

# Mark

## Chapter Seven

### Introduction

Every Sunday, many spiritually needy people are asked to leave the churches they have come to visit. They are not asked to leave directly; they are asked to leave indirectly. It quickly becomes clear to them that they are not welcome because they don't fit in. It could be their clothing, or their grooming, or their nationality, or their color; it could be any of a number of things that makes it clear to them that they don't, and that they never will, fit in. So they leave because they have indirectly been asked to leave by the *practices* and *preferences* of the saints they encountered in the Lord's household of faith.

Every church has its own particular practices and preferences. That's OK, *until* some practice or preference bars someone from seeking after God. Then the practice or preference must be re-evaluated by the precepts and principles found in God's Word.

Jesus once said,

Matthew 11:28 "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

Matthew 11:29 "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

Matthew 11:30 "For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

The burdens He was speaking of were the religious burdens placed upon the common people by the self-righteous Pharisees. The practices and preferences of the Pharisees were barring people from fellowship - people who the Lord came to bring to Himself.

If *you* don't want to become like the Pharisees in *your own* practices and preferences, you will want to take a good look at Mark Chapter Seven. There Jesus calls the practices and preferences of the Pharisees "the traditions of men" which "reject the commandment of God." Then, as the Chapter closes, Jesus shows you the proper

way to treat someone seeking after Him: Not with manmade tradition, but with the Master's tenderness.

#1 Because Of Their Traditions Men Bar  
You From Fellowship At The Lord's Table  
(7:1-23)

Having a personal relationship with Jesus is often compared to the fellowship of sharing a meal with Him around His table. One of our most beloved verses is Revelation 3:20, where Jesus says,

Revelation 3:20 "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me."

Mark organizes his thoughts in Chapter Seven around this idea of fellowshiping with the Lord at His table. By their traditions, the Pharisees were barring people from fellowship at the Lord's table. By directly teaching that you couldn't eat until you washed in a very particular and ritual way, they were indirectly telling the people that they were not welcome at the Lord's table. The Lord refutes them, then immediately gives His disciples an object lesson. A Gentile woman, who every Jew would have agreed had no place at the Lord's table, comes to Jesus. What do she and the Lord talk about? *They talk about her place at His table!* Jesus, in His tenderness, receives her into fellowship, showing His disciples and us that His tenderness always triumphs over manmade tradition.

Mark 7:1 Then the Pharisees and some of the scribes came together to Him, having come from Jerusalem.

Mark 7:2 Now when they saw some of His disciples eat bread with defiled, that is, with unwashed hands, they found fault.

Mark 7:3 For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands in a special way, holding the tradition of the elders.

Mark 7:4 When they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they wash. And there are many other things which they have received and hold, like the washing of cups, pitchers, copper vessels, and couches.

It's a good idea to wash your hands before you eat. I'm sure you all appreciate the sign in every restaurant restroom that urges food preparers to wash their hands before returning to work!

But notice Mark says that "the Pharisees...do not eat unless they wash their hands in a special way..." He is describing a religious, ritual way of rinsing your hands, a self-righteous ceremony, that the Pharisees burdened the people with. An early Jewish document reads,

"Hands become unclean and are made clean as far as the wrist. How so? If [you pour] the water over the hands as far as the wrist and [pour] the second water over the hands beyond the wrist and the latter [water] flowed back to the hands, the hands...become clean."<sup>1</sup>

This was a rinsing, not a washing. Your hands would not necessarily be *really* clean, but they would be *ritually* clean. This was a ceremony. It spilled-over to the ritual washing "of cups, pitchers, copper vessels, and couches" - everything associated with eating. You couldn't eat without washing your hands and your utensils in this special, religious way. There is a story told of one Jew who, when in prison, almost died of thirst because he was using his drinking water for ritual rinsing of his hands before he ate!

We're OK on ritual washing. But the point is this: Any practice or preference can all too easily become a tradition that bars people from fellowship with the Lord. Friends of mine in Southern California once were required by a church to be re-baptized for membership. The church, of course, practiced water baptism. They also preferred to personally baptize all who attended. This grew into a tradition that barred you from membership unless you were baptized by them.

We frequently criticize the disciples for their lack of spiritual insight. But notice that "some of [the] disciples [ate] bread with...unwashed hands." They were growing in fellowship with the Lord - leaving behind the burdens of religion for the blessings of relationship with Jesus.

The Pharisees, looking to accuse Jesus, wasted no time:

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<sup>1</sup>quoted by Hendriksen, *Mark*, pps. 272-273.

Mark 7:5 Then the Pharisees and scribes asked Him, "Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashed hands?"

Mark 7:6 He answered and said to them, "Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: 'This people honors Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me.

Mark 7:7 And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.'

Mark 7:8 "For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men; the washing of pitchers and cups, and many other such things you do."

