

Pentwater Bible Church

Gospel of Mark
Message 278

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Annas and Caiaphas by James Tissot Cir 1886-1894.

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Pentwater Bible Church

The Book of Mark

Message Twenty-Eight

The Pharisees Follow Man and Not God

October 5, 2014

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The Parable of the Blind by Pieter Bruegel the Elder Cir 1568

JESUS CONDEMNS THE PHARISEES

Mark 7:1-13

¹ Then came together unto him the Pharisees, and certain of the scribes, which came from Jerusalem. ² And when they saw some of his disciples eat bread with defiled, that is to say, with unwashen, hands, they found fault. ³ For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, except they wash their hands oft, eat not, holding the tradition of the elders. ⁴ And when they come from the market, except they wash, they eat not. And many other things there be, which they have received to hold, as the washing of cups, and pots, brasen vessels, and of tables. ⁵ Then the Pharisees and scribes asked him, Why walk not thy disciples according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashen hands? ⁶ He answered and said unto them, Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. ⁷ Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. ⁸ For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do. ⁹ And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition. ¹⁰ For Moses said, Honour thy father and thy mother; and, Whoso curseth father or mother, let him die the death. ¹¹ But ye say, If a man shall say to his father or mother, It is Corban, that is to say, a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; he shall be free. ¹² And ye suffer him no more to do ought for his father or his mother; ¹³ making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered: and many such like things do ye (KJV).

SCRIBES AND PHARISEES TRAVEL TO SEE JESUS

Mark 7:1

¹ Then came together unto him the Pharisees, and certain of the scribes, which came from Jerusalem (KJV).



For the Pharisees and the Scribes to travel the eighty-five miles from Jerusalem in the first century to the Northern region of the Sea of Galilee it would have taken them at least five days. As the Romans began their occupation of Israel in 43 B.C. they had not yet completed their road modernization projects in Israel. Therefore the religious authorities would have had to travel on less safe and slower old roads. Josephus records that the Roman General Vespasian (later emperor 69-79 AD) had road-surveyors with his army during the 1st Jewish Revolt (Cir 66 AD). While the Roman occupation would offer the travellers some safety from bandits most would only travel during the day for the protection of daylight. Most also would go by foot. Officials with permits could use the facilities of the courier system, both horses and carriages. Various light carriages were used and some ordinary travellers rode on the heavier ox-wagons, both open and covered.¹

¹ Garner, G. G. (1996). Travel in Biblical Times. In (D. R. W. Wood, I. H. Marshall, A. R. Millard, J. I. Packer, & D. J. Wiseman, Eds.) *New Bible Dictionary*, Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

It is quite clear that the Pharisees and the Scribes wanted to witness the miracles and popularity of Jesus for themselves as evidenced by their willingness to undertake the long journey from Jerusalem to the Capernaum region. In fact it was their anger and outrage that drove them to make the journey. They were looking for reasons to denounce Him because they did not ordain Him as a product of their schools and by their authority.

Before the exile from Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 586 B.C. the scribes were mainly professional document writers for a mostly non-literary population. After the exile and during the first century AD they were primarily men who gathered together, studied and interpreted the Jewish Mosaic Law and its 613 individual commandments. The Pharisees on the other hand were the purveyors of Rabbinic Judaism (such as the Mishnah, the Talmud, and the Midrashim), which are generally positive and praiseworthy. However they were strong legalists in their devotion to these non-biblical documents. They had disassociated themselves from genuine orthodoxy and fidelity to the Bible.

Since the Babylonian captivity there was decline in Orthodox Judaism and a rise of Rabbinic Judaism. With the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1948, we find that prior to AD 70 the Pharisees constituted only a small movement in a highly diversified society; whatever their popularity and influence was. However because they were very influential they constituted a significant presence on the Sanhedrin, which was Israel's ruling council.² For them to travel all the way to Northern Galilee they had a strong motive to find fault with and attempt to subdue this noteworthy person who was unlike any other that had ever been in Israel. Further, some were even calling Him Israel's Messiah. If so why did He not come to them to align Himself with the powers that be? If He had come to them first as they thought He should have they would have examined Him and made a determination as to His fitness to embark on an evangelistic career in Israel. After all this was their territory He was intruding into their domain and He deserved to be criticized at least and dealt with in the most extreme measures if He would not submit to their authority.

THE PHARISEES FIND FAULT WITH JESUS

Mark 7:2-3

¹ Then came together unto him the Pharisees, and certain of the scribes, which came from Jerusalem. ² And when they saw some of his disciples eat bread with defiled, that is to say, with unwashen, hands, they found fault. ³ For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, except they wash their hands oft, eat not, holding the tradition of the elders (KJV).

Jesus disciples were eating bread without a ceremonial hand washing. This is not to say they were unsanitary. They just simply did not adhere to the non-biblical ceremonial practices of the Pharisees and Scribes. The Pharisees observed self made non-biblical ritual washing regulations. This they said was a part of the tradition of the elders, which they followed scrupulously. The actual origin of this practice points to the ceremonial washing of the priests who washed their hands and feet in the laver of the Tabernacle (Exodus 30:17-21). This was designed by God for those men only and not the general

² Elwell, W. A., & Comfort, P. W. (2001) In *Tyndale Bible dictionary* Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

public. This was part of God's Law. The Pharisees and Scribes Oral tradition extended this to the entire population (*all the Jews*), which was now required prior to eating and prayers.

