

## Holiness Without Hypocrisy

Mark 7:1-13

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More than 200 years ago, Edward Gibbon wrote a six-volume series called, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. He spent 20 years studying the Roman Empire to find out how a nation that was so great suddenly imploded.

Interestingly, the first volume was published in 1776, the year our country was born. Gibbon listed five primary reasons for the collapse.

1. The rapid increase of divorce, with the undermining of the sanctity of the home, which is the basis of society.
2. Higher and higher taxes; and the spending of public money on bread and circuses.
3. The mad craze for pleasure, with sports becoming every year more exciting and more brutal.
4. The building of gigantic armies to fight external enemies, when the most deadly enemy, the decadence of the people, lay within.
5. The decay of religion; faith fading into mere form, losing touch with life, and becoming impotent to guide it.

This should be a sober warning that we are repeating many of the same patterns that wrecked the Roman Empire. I asked Justin Rumley, our intern, to look up some stats that relate to each of these, but realized that the connection to our culture is more than obvious. I want to focus on the last one, *the fact that our faith can fade into mere form, losing touch with life, and becoming impotent to guide it*. Instead of being moved by the Majesty, we can end up just going through the motions. We can so easily focus on religion and not relationship, which leads to pretenders in the pews.

BTW, when I hear someone say that they don't come to church because it's filled with hypocrites, I often smile and say something like this: "*Oh, don't let that stop you...come and join us, we have room for one more!*"

We grow tired of people saying one thing and living something that's completely opposite, don't we? According to the dictionary, a hypocrite is "*a person who pretends to have beliefs or practices which he or she does not actually possess.*"

As used in the Bible, the term comes from ancient Greek theater, where one actor would often play two parts. When saying something humorous, he would hold up a mask with a smiley face [hold up]; when playing a tragic part, he would hold up a mask with a sad face [hold up]. A good actor could imitate the speech, mannerisms, and conduct of the character he was portraying [hold up mask of Pastor Ed]. The word literally means, “*One who hides behind a mask.*”

How then can we fight this? How can we grow in holiness without giving into hypocrisy? We’re going to look at an encounter Jesus had with some religious dudes and learn that the *heart of the problem is the problem of the heart*. That’s exactly what Proverbs 4:23 says, “***Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.***” That’s one of the reasons I like our parenting class for mothers called, *Entrusted with a Child’s Heart*. The heart is always the heart of the matter. BTW, we will be having a parenting seminar on October 22<sup>nd</sup> for moms and dads.

Hypocrisy concentrates on the external while holiness starts on the inside. *The religious leaders were focused on having clean hands; Jesus was all about having a clean heart*. Let’s walk through Mark 7:1-13 and see how Jesus handles unholy hypocrites.

Here are a few observations before we dive in.

1. **Much of Mark’s material focuses on what Jesus did; chapter 7 is filled with what He said.** To say it another way, much of this gospel records the miracles of Jesus. In these verses we get to hear His message.
2. **From this point forward in Mark’s gospel we see the popularity of Jesus begin to decline.** Moving toward the final year of His life, Jesus pours more time into the disciples while the religious leaders ramp up their confrontation. As Jesus exposes their superficial spirituality, they become more agitated and attack Him relentlessly to discredit Him and eventually send Him to death.
3. **The word “*tradition*” is used six different times in this passage (v. 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 13).** While tradition can be a good thing, Jesus is going to show us that tradition must be subservient to Scripture, not the other way around.
4. **Mark 7:7 is the key verse that will help us unpack this section: “*In vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.*”** The word “*vain*” means groundless, invalid, and hypocritical. We don’t want our worship to be worthless, do we?

With that as background, here's a simple outline that captures the flow of thought:

1. Confrontation (1-5)
2. Condemnation (6-9)
3. Correction (10-13)

Buckle up because this is a head-on collision between Christ and the spiritual status quo. It's about to get messy. Let's look first at this confrontation between the Lord and a bunch of legalists as recorded in verses 1-5. We can pull out some truths that apply to us as well.

### Confrontation

**1. Legalists love other legalists.** We saw earlier in 3:22 that the scribes came from Jerusalem to confront Jesus but now they form a posse with the Pharisees in verse 1: ***“Now when the Pharisees gathered to him, with some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem.”*** The ***“Pharisees”*** are literally the ***“separated ones”*** and the ***“scribes”*** are the interpreters of the Law. One of their jobs was to copy and preserve the Scriptures.

