

Traditions and Commandments

The Gospel According to Mark Part 14

Mark 7:1-13

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Why Study The Gospel According to Mark

- We've been studying the Gospel According to Mark for some time. We began in August, and will conclude in May. This school year we will be in the Gospel According to Mark a total of 25 Worship Wednesdays.
- Instead of just studying the Gospel According to Mark week-to-week, I want you to remind you why we are studying Mark. Why would we spend so much time in the Gospel According to Mark?
 - Many of you have not completed an in depth study of a gospel.
 - If I came up with a "clever" topical series, you will likely forget very soon. But you'll have the Gospel According to Mark with you forever.
 - Jesus commands us to make disciples (*Matthew 28:18-20*). If you become familiar with Mark, you can walk through the Gospel According to Mark with a new Christian as they learn about Jesus.
 - Studying the life of Jesus and applying His example and teachings to our lives is very relevant.
 - We are studying the life of Jesus because want to be more like Jesus.
 - *Romans 8:28-29* - "28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. 29 For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters."
 - 2 Corinthians 3:18* - "And we all...are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit."
 - 1 Peter 2:21* - "To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps."
 - God is working on you. He has a plan to transform us into the Image of Jesus. We follow His example, learn from Him, and are being transformed by Him.

Traditions

- Turn to your neighbor and tell them one tradition you participate in on a yearly basis.

- This can be a tradition with your family or friends.
- When we think about church traditions, likely, we have mixed feelings. We have both positive feelings and negative feelings on the idea of traditions in church.
 - Positively, many of us love the traditions of singing “Silent Night” around Christmas, and we love the annual church potluck.
 - Negatively, we’ve also probably had negative experiences with church traditions. Maybe someone tried to change something at your church, and conflict arose.
- An example of breaking a church tradition that caused conflict:
 - Several years ago there were lots of conflicts over a cloth that covered Lord’s Supper tables in churches. Before churches had air conditioning, churches would leave windows up in their buildings for airflow. Since people did not want flies in their bread and grape juice, out of convenience, many churches would place a sheet over the Lord’s Supper table. And when it was time to take communion, there would be some sort of a ceremony of removing the cloth. When air conditioners were installed, some people would try to remove the sheet, and people would get upset. Some people thought, because of that necessary tradition, doing away with that tradition was dishonoring God.
- Traditions have been tension points since the beginning of the church. Traditions are harmful when division over preferences occur. But they are especially harmful when traditions stand in the way of people obeying God’s will.
- Tonight we will study a section of the Gospel According to Mark when Jesus confronts some religious leaders about their traditions.

Mark 7:1-13

- *Mark 7:1-2* - “The Pharisees and some of the teachers of the law who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus” ² and saw some of his disciples eating food with hands that were defiled, that is, unwashed.”
 - “Pharisees”
 - Pharisees were a part of an influential Jewish movement in the time of Jesus that sought to purify the Jewish people through a strict observance of the Jewish law (Torah). And in order to apply the Jewish law, they required additional traditional regulations.
 - Ritual purity and keeping oneself separated from impurity was a big deal to the Pharisees.
 - Jesus bumped heads with the Pharisees many times, especially when He hung out with sinners and tax collectors. (*Mark 3:6; Mark 2:16; Luke 15:2*)

- “Teachers of the law who had come from Jerusalem”
 - Jerusalem was the capital of Israel.
 - The Temple was in Jerusalem, and, therefore, is the center of Jewish culture, politics, and religion.
 - Jerusalem would eventually be where Jesus was crucified.
 - This was the second time in the Gospel According to Mark when people came from Jerusalem to confront Jesus. (See *Mark 3:22*)
 - People had come from Jerusalem to test Jesus’ orthodoxy.¹ They wanted to see if Jesus was teaching and preaching appropriately.
- (We will not cover this tonight, but Jesus does discuss what defiles people later in chapter 7 in *Mark 7:14-23*.)
- *Mark 7:3-4* - “² and saw some of his disciples eating food with hands that were defiled, that is, unwashed.” ³ (The Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they give their hands a ceremonial washing, holding to the tradition of the elders. ⁴When they come from the marketplace they do not eat unless they wash. And they observe many other traditions, such as the washing of cups, pitchers and kettles.)”
 - This seems to be a parenthetical phrase added in by the author. We know that The Gospel According to Mark was likely written to Gentiles because throughout the Gospel there are explanations of Jewish customs and teachings. If Mark was writing to a Jewish audience, there would be no need for these explanations.
 - This disagreement had nothing to do with hygiene, but was a matter of purity.²
 - It wasn’t like the disciples hands were literally dirty (it’s not like not washing hands after going to the bathroom), but ritual purity and cleanliness. According to some customs, people become unclean if they don’t ritually purify themselves before eating.
 - The “tradition of the elders” was unscriptural law that had no biblical basis.³ Ritual hand-washing was not mentioned in the Hebrew Scriptures. Ritual hand-washing was a tradition created by humans. Therefore, this was a human command, not a God command.

¹ David M. Young, *Extreme Discipleship: Following Jesus from the Gospel of Mark* (Montgomery, AL: E-BookTime, LLC, 2007), 126.

² David E. Garland, *The NIV Application Commentary: Mark* (Grand Rapids, MI: ZondervanPublishingHouse, 1996), 272.