These interpretations, designed to regulate every aspect of Jewish life, were considered as binding as the written Law and were passed on to each generation by faithful Law teachers (scribes). Later, in the third century A.D., the oral tradition was collected and codified in the Mishnah, which, in turn, provided the foundation for and structure of the Talmud.³ The Talmud constituted the five thousand plus non-biblical laws that the Jewish religious authorities imposed upon the people of Israel. Mark explains this departure from the genuine Jewish Law, which was from God and that, which is man, made. He further explains this divergence from God's Law to traditions of men. He shows how they came prepared to make accusations of Jesus and His disciples. In approaching Jesus the Pharisees became defensive regarding their adherence to their own tradition so as to assure any witnesses in the area that they were not like the Gentiles who they disliked immensely. They referred to them as dogs. By their scrupulous observance of the minutest physical rule they had created they sought to show all how pious they were. The only problem with this is they had completely lost any genuine connection to God and the reasons for God's Law. It was given to bring God's Kingdom to this earth and provide reconciliation between God's people and Himself as well as bring peace.

THE PHARISEES PERFECTION

Mark 7:4

⁴ And when they come from the market, except they wash, they eat not. And many other things there be, which they have received to hold, as the washing of cups, and pots, brasen vessels, and of tables (KJV).

Mark continues his description of the Pharisee and Scribe's traditions for the benefit of his Roman Gentile audience. They would not have been steeped in Rabbinic Judaism and therefore not fully understood the full impact of Jesus teaching and the mounting animosity of these men toward Him. Having this unbiblical view of defilement they would go to great lengths to be ritualistically clean from potential spiritual defilement from a non-spiritual object. Of course this was not a genuine God given commandment for all to follow and even them during ordinary activities. Washing of one's hands with a handful of water, was especially important to them before eating and after a trip to the marketplace where a Jew would likely come in contact with an "unclean" Gentile or such other unclean things as money or utensils.

Mark says the Jews observed many other traditions (*And many other things there be, which they have received to hold*), some of which Mark named, indicating that the issue here involved the whole question of ritual cleansing. For a loyal Jew, to disregard these regulations was a sin; to follow them was the essence of goodness and service to God. This was in essence a "cleanliness equals Godliness man made rule. Today we call this *legalism*. This is the imposition of non-biblical rules and practices, which the present day religious authorities tie to a person's salvation or sanctification.

³ Grassmick, J. D. (1985). Mark. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, pp. 132–133). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

THE PHARISEES CHALLENGE JESUS

Mark 7:1-13

⁵ Then the Pharisees and scribes asked him, Why walk not thy disciples according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashen hands (KJV)?

Directing their inquiry toward Jesus as the one responsible for His disciples inappropriate and even sinful violation of their law they were searching for a deeper issue than just a one-time violation of their law. They wanted to see if Jesus and His disciples were not following *the tradition of the elders*, which would be a most serious breach of all their law. Directing their questioning to Him they were in essence saying that if He were a genuine rabbi as holy and righteous as they were and knowledgeable of the law He should know the proper practices and exert vigilance over the behavior of His disciples. They viewed Him as equal to a common sinner and unqualified to be a rabbi, which they certainly had not ordained.

JESUS CONDEMNS THE PHARISEES

Mark 7:6-9

⁶ He answered and said unto them, Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. ⁷ Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. ⁸ For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do. ⁹ And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition (KJV).

Jesus immediately quoted from their Bible the Tenach, which we call the Old Testament. First He calls them hypocrites and says that Isaiah the prophet foretold their activities. He prophesied that they would be setting aside the genuine Word of God for their own manufactured traditions, which they embodied into law. All the while they were displaying nothing more than hypocritical religiosity coupled with an empty show of false piety. The same thing happens today in the Church.

Isaiah 29:13

¹³ And the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw nigh unto me, and with their mouth and with their lips do honor me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear of me is a commandment of men which hath been taught them (ASV 1901).

As religious leaders they should have been teaching the people what God's genuine desire was for their lives. Jesus began to go right for their hearts, which were far from the Word of God and any real adherence to it. They were rejecting the Word of God in favor of themselves and their own traditions. Their mandatory ceremonial washing meant nothing to God and by their strict adherence to it they elevated the practices of men above the

Word of God. It is important to see how Jesus leveled the most serious devastating charge toward them. He was in essence calling their behavior a direct violation of the fourth commandment of the Mosaic Law, which was *“Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain,”* (Exodus 20:7). The Hebrew word translated as vain is *lo lashava* or “become nothing”. So what Jesus is saying to them is you have made God’s commandments nothing! This caused them to fume in anger at Him and add to the other grievances they had against Him. These continued to accrue until they had enough evidence to arrange for His execution.