The Pharisees and scribes are the religious experts of the day and they ***“gather”*** together to team up against Jesus. We emphasize the importance of *gathering with God's people for worship* but there are other ways people gather that are not so good. These men made a two-day trip from Jerusalem, the center of spirituality. One commentator refers to them as, *“legalistic, self-righteous, hypocritical phony members of the religious establishment.”*

**2. Legalists look for lawbreakers.** If you look hard enough, you can always find something to get upset about. The Pharisees and Scribes not only gather together, they play “gotcha” with the followers of Jesus in verse 2: ***“They saw that some of his disciples ate with hands that were defiled, that is unwashed.”*** Does this mean that the disciples were practicing bad hygiene by not washing up before dinner? No, something deeper is going on.

I love how Mark helps his readers understand more about this in verses 3-4. Do you see the parenthesis around these verses as he gives some cultural background to those who are not Jewish? Remember that Mark's primary audience is made up of Gentiles living in the Roman Empire: ***“(For the Pharisees and all [everyone***

bought in] *the Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands properly, holding to the tradition of the elders, and when they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they wash. And there are many other traditions that they observe, such as the washing of cups and pots and copper vessels and dining couches.)*”

The word “**properly**” means, “*diligently, carefully, frequently and vigorously.*” And there was a certain way they had to wash their hands.

→ **Demonstrate washing hands.** [Ask for a volunteer] Someone would take a jar or pitcher and pour water onto a person’s hands. The person had to have his fingers pointing up. Next, he would point his fingers down while more water was poured over them. Then the person would take his fist and rub the other hand.

The word “**holding**” refers to grasping firmly. They are obstinately adhering to “*the tradition of the elders.*” Is it a bad thing to wash one’s hands before eating? Not at all. I should probably do it more than I do. But here’s what happened. The Bible never says that everyone must do this. The only reference I could find was for priests to wash their hands and feet before entering the tent of meeting in Exodus 30:19.

What began as something good became a tradition that ended up binding and blinding the people to what really mattered. John MacArthur helped me see these “*traditions of the elders*” were eventually put into the *Mishnah*, which was a collection of oral traditions. Incidentally, the *Mishnah* has over 35 pages devoted to washing alone! These regulations were then put in the *Gemara*, which was like a commentary. The *Mishnah* and the *Gemara* were then combined to form the *Talmud*. The Rabbis in Babylon created a *Talmud* four times larger than the Jerusalem *Talmud*.

Notice that these religious mask-wearers not only washed their hands but they observed “**many other traditions.**” They focused on cleaning cups and couches, as well as their pots and pans.

With that as background verses like Luke 11:46 take on more meaning when Jesus said: “**Woe to you lawyers also! For you load people with burdens hard to bear, and you yourselves do not touch the burdens with one of your fingers.**” In contrast to this, Jesus makes a wonderful offer in Matthew 11:28: “**Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.**”

**3. Legalists lecture the Lord.** Serving as judge and jury, these hypocritical “holy men” ask a question meant to discredit the disciples and Jesus himself in verse 5: *“And the Pharisees and scribes asked him, ‘Why do your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?’”*

### Condemnation

I love that Jesus doesn’t answer their question about tradition but instead goes right to Scripture as He lays some hurt on them in verse 6: *“And He said to them, ‘Well did Isaiah prophecy of you hypocrites...’”* The word “well” means “rightly” or “suitably.”

And then quoting the Greek translation of Isaiah 29:13, Jesus directly applies this stinging Scripture to them in the second half of verse 6 and verse 7: *“As it is written, ‘This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrine the commandments of men.’”*

Here are some things we can learn from Jesus’ response.

- 1. Always go to Scripture and apply it to life today.** One of the things I admire about Billy Graham is how frequently he uses this phrase when he preaches: *“The Bible says...”* Here Jesus takes Isaiah and applies it directly to those playing spiritual charades.
- 2. Resist adding or subtracting from Scripture.** Revelation 22:18: *“I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book.”*
- 3. It’s easy to say or sing something and not really mean it.** Our lives don’t always match what comes across our lips.
- 4. Scripture must always take supremacy over tradition.** Several well-known groups like Catholics, Mormons and Muslims put tradition on an equal or higher level than Scripture.

We have to watch ourselves as well because we don’t want to let our preferences or traditions have more weight than God’s Word. By the way, this helps us process change, doesn’t it? We’re making some changes to the child check-in process, moving Guest services and making a “Go” Display in the south hallway. Change is difficult for some of us but it’s not a biblical issue, is it? Pastor Tim and I want to change the name of our Life Groups and ABF classes to *Growth Groups*

to more closely align with our grow value. That's a change but it's not a biblical issue. Right?

