

**THE TRADITIONS OF MEN, or
THE COMMANDMENTS OF GOD**

Mark 7:1-13

Intro: It has been a month since I last spoke to you from the Gospel according to Mark. I brought three messages in the last three Sundays of December from Hebrews 2 which had to do with the coming of the Son of God to earth *as a Man*. This is the event which we remember during the Christmas season. We saw in Hebrews 2 that our Lord came to redeem sinners, paying by His death on the Cross the penalty for their sins. On the second Sunday we learned that our Lord died to defeat our Archenemy, the Devil. And then on Christmas Sunday we had the truth brought out in the last two verses of Hebrews 2, that our Lord came to earth as a Man that He might be “a merciful and faithful High Priest” for His people “in things pertaining to God.” And that, of course, is the main theme of the Book of Hebrews.

Last Sunday, being the first day of 2006, a time when people often think of new year’s resolutions, we saw in Psalm 27 what was David’s resolution, not just for a year or so, but what was his resolution for his life, the main objective he had in his relationship with the Lord. It is expressed in verse 4 of Psalm 27 where we find these words, reading verse 5 with it:

4 One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in his temple.

5 For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion: in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me; he shall set me up upon a rock (Psalm 27:4-5).

I believe that one reason King David wrote the one thing that was uppermost in his mind each day, was that he was encouraging us to do what he did – to live each day as in the presence of the Lord, delighting himself in the Lord, and seeking to know from day to day how truly glorious our God is. I hope we all have been thinking about that verse this week, possibly memorizing it, but making it the life-long resolution of our lives.

The four Gospels record for us only a part of the life our Lord lived while He was here on earth. But the writings of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John contain far more that any of us will be able to fully understand. That is the reason that we need to be reading them over and over again, always seeking the help of the Holy Spirit in understanding more about the life of our Lord here on earth.

If all we had was the Gospel of Mark, we really wouldn't understand anything about the birth of the Lord, or those early days of His life. After stating very forcibly that Jesus of Nazareth was the Son of God, Mark introduced us to the ministry of John the Baptist who was sent by God to prepare the way for the public ministry of Jesus the Christ, the Messiah. And then Mark tells us about our Lord's baptism, about His temptation by the Devil, and how the Lord began His ministry, "preaching the gospel of the Kingdom of God," which is the Gospel. He called four men from the fishing business to be His disciples, and eventually, His apostles. Then Mark began to tell us about the miraculous works of the Lord. Interspersed with the miracles of the Lord, are His teachings, but while John Mark gives us many things that the Lord said in His teaching, he does not give us the extended messages like the other Gospel writers do. If you have a red letter edition of the NT which gives the words of our Lord in red print, you can see the difference between Mark as compared with Matthew, Luke, and John concerning the messages of the Lord. Mark was probably the first one to write, and the others seem to have expanded upon what he wrote. Of course, all of this was under the direct guidance and inspiration of the Spirit of God.

The Lord made it very clear, especially in the Gospel of John, that He came to do the will of His Father in heaven. This He did:

- 1) In His works.
- 2) In His words.
- 3) In His ways.

Or it could be stated in this way. The Gospel writers tell us:

- 1) About His preaching and teaching/
- 2) About His miraculous works.
- 3) About the training of His twelve apostles.

Everything pointed to the ultimate work that the Father had sent Him to do, and that was the giving of Himself of a sacrifice to God on behalf of those sheep He had come to save. The price of their salvation, was the shedding of His own precious blood. All through history, there never has been a person like Him. He was infinitely superior to the best of men who have lived upon this earth. No one spoke like He did. He spoke the truth. He did not need to be trained in the schools of the Rabbis because He was the truth. No one ever lived without sin like He did. He never sinned in what He thought, nor in what He taught, nor in what He wrought. Mark and Matthew and Luke agreed heartily with what the Apostle John wrote in John 1:14, speaking of the Lord Jesus Christ:

14 And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we

beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth (John 1:14).

As we come to Mark, chapter 7, we are reminded that not everyone held Jesus in such high esteem. In fact, the religious leaders of the day were opposed to Him, His teaching, and their hearts were full of envy because of the response our Lord had gotten from the people because of His teaching, and because of the amazing miracles He was performing day after day.

We met them first in chapter 2, verses 16 through 24. There they brought three complaints to the Lord, and their complaints were primarily against His disciples. They feared that the Lord's teachings would spread among more of the people. They were critical because the Lord and His disciples were eating with publicans and sinners. They were critical because the disciples were not fasting like they did, and even like the disciples of John did. And, what was one of their greatest problems with the Lord, was that He and His disciples did not observe the Sabbath the way they taught that it should be observed.

The opposition of the Pharisees continued in chapter 3, where He healed a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath. The Lord knew what they were thinking, and He asked them a question in verse 4 which they refused to answer. When the Lord proceeded to heal the man's hand, the Pharisees went out and tried to enlist the Herodians in their opposition to the Lord. These so-called spiritual leaders of Israel were already wanting to kill the Lord.

Then we don't hear about them again until we come to our text for today, and here their complaint was against the way the Lord's disciples ate their food.

It appears as we read this that the disciples were not sanitary. It probably bothered the Pharisees that the Lord's disciples were not men of the intelligentsia, or educated class, of the day. But the Pharisees were not talking about common hygiene, they were talking about ceremonial cleansing, cleansing which was designed to impress the onlookers of the devotion of the men in their attempt to cleanse themselves from the defilement that was present in mingling with people and being in certain places. Mark described perfectly what they were doing. They were "holding the tradition of the elders."