When tradition bars someone from fellowship, it is evil. Those who demand that their tradition be kept are "hypocrites" - making an outward show of worship with their lips while inwardly their hearts are unchanged.

Outward practices cannot affect the inner person. There must be a change in the heart first, *then* a change in behavior consistent with the precepts and principles taught in God's Word.

Jesus gives them an example of how their own traditions contradicted the commandments of God:

Mark 7:9 He said to them, "All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition.

Mark 7:10 "For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother'; and, 'He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.'

Mark 7:11 "But you say, 'If a man says to his father or mother, "Whatever profit you might have received from me is Corban"; ' (that is, a gift to God),

Mark 7:12 "then you no longer let him do anything for his father or his mother,

Mark 7:13 "making the word of God of no effect through your tradition which you have handed down. And many such things you do."

It's up to children to properly care for their parents in their old age. The fifth commandment implies your continuing responsibility for the elderly. Jesus certainly interpreted it that way. Instead of sacrificing to help their needy parents, the Jews had developed a tradition that you could dedicate your money to God - making it unavailable to anyone else. But, instead of giving it to God, you kept it *and* kept on getting the benefit from it. Thus you appeared spiritual by the keeping of the outward tradition while you were really carnally rejecting God's revealed Word.

Mark 7:14 When He had called all the multitude to Himself, He said to them, "Hear Me, everyone, and understand:

Mark 7:15 "There is nothing that enters a man from outside which can defile him; but the things which come out of him, those are the things that defile a man.

Mark 7:16 "If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear!"

This is the Declaration of Religious Independence! It establishes once and for all that things like diet, dress, and days have nothing to do with true holiness and spirituality. It sets you free from all of those rules and rituals which are supposed to make you more righteous but which only reveal your own self-righteousness. It puts all of the focus on the inner person, on the heart. You can do nothing that will change your heart - *except to believe on Jesus!* When you do, you are declared righteous by God, and an inward change begins that will affect your outward behavior.

We simplify this by saying that *religion* cannot save you, but that *relationship* can and does save you. Christianity is not the practice of a religion; it is a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

Mark 7:17 When He had entered a house away from the crowd, His disciples asked Him concerning the parable.

Mark 7:18 So He said to them, "Are you thus without understanding also? Do you not perceive that whatever enters a man from outside cannot defile him,

Mark 7:19 "because it does not enter his heart but his stomach, and is eliminated, thus purifying all foods?"

Mark 7:20 And He said, "What comes out of a man, that defiles a man.

Mark 7:21 "For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders,

Mark 7:22 "thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness.

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

The problem of the human race is not a matter of diet, but of depravity. No particular diet, no preference of dress, no prescribed days, can ever hope to change your standing before God. You are a depraved sinner, capable of all of these things listed by Jesus, and many worse things. The heart of your problem is the problem of your heart.

"Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me."

The door Jesus is standing outside is the door of the human heart. If you want to be technical, it was the door of the Laodicean Church. But, remember, the Church is not a building, it is the people inside the building; and the Laodiceans were people who individually

needed to open the doors of their hearts and receive the Lord as Savior!

I don't ever want to bar someone from the Lord because of my own practices and preferences. Every Christian, and every group of Christians in a Church, has its own practices and preferences. That's OK, as long as they don't become traditions which replace and reject the clear principles and precepts of God's Word. We are not here to burden people with religious rules and rituals. We are here to bring them into the freedom of a relationship with Jesus. We are here to bring them to the Lord's table so that they can share fellowship with their risen Savior, Jesus Christ.

## #2 Because Of His Tenderness Jesus Brings You To Fellowship At The Lord's Table (7:24-37)

Jesus immediately heads out into Gentile country:

Mark 7:24 From there He arose and went to the region of Tyre and Sidon. And He entered a house and wanted no one to know it, but He could not be hidden.

Mark 7:25 For a woman whose young daughter had an unclean spirit heard about Him, and she came and fell at His feet.

Mark 7:26 The woman was a Greek, a Syro-Phoenician by birth, and she kept asking Him to cast the demon out of her daughter.

Mark 7:27 But Jesus said to her, "Let the children be filled first, for it is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs."

Mark 7:28 And she answered and said to Him, "Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs under the table eat from the children's crumbs."

Mark 7:29 Then He said to her, "For this saying go your way; the demon has gone out of your daughter."

Mark 7:30 And when she had come to her house, she found the demon gone out, and her daughter lying on the bed.

Jesus is generally seen as harsh in His dealings with this Gentile woman. He seems to ignore her, then answers her in a very unusual manner. Why?

I don't presume to know the Lord's mind as to all of His reasons for treating her as He did, but I will say this: She perfectly illustrates to His disciples what He has just instructed them! He had just taught them not to bar people from fellowship at His table. This woman was the ultimate object lesson of just how far-reaching the Lord's teaching was intended to be. If anyone was barred from His table, it was she:

Her nationality was against her coming to His table:

She was a Gentile, a Canaanite, from a region noted for its unbelief.