To make sure they don't miss His message, Jesus then pivots from Isaiah and applies it to each of them personally. Listen for the word **"you"** in verse 8: ***"You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men."*** To **"leave"** means to **"dismiss and let go."** They've dissed the commands of God and instead they **"hold"** or **"grasp"** to the tradition of men.

Verse 9 says they've not only left God's commands but they have actually rejected them: ***"And He said to them, 'You have a fine way of rejecting the command of God in order to establish your tradition!'"*** The phrase **"fine way"** is like Jesus is saying they've done a nice job of slicing away the Scriptures so they can savor what is important to them.

These unholy hypocrites begin by *confronting* Jesus. That quickly turns into Jesus *condemning* them. In verses 10-13 we see how Jesus *corrects* them, and us.

### Correction

Jesus is not done exposing their legalistic laws and hypocritical beliefs and behavior. Notice again that He bases everything He says on Scripture. That's what we strive to do as well. When someone asks me why Edgewood believes that baptism by immersion is a step of obedience to be followed after one believes in Christ, I quickly add that no one should do this just because a church says to do it but because that's what the Bible teaches. Our "Taking the Plunge" booklet walks through every passage in the New Testament on baptism and then draws application from it.

Look at verse 10 where Jesus quotes the fifth commandment: ***"For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother...'"*** This is found in Exodus 20:12 and is stated positively. One chapter later, in Exodus 21:17 and again in Leviticus 20:9, Jesus quotes the negative side of the same command, ***"Whoever reviles [curses] father or mother must surely die."***

I can't prove this but my guess is that the Pharisees and scribes are nodding in agreement to this truth until Jesus exposes their hypocrisy in verses 11-13 with the phrase: ***"But you say..."*** This is what God says, but you guys say this. They were like those who say: ***"I know what the Bible says, but God just wants me to be***

*happy.*” Actually, if you ever hear yourself use the word “*but*” after referring to the Bible, you should hear alarms going off because whatever you say next is going to be unbiblical and therefore wrong.

What is it that they were saying? Look at verse 11: ***“If a man tells his father or his mother, ‘Whatever you would have gained from me is Corban’ (that is, given to God)...”*** Mark inserts some parenthesis again to explain a common Jewish custom at that time. The word “***Corban***” means, “*given to God.*”

Here’s what’s going on. If someone pronounced something, “*Corban,*” it became sacred and therefore could not be used to help care for parents. It was like a deferred gift that was pledged to the Temple but in many cases, it was never given. And since Numbers 30:2 warns against breaking a vow, once someone declared something *Corban*, they could never change their mind. It was actually a rather convenient and sinister way to look spiritual and yet get out of one of God’s clear commands.

If my parent’s coffee maker broke and I had a Keurig and a coffee maker I could declare them both *Corban* and I wouldn’t have to help them. I could do the same thing with my savings account and I’d never have to help out financially.

Let’s pick up verse 12: ***“...Then you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or mother.”*** Notice the word “***you***” again. They not only gave people an out if they didn’t want to care for their parents, they went a step further and actually prohibited them for doing “***anything***” for them.

Speaking of caring for parents, listen to these strong words from 1 Timothy 5:8: ***“But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.”***

And in verse 13, Jesus gives a stinging indictment to these spiritual charlatans: ***“Thus making void the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And many such things you do.”*** The word “***void***” was used to annul a contract and meant to cancel or revoke something that was binding. Do you see what they’re doing? Their tradition was wiping out the Word of God. And this wasn’t the only time this happened because Jesus said, ***“And many such things you do.”*** There’s the word “***you***” again!

It's easy for us to pile on these legalistic hypocrites but I wonder what this passage might be saying to us as a church or to us as individuals. What kinds of things does Edgewood do out of tradition that might be more important than what Scripture says? What is that you hold to that you've elevated above the Word of God?

Legalism can be defined as a strict adherence to the law. Specifically, as it relates to faith, a legalist is one who believes that performance is the way to gain favor with God. Legalism is the human attempt to gain salvation or prove our spirituality by outward conformity to a list of religious "do's" and "don'ts." It's often disguised in spiritual beliefs and behavior.

Here are some observations about legalism. You may want to tighten your seatbelt because we're about to go through some turbulence.

