

Theme: Jesus taught that Scripture alone is the final authority for God's people; therefore all traditions and extra-biblical teachings and practices are helpful only when they clarify, support, uphold, and submit to the Scripture.

I. Intro - A Surpassingly Relevant Story

- A. Arguments about ritual washing of hands?
- B. Doesn't this show the Bible is outdated?
- C. Its key relevance for today:
 - 1. What is the source of moral authority?
 - 2. What is the nature of cleansing we need?
 - 3. How does God's law apply today?
- D. We will cover all of this in the coming weeks

II. Jesus, the Scribes, & Pharisees - Round 2

- A. The scribes and Pharisees disapprove of Jesus again
The Pharisees and some of the teachers of the law who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus and ² saw some of his disciples eating food with hands that were "unclean," that is, unwashed... 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 'unclean' hands?" Mark 7:1-2, 5
 - 1. Mark 2 and 3 record earlier conflicts between Jesus, the scribes, and the Pharisees
 - a. Forgiveness of sins, eating with 'sinners', fasting
 - b. Picking heads of grain and healing on the Sabbath
 - c. The source of Jesus' power - God or Satan?
 - 2. This is another major conflict
 - a. The disciples ate without washing their hands
 - b. This is ceremonial washing, not hygienic washing
 - c. Is this really a big deal for them?

- B. The importance of ceremonial washing in Judaism
(The Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they give their hands a ceremonial washing, holding to the tradition of the elders. ⁴ When 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.) Mark 7:3-4
 - 1. Mark explains "washing" for Gentile readers
 - a. Verse 2-5 is one sentence in Greek
 - b. Verses 3-4 are a "parenthesis" explanation for those unfamiliar with Pharisaical ceremonial washing practice (a clue that Mark wrote mainly to Gentiles).
 - 2. The key points to understand this "washing"
 - a. It is a ceremonial washing (not to get rid of germs)
 - b. They washed hands, utensils, etc - to purify after contact with Gentiles or unclean people (the market)
 - c. This was based on the "tradition of the elders"
 - 3. We will take a deep dive into this next week

III. The Real Issue - the Source of Moral Authority

- A. Traditions of men or the Word of God
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 'unclean' hands?" 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 but **rules taught by men.**" ⁸ You have let go of **the commands of God** and are holding on to **the traditions of men.**" Mark 7:5-8
 - 1. Washings based on tradition, not Scripture (v5, 7-8)

2. Note the contrast between **traditions** and **Scripture**
3. This “oral law” or tradition of the elders was not given in Scripture, though some claimed it had been handed down orally from Moses himself (Mishnah Avot 1:1–13)
4. The oral law was a “fence around the Torah” (Mishnah Avot 1:1–13) - making sure people did not violate the written Law
5. The oral Law began as a way of applying the Law to new situations and questions to help the people obey God
6. The traditions of the elders/oral law were extra-biblical commands that came to be binding on the people of God.

B. Oral law vs Scripture - two test cases

1. Ceremonial washings vs true cleansing from sin
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 ‘unclean’ hands?” Mark 7:5
 - a. Scripture commanded Priests in the Temple to do ceremonial washings (Exodus 30:19; 40:13; Lev. 22:1-6)
 - b. The tradition expanded this to everyone throughout all the land of Israel
 - c. Thus the tradition went WAY beyond what Scripture actually commanded - they were trying to be holier than God!
 - d. It also elevated the ceremonial law above the moral law, and obscured true sin and cleansing
 - e. We will look at this more in the coming weeks

2. Corban (devoted gifts) vs honoring parents
And he said to them: “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 your mother,’ and, ‘Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.’ ¹¹ But you say that if a man says to his father or mother: ‘Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is Corban’ (that is, a gift devoted to God), ¹²then you no longer let him do anything for his 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.” Mark 7:9–13
 - a. Honoring parents was a central biblical command
 1. It is in the 10 commandments (Exodus 20:12)
 2. The first command in table for duty to other humans
 3. Death penalty for cursing parents (Exodus 21:16)
 4. This is a foundational command!
 - b. Corban - gifts devoted to God (v11) by oath
 1. Loosely related to Numbers 30:1-2 - keeping oaths
 2. Not nearly as central in the Law as honoring parents
 3. Pitting this command against honoring parents was invalid in the first place
 4. A corban gift was promised and the person could not make a profit or let others use it until it was given over at death
 5. In practice, a child could avoid taking care of parents with property by making an oath to give it to the Temple at death - completely nullifying the command to honor and care for the parents
3. These are just two of many examples (v13)
4. This is why Jesus changed to this topic - it was the true issue. He and the scribes/Pharisees had two different sources of moral authority. Thus, there would be inevitable conflict.

