23 These are the kinds of things that reside in the human heart, these are the tendencies that lie dormant in you at birth and only develop and mature from there. and That's why the bible teaches us that we must be *born again*. Job said, "*Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? No one!*" Job 14:4 and Again, "*What is man, that he could be pure? And he who is born of a woman, that he could be righteous? If God puts no trust in His saints, And the heavens are not pure in His sight, How much less man, who is abominable and filthy, Who drinks iniquity like water!*" Job 15:14-16 and Finally, "*How then can man be righteous before God? Or how can he be pure who is born of a woman?*" Job 25:4 The answer is he can't...

That's why we have to be *born again* as by the Spirit of God.

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.” 2 Cor 5:17 When Jesus died upon the cross He paid the penalty in full for our sin; it’s His blood that’s paid the sin debt for mankind and it’s faith in Him that imputes or accredits His righteousness to our account. The bible says, *“For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”* 2 Cor 5:21 The heart of the matter is a matter of the heart, when God is searching your heart what does He find, your sin, or His righteousness, your tradition or His truth? Draw near *to* Him, walk closely *with* Him, lay down your life *before* Him, surrender your own ideals, your own philosophy or personal point of view, it’s not about a set of rituals, it’s about a loving relationship with Jesus. He laid down His life for you, the question is will you lay down your life, your wants, your will for Him?

Prayer Points:

Lord search our hearts, help us not to try and hide what’s really there from You. and As you see things that You want to change, or You want us to surrender, or lay aside, may we not resist You but be willing to receive Your will and obey Your word. Help us that we not get caught in the snares of our traditions at the expense of Your truth, and wash us, cleanse us, have Your way in us.

If perhaps you’re waking up to the reality that you’ve been trying to please God on the basis of what you do rather than resting in what Jesus has done, or if in some way God is speaking to you, dealing with you, knocking on the door of your heart. He wants to come in, toss that old heart out the door and give you a brand new one. He wants to create in you a clean heart, and renew a right spirit with in you. Why not let Him do that today?