Her sex was against her coming to His table:

She was a woman at a time when women had no rights.

Even the disciples were against her:

In Matthew's account of this same event, the disciples begged Jesus to send her away.

With all this against her, she nevertheless came to the Lord's table. Though He seems harsh, you can't help but see His tenderness towards her. You begin to see His tenderness in a word in His initial statement to her:

Mark 7:27 But Jesus said to her, "Let the children be filled first, for it is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs."

The important word here is "first." It opens the door of fellowship with Jesus. It holds that door wide open for her. Yes, salvation was for the Jews; *but it was not exclusively for the Jews*. It was for the Jews first, but after that, it was for "whosoever will believe." All who desired Jesus could come to Him. The Gospels and the Book of Acts, as well as the Book of Romans, make it clear that salvation was offered to the Jews first - but never to the exclusion of the Gentiles.

The reference to Gentiles as "little dogs" isn't really as bad as it seems either. The particular words Jesus chose would be used of pet animals that were dear to you. Jesus plays on the word "dog" because most Jews did consider the Gentiles dogs in a more derogatory way. By using this form of the word He was telling her that He did not see Gentiles as beyond His help. So, again, His words offered her hope. His words were tender.

What Jesus tells her here is similar to something He said in Matthew 8:11,

Matthew 8:11 "And I say to you that many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven."

Many Gentiles is who He has in mind! Many Gentiles will come and fellowship with the Jews around His table when Jesus sets up His kingdom on earth. So, you see, what He does with this Gentile woman is show the disciples that His words about not barring people from His table extend far beyond the Jews - to all the people of the world, regardless their nationality or sex.

Jesus was tender towards her - opening a door to her that seemed closed, referring to her using a formerly derisive term in a new and endearing way. Because of His tenderness this woman was brought to His table to enjoy fellowship with Him.

We should be tender in our dealings with spiritually needy people who come to the Lord for help. Jesus said, "...the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out."<sup>2</sup> In another place it is said of Jesus' tenderness that "A bruised reed He will not break, And smoking flax He will not quench, Till He sends forth justice to victory; And in His name Gentiles will trust."<sup>3</sup> We want to bring people to Jesus - not bar them from Him.

Chapter Seven closes with the account of Jesus healing a deaf mute:

Mark 7:31 Again, departing from the region of Tyre and Sidon, He came through the midst of the region of Decapolis to the Sea of Galilee.

Mark 7:32 Then they brought to Him one who was deaf and had an impediment in his speech, and they begged Him to put His hand on him.

Mark 7:33 And He took him aside from the multitude, and put His fingers in his ears, and He spat and touched his tongue.

Mark 7:34 Then, looking up to heaven, He sighed, and said to him, "Ephphatha," that is, "Be opened."

Mark 7:35 Immediately his ears were opened, and the impediment of his tongue was loosed, and he spoke plainly.

Mark 7:36 Then He commanded them that they should tell no one; but the more He commanded them, the more widely they proclaimed it.

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<sup>2</sup>John 6:37

<sup>3</sup>Matthew 12:20-21

Mark 7:37 And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, "He has done all things well. He makes both the deaf to hear and the mute to speak."

At first this account seems to have little connection to our context. In fact, it puts a wonderful exclamation point at the end of what Jesus has been teaching His disciples and us. In His dealings with the woman you saw the Lord's tenderness in bringing a Gentile to trust in Him. In His healing of this man you see the Lord's tenderness in bringing many Gentiles to trust in Him!

First, notice His tenderness:

Jesus acts out in His own miracle-sign language what He intends to do for this man. He put His fingers in his ears, signing to him that He could open the closed ears. He touched the mans tongue with a salivaed finger, signing to him that He could cause his words to flow. He looked up to heaven, signing to the deaf mute that the power would come from God.

In His own, very tender, way, Jesus was calling upon this man to have faith in God.

Now see Jesus' tenderness in dealing with the Gentiles as a whole:

A deaf mute is a good illustration of what it meant to be a Gentile. The Jews had been given the Word of God through the Prophets and the Scriptures; the Gentiles were, by comparison, deaf to God's Word. The Jews had been given the privilege of praising God with their lips; the Gentiles were, by comparison, mute to God's praise. But by His tender mercies God had not overlooked the Gentiles. His plan of salvation always included them in every generation - opening their ears to hear Him, and their mouths to praise Him!!!

You were once a deaf mute...

Conclusion

Tenderness or tradition? The choice should be obvious!

There is nothing inherently wrong with having our own practices and preferences. God has given us the wonderful liberty to worship Him in a variety of ways.

We go wrong when our preferences and practices become traditions that are elevated to a place above the clear precepts and principles of God's Word. We go wrong when we bar people from fellowshiping with Jesus at His table.

Let's have a tradition of tenderly bringing people to Jesus!