IV. Applying the Word - Scripture and Tradition

A. All believers and churches have traditions

1. It is impossible for any human or group to live without traditions
2. For believers and churches we choose which language we use for worship, which Bible translation we use, what type of music we prefer, what type of clothes we tend to wear, our format/liturgy of worship, whether to have men's and women's ministries, whether to have Sunday schools or small groups (or both) - and NONE of these are specifically given by Scripture.
3. Thus EVERYONE has traditions - one can not evade the issue of Scripture and tradition by not having tradition!

B. There are good and bad traditions in the church

Thus you nullify the word of God by your **tradition** that you have handed down." Mark 7:13

I praise you for remembering me in everything and for holding to the **teachings**, just as I passed them on to you. 1 Corinthians 11:2

So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the **teachings** we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter. 2 Thessalonians 2:15

1. The Pharisee's traditions nullified the Scripture!
2. Paul passed traditions (same Greek word as Mark 7:13) on to the Corinthians and Thessalonians and praised them for keeping them!
3. This means that every tradition must be evaluated and submitted to the written Word of God.

4. This also means that over time good traditions can morph into bad traditions that no longer help people walk with God.

C. Every single person and church is susceptible to embracing and enforcing bad traditions

1. The Jewish traditions of the elders started for good and noble reasons and were helpful for many people, but over time they took the place of God's Word and were fiercely opposed by Jesus.
2. The Church of the Middle Ages in Europe had become so encrusted in traditions that obscured God's Word that the Gospel was nearly lost. The fight over extra-biblical traditions was a central issue in why God sent the Reformation.
3. American liberal churches are more committed to progressive political philosophies than to the explicit teaching of Scripture.
4. The American evangelical church is often more committed to American cultural traditions than to God's Word and Kingdom.

D. Determining good and bad traditions

1. Good traditions clarify, support, uphold, and submit to the explicit teachings of Scripture but bad traditions come to a place where they obscure, undermine, contradict, or nullify the explicit teachings of Scripture.
2. Good traditions consistently point people back to God's Word, but bad traditions become more well-known than the Scripture itself.

E. Keeping traditions healthy

1. Traditions only remain healthy when they are firmly submitted to Scripture

- a. This is the principle of Sola Scriptura - Scripture alone is the final authority
- b. It is the Word of God that feeds, corrects, commands, and governs us as believers and as a local congregation.
- c. We must be rigorously careful to distinguish between what Scripture actually teaches and everything else - for Scripture alone is infallible.
- d. This is why Scripture must be central in our devotions, in our worship, and in shaping our thoughts and practices.

2. Traditions are a source of wisdom, strength, and vitality while traditionalism ossifies our faith and saps our spiritual strength.

Tradition is the living faith of the dead; traditionalism is the dead faith of the living. Tradition lives in conversation with the past, while remembering where we are and when we are and that it is we who have to decide. Traditionalism supposes that nothing should ever be done for the first time, so all that is needed to solve any problem is to arrive at the supposedly unanimous testimony of this homogenized tradition.

—Jaroslav Pelikan

- a. Tradition is a helpful guide to understanding how God has worked among His people and in our own lives and church in the past.
- b. Understanding tradition can help us as we seek to faithfully serve Jesus in our time and place.

- c. We are constantly called back to a vital, living relationship with Jesus, but we are tempted to live on spiritual auto-pilot!
- d. Traditionalism short circuits our walk with Jesus, keeping Him encrusted in layers of history, and attempts to fence in the Holy Spirit as He seeks to work in and through us in fresh ways.
- e. Embracing tradition is healthy; sinking into traditionalism is deadly!

3. The Table of the Lord

- a. This Table is a place for Jesus to meet us face to face!
- b. This is a weekly place calling us out of lethargy to let the Spirit give us fresh life, wisdom, and strength
- c. Come receive from the Lord!

Scripture and Tradition

Mark 7:1-13
August 13, 2023
Communion
Acts 20:32

Teaching keywords: Word of God; God's Will and Guidance; Christian Life; holiness

Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified. Acts 20:32

The Pharisees and some of the teachers of the law who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus and ² saw some of his disciples eating food with hands that were “unclean,” 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. ⁴ When 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.) 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 ‘unclean’ hands?” 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 but rules taught by men.’ ⁸ You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men.” ⁹ And he said to them: “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 your mother,’ and, ‘Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.’ ¹¹ But you say that if a man says to his father or mother: ‘Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is Corban’ (that is, a gift devoted to God), ¹² then you no longer let him do anything for his 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.” Mark 7:1–13