Now the word “tradition” is not necessarily a bad word, although it is bad here. A “tradition” is something that is handed down from one generation to another. Paul had this to say to the believers in Thessalonica,

6 Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us (2 Thess. 3:6).

Now the Jews had a very rich tradition. Think of all of the wonderful truth about God, and the will of God, and the ways of God, that is found in the OT. But the problem was that gradually through the years men on their own, had added to what God had revealed, and so in the time that our Lord was here on earth a massive amount of tradition had gradually been added, but it was the tradition of men, not the Word of God.

Peter in writing to Jewish believers who had suffered much for their faith, had this to say about their “tradition” in his first epistle. Most of you will recognize this verse as I read it, and perhaps some of you have even memorized it. This is what Peter wrote:

18 Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers;

19 But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot:

20 Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you (1 Peter 1:18-20).

I read verse 18 to the Tuesday Class last week as we were talking about the word translated in the KJV as “conversation.” And I mentioned that this word has been completely changed in meaning since the KJV was translated. It meant conduct or walk then, but it means talk now. Peter said it was “vain,” empty, meaningless.

Illus: When we were in Jerusalem, the large pool outside one of the Jews’ place of worship. with places for men to sit around the pool where water came out so that they could wash their hands before going into the place of worship. Peter called it vain because we are not cleansed from the defilement of sin by water! It takes the blood of Christ. When the men add their tradition to the Word of God, the tradition soon takes the place of the Word of God. Our Lord said as much as we can see in verse 13: “Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered: and many such like things do ye.”

We can see from what the Pharisees and scribes said in verse 5, the question that they asked of the Lord, that it was not the Word of God that they were concerned about, but “the tradition of the elders.” The word of man had replaced the Word of God to such an extent that the Pharisees and scribes would without shame, dare to ask the Lord a question which displayed their own ignorance.

But notice what the Lord did. He responded to the Pharisees and scribes with a quotation from one of their prophets. And when you examine those words you can see that the Lord was not only calling them hypocrites, but was proving it. It was all for show. People don't like the Gospel and the Word of God because it humbles them. The tradition of men, emphasizing what man needs to do to please God, makes sinful men even prouder in heart. The way even pastors handle the Word of God, can reveal whether they know the Lord, or not.

As I have been thinking about this passage this week, I asked myself the question, Why did the Lord refer to His Word as “the commandment of God” as opposed to simply calling it *the Word of God*? I don't know that I have the whole answer, but I think it was because He wanted to emphasize with those scribes and Pharisees *the authority of God's Word*. Man has absolutely no right to add to what God has revealed, nor does he have any right to take away anything. And when man's word runs contrary to God's Word, man is replacing God's word, God's commandment, with his own word. And it isn't long before man's word becomes a tradition and the Word of God is either forgotten altogether, or parts are deleted.

There were things going on in our Lord's day, just as there are in our day, whereby people are setting aside the Word of God in preference for what they want to do.

But notice the example that the Lord used. He reached back into the law of God, the commandment of God, where God said through Moses that children need to honor their parents. And that command holds as long as the parents live. A man may leave his father and mother when he gets married, but his obligation to respect them and to care for them, to make sure that their needs are met, remains. And when you see this going on, it is a blessing to behold.

But what had the Jewish tradition done? And the elders and scribes and Pharisees were responsible for perpetrating this tradition. They were

saying that the command of God for children to honor their parents is not a command. You can do it if you want to, but you don't have to if you don't want to. That command doesn't hold anymore; it is now just a "gift" if you do anything for your parents.

So what happens if it is a gift. It is left up to every individual to do what he wants to do. You see, even then people were more concerned about human rights than they were about the Word of God.

But there is another factor in this sad story, because it really is sad. You and I can't consistently violate the Word of God without paying a great price. The reason this "tradition" was so popular with the scribes and Pharisees, was because they wanted the money that children might use to take care of their parents.

When the Lord was denouncing the scribes and Pharisees in the words we find in Matthew 23, one of the things that He said was this. Listen carefully to these words:

14 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation (Matt. 23:14).

Where were those widows' kids (plural, because it was happening all of the time) when the scribes and Pharisees were taking their mother's home away from her?

Think of what people are doing to the Bible in our day – adultery, homosexuality. the feminists who say they are not going to be satisfied until they destroy marriage. That is a good tradition as long standing as the human family. Those who take that stand have God to deal with.

It's no wonder that people want to do away with Christmas, or anything that has to do with Christ. The scribes and Pharisees wanted to kill Jesus, and they finally got what they wanted, or did they? They killed Him, but He arose from the dead, and now there is nothing that they can do.

We are in a warfare worse than any other war that has ever been waged, a war against the commandments of God, a war against the Word of God, a war against the Christ of the Word. And it looks like God is losing. But don't be deceived. Read your Bible, and you will see what the outcome will be. Oh, my dear fellow-believers, let's stand on the Word and for the Word and by the Word. Know the Bible so well that you know when you

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are hearing someone who would lead you down to wreck and ruin. And make sure that your children are being grounded in the Word of God. Those who truly know the Lord are going to love the Word, and obey it, and seek by God's grace to get others to believe and obey it. The Devil is sentenced to spend eternity in a lake of fire where the fire will never go out. And the same destiny awaits all who take sides with the traditions of men and against the commandments of God. Make sure that you are on the right side, and that is God's side. May the Lord give us the grace to be faithful to Him until He calls us home, or until He comes again.