The apostle Paul knew this well being a Pharisee before conversion by Jesus on the Damascus road (Acts 9:3-9). He wrote to the Church of Galatia warning them of doing this as it is completely outside the Will of God. Many so-called Christian pastors today do the same thing. They abrogate God’s Word in favor of man’s desires to keep money coming in and exert control of the congregations. There is nothing new under the sun.

Galatians 1:10

For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ (KJV).

JESUS CONTINUES HIS ASSAULT ON THE PHARISEES

Mark 7:10-13

¹⁰ For Moses said, Honour thy father and thy mother; and, Whoso curseth father or mother, let him die the death. ¹¹ But ye say, If a man shall say to his father or mother, It is Corban, that is to say, a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; he shall be free. ¹² And ye suffer him no more to do ought for his father or his mother; ¹³ making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered: and many such like things do ye (KJV).

The religious leaders traced their oral law back to Moses asserting that he was their leader whom they followed. But Jesus countered this again by referring to another of the Ten Commandments *Honour thy father and thy mother* (Exodus 20:12). He chose this particular commandment because one should speak respectfully and show care and consideration towards their parents as a way of honoring one’s parents. Such responsibility included adequate financial and practical care to meet their needs in old age (I Timothy 5:4 & 8). Then He reverses the commandment to present it in a negative way as it is found in Exodus 21:17 and Leviticus 20:9. He says, *“Whoso curseth father or mother, let him die the death.”* Speaking ill or ridiculing one’s parents means that a person will not honor them or anyone else if he is prone to do this. To further explain this He said, *“But ye say, If a man shall say to his father or mother, It is Corban, that is to say, a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; he shall be free. ¹² And ye suffer him no more to do ought for his father or his mother.”* What He was referring to was a scribal tradition wherein they would avoid the commandment to care for their parents by declaring all his possessions Corban and that way they thought they were absolving themselves from the fifth commandment. Corban is the transliteration of a Hebrew term used to refer to a gift devoted to God. It was a shady formula to dedicate money and

property donated to the temple and its service by a vow that could not be reversed. So any such gift declared as Corban could only be used for religious purposes.

If a son declared his money or other resources, which could be otherwise used to support his aging parents were “Corban” then, he was exempt from this command of God, and his parents were legally unable to make any claim on him. The scribes emphasized that his vow was unalterable (Numbers 30) and held priority over everything even his family responsibilities. So they no longer had to do anything for their parents. It was a sleazy practice, which they thought, allowed them escape from responsible behavior and annul the law of God. Nothing could be further from the truth. In essence it finds its way into some denominations today where couples are told they can annul a long-term marriage, which has produced children. They are told that with the annulment God views them as never having been married. The problem is they were married and the children are evidence of the marriage. So the attempt to get around God’s laws cannot actually be done.

The practice of Corban was another self-rule law that elevated tradition above the law of God. Jesus in His accusation of them added that they did many more things like this in violation of God’s will and commandments. They were hypocrites and exerted premeditated selfishness over other people including those closest to them, their parents. Jesus clarifies this teaching that God’s Law is what is the true authority and not man’s oral tradition. Other examples include restrictive Sabbath rules where scribal tradition distorted and avoided the Old Testament.

This practice has not gone away. Church leaders are still exerting unbiblical control over their congregations in violation of God’s Word. Interestingly Jesus in His letters to the seven churches of Asia Minor said He was against the deeds of the Nicolaitans (Revelation 2:6), which He told to the church at Ephesus. They are commended for hating the work of the Nicolaitans. Conversely the church at Pergamum is cited for accepting it. There is no mention of this group in church history but we can get a clue from the meaning of the Greek word. It means “rulers of the people.” This meaning implies that there was an attempt to divide the clergy from the laity, which makes an unnatural distinction between them in which the clergy exercise rulership over the laity. Certainly, elders have the Biblical authority to determine policy and church discipline over the local church. But, it appears that the authority described here went much further than issues in the local church and may have extended into their personal lives.

In terms of the church of Pergamum which means “thoroughly or mixed married.” This is the church that represents the age of Constantine in which the church was married to the state. It was Constantine’s “edict of toleration” that started the process and it came to fruition with Theodosius’ forced conversions to Christianity that the church actually fell bringing on the dark ages.

With the church and state merging and the forced conversions pagan practices entered the church. The church already had regional bishops. The Lord’s brother James was the Bishop of Jerusalem until he was martyred. Now the bishop of Rome was suddenly imbued with extraordinary power and a large increase in members along with wealth. Idolatry entered the church, as Jesus became one of many gods the pagans worshipped. This led to spiritual fornication and idolatry. It planted the seeds for the formation of what would become the Roman Catholic Church. They were rightly condemned for holding the teachings of Balaam, which are corruption. They were also condemned for permitting the

teachings of the Nicolaitans (Revelation 2:15). While the Ephesians were against this practice the Pergamum Church tolerated it. It was during this period of church history that a distinction began to emerge between the clergy and the laity with different sets of laws and regulations for each group. A priestly order was set up in the church that further corrupted and laid the foundation for more church decline.

NEXT WEEK: MARK: JESUS TEACHES ABOUT GENUINE DEFILEMENT

Please call or e-mail with any questions or comments

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