³ Garland, *Mark*, 272.

- *Mark 7:5* - “So the Pharisees and teachers of the law asked Jesus, “Why don’t your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders instead of eating their food with defiled hands?”
 - Jesus’ opponents questioned Jesus. These folks, who came up from Jerusalem to see if this Galilean rabbi Jesus was a sound teacher, noticed that His disciples did not follow their customs.
 - Jewish rabbis were held accountable for their disciples’ actions.

- *Mark 7:6-8* - “⁶ He replied, “Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written: ‘These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. ⁷ They worship me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules.’ “⁸ You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to human traditions.”
 - Jesus did what He often did when He was opposed. He quoted Scripture.
 - *Isaiah 29:13*
 - Jesus asserts that Pharisees who hold on to these man-made traditions claim and perhaps believe they are honoring God, but their teachings and actions do the opposite. Their hearts are far from God. They think they’re doing what God wants them to do. But they’re really dishonoring God.
 - Jesus called them hypocrites (actors) because they portrayed themselves as teachers of the way of God, but they, in fact, teach against the words of God. They teach human traditions.
 - Not only are they insisting upon human traditions, they’re disregarding God’s commands in order to keep human traditions.
 - Traditions aren’t harmful or bad in and of themselves, we just need to make sure that the traditions we have or

- *Mark 7:9-13* - “⁹ And he continued, “You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions! ¹⁰ For Moses said, ‘Honor your father and mother,’ and, ‘Anyone who curses their father or mother is to be put to death.’ ¹¹ But you say that if anyone declares that what might have been used to help their father or mother is Corban (that is, devoted to God)— ¹² then you no longer let them do anything for their father or mother. ¹³ Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that.”
 - Jesus really lets them have it here. Jesus gives them an example of how their human traditions undermine core commands of God.
 - There’s nothing more central to Jewish law than the 10 Commandments. So Jesus discusses the fifth command: “Honor your father and mother.”

- According to God and Jewish law, one of the most important things people can do is to honor their mothers and fathers. We're supposed to take care of our parents.
- But, in the time of Jesus, there was no social security and medicare. When parents grew too old to care for themselves, their kids had to take care of them or they were hopeless and had to beg.
- But aging parents can be expensive. Taking care of parents takes up a lot of resources. And it was the law to provide for
- So many people would try to try to find a way to get out of having to take care of their parents. But they didn't want to break the law or be looked down upon, so they found a way to avoid taking responsibility of caring for aging parents.
 - This is similar to how tax accountants may find legal loopholes to avoid paying taxes.⁴
- "Corban (that is, devoted to God)"
 - "Corban was a dedicatory formula used in setting aside property for God and barred one from taking profit from it."⁵
 - "Pharisees would allow a son to duck that responsibility by informing his parents that what support they might expect from him is Corban, dedicated to God, and therefore cannot be touched to help them...The son can say to his parents that he cannot offer them any help because he has dedicated to God everything that could help them. He could claim that doing so would be a sin against God"⁶
- Jesus is making the point that by practicing this human tradition, people are neglecting an even more important command of God, honoring parents.

2 Warnings for Religious People and Us

- Actually follow Jesus. Don't just say you follow Him. Actually follow Jesus.
- Don't make it harder for others to follow Jesus.

Actually follow Jesus. Don't just say you follow Him. Actually follow Jesus.

- According to Jesus, the Pharisees and teachers of the law say they honor God, but really don't. They just submit to human laws instead of God's commands. They claim to be faithful followers of YHWH, but by their actions, they deny God.

⁴ N.T. Wright, *Mark for Everyone* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 88.

⁵ Garland, *Mark*, 274.

⁶ Garland, *Mark*, 274.

- Is this something we are tempted to do? Have you ever seen someone who claims to be a Christian, but their actions and lives don't reflect Christ much?
- Has this ever been you? Have you ever claimed to be a Christian, list "Christian" in your Facebook bio, place a Bible verse in Instagram profile, but act in an un-Christlike way?
- Is there an area of your life where you have not fully submitted to the Lordship of Christ?
 - Going to church or attending a campus ministry doesn't make you a Christian. Voting a certain way doesn't make you a Christian. Bring from the South doesn't make me a Christian. My parents being faithful Christians doesn't make me a Christian.
 - Are there sins you need to repent of?
 - Am I a fully committed follower of Jesus?
- This is a question only you can answer. Am I really a follower of Jesus?

Don't make it more difficult for others to follow Jesus.

- The teachings of the Pharisees and Jewish leaders here added burdens to people who were trying to be faithful to God.
- James, the brother of Jesus, at the Jerusalem council - *Acts 15:19* - "It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God."
- *Hebrews 12:15* - "See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God."
- I'm not saying to water down to commands of Jesus, or to brush over hard truths. It is hard to follow Jesus.
- But are there ways we might have added additional burdens or barriers to people who want to follow Jesus?
- Here are some barriers and burdens we place on people that I have witnessed:
 - Church dress codes
 - Hypocrisy of professing Christians
 - Aligning Christ was a particular political party
- Am I making following Jesus attractive?
- How can we, as John the Baptist did, prepare the way for Jesus in people's lives (*Mark 1:2*)? What are some ways we can avoid making it more difficult for people to follow Jesus?
 - Hospitality
 - Providing for needs
 - Genuinely loving people