- 1. We tend to think others are legalistic, but that we're not.** The fact is that we're all legalistic by nature. We tend to judge others by our own standards of what is acceptable and what isn't. In essence, we think our sins smell better than other people's because we have very little tolerance for people who sin differently than we do.
- 2. Legalism is highly contagious.** While it's usually less conscious and systematized in our minds than it was among the Pharisees and the scribes, legalism can spread like a bad virus through an entire congregation. That's why Jesus reserved some of his harshest criticism for legalistic list-makers.
- 3. Legalism can take a vibrant faith and make it dull and lifeless.** It can evaporate enthusiasm, jettison joy, and stifle spirituality. Instead of finding freedom through Christ, many believers become burdened by a bunch of rules and regulations.
- 4. Legalism produces large quantities of self-righteousness, judgment and condemnation.** It majors in guilt and misguided sacrifice, urging its followers to evaluate their relationship with God on the basis of standards and scores – and expects others to do the same. Superficial spirituality short-circuits the work of grace.
- 5. Legalism makes us narrow and divisive.** The legalist insists that everyone live up to the standard they have adopted. In other words,

everyone needs to be like me. When we think this way, we miss the delight of diversity in the church.

**6. Legalism makes it impossible for people to see Jesus.** There is nothing that pushes someone away faster than a list of rules and regulations when we inadvertently portray Jesus as a drill sergeant instead of the Savior.

Most of us fall into legalism without trying to do so. Let me illustrate. Several years ago I asked a woman from China and a man from Puerto Rico to lead us in prayer for the persecuted church (By the way, we'll hear from the Puerto Rico Go Team next weekend). It was beautiful to hear Hector pray for the persecuted in Spanish. When Stella prayed in Mandarin, she told us she was going to kneel and very graciously invited us to do the same, if we wanted to. I followed her lead and knelt. My motives were good initially as we interceded for the needs of beleaguered believers around the world. But then I took a peek and noticed only a small number were on their knees. A seed of judgmentalism began to germinate, as I secretly wondered why others weren't as spiritual as I was.

Now, work with me on this. Imagine that because I found kneeling to be so helpful, I began kneeling during my quiet times. When I led in prayer in services I knelt as well. And then I started telling everyone else they had to kneel when they prayed. I might even quote some Scripture. And when I didn't see people kneeling I started to feel angry but also spiritually smug because at least I was doing what everyone else should be doing.

Do you see how subtle and sneaky legalism is? Its weeds are under the surface in each of our lives. Kneeling to pray is a good thing but it can easily become the standard by which we judge other people's spirituality. In short, if we're not careful we'll default to a performance-based, hypocritical kind of faith. By the way, there are other acceptable prayer postures in the Bible – sitting, standing, lying down, bowing, hands in the air or praying to stay awake during sermons.

One of the best ways to not slide into spiritual superficiality and ritualistic religion is by serving those in need. James 1:27 says: ***“Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.”***

Isaiah 1 says something very similar: ***“I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of well-fed beasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of***

***lambs, or of goats. When you come to appear before me, who has required of you this trampling of my courts? Bring no more vain offerings...they have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them...cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause.***” (Isaiah 1:12-17)

Clean hands are OK but God wants clean hearts that are mobilized to serve the little, the least and the lost. One way to harpoon hypocrisy is by helping the hurting. We have a table set up in the lobby today for Operation Christmas Child because now is a good time to buy school supplies for the shoeboxes we'll be filling in November to be sent to children around the world.

I'm thrilled to introduce one of our newest Go Team ministries called *Safe Families for Children*. You can read more about this ministry on the bottom of the left panel in your bulletin, which is where we put Go Team updates each week.

Jessica Trowbridge attends Edgewood and is the *Program Coordinator*. I'll be interviewing her shortly. Laurie Carleton also attends Edgewood and serves as the *Family Coach Supervisor* at Safe Families. They have a table set up outside the sanctuary with more information. But first we want to play a video that captures the heartbeat of Safe Families.

### Play [Video](#)

1. Tell us about Safe Families (mission and purpose).
2. Can you share a story about how God is using this ministry in the life of a family?
3. What are some specific ways someone can get involved?

Are you hiding behind a mask? [Hold up] It's much better to hold up a mirror because it reflects more accurately who you are [Hold up mirror]. James 1:23: ***“For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror.”***

Christianity is ultimately not a matter of what you *do* or what you *don't do*. Christianity is what is *done* for you. Its not spelled D-O but rather D-O-N-E.

When Jesus died on the cross, He said, “It is finished.” The price has been paid. The debt has been erased. You are complete in Christ and you are clean.

Pilate washed his hands of Christ [demonstrate]. Jesus is ready to wash your heart...if you'll let him. Once your heart is clean He can use your hands in ministry...and in the process we will not belike those who allow *faith to fade into mere form, losing touch with life*. If we're serious about our spirituality, we just may avert the decline and fall of America.