

## TRADITION AND HEART

Mark 7:1-23

Key Verse 7:19

"`For it doesn't go into his heart but into his stomach, and then out of his body.' (In saying this, Jesus declared all foods `clean.')

We learned in the last passage how to thank God [in prayer](#). Jesus could not eat or sleep for several days, but he fed 5,000 with five loaves and two fish. Then he remained alone in a certain part of the mountain while his disciples were crossing the lake. Jesus thanked God in prayer that he was able to feed 5,000 hungry men with five loaves and two fish. Jesus was tired; he was sleepless. But he thanked God in prayer. We must learn how to thank God in prayer. Last week, I asked you to thank God, looking in the mirror. How many of you stood in front of the mirror and practiced, "Thank you, Jesus"? A thankful mind doesn't come from sinful men. A thankful mind comes from those who know God and his existence. Prayer is very important. But it is very hard to pray regularly. Whenever we want to pray, Satan attacks us, telling us not to pray, but to think this and that. When we pray earnestly, sometimes God does not seem to answer [our prayer](#). Real prayer is listening to God's voice. Prayer is reporting to God how we obeyed what we heard through prayer. Today's passage in the Bible is entitled, "Clean and Unclean." To the modern psyche, the title "Clean and Unclean" doesn't make sense. So according to the contents of this passage we gave this message the title "Tradition and Heart."

I. Pharisees and teachers of the law come to investigate Jesus' company (1-5)

Recently, we have studied that so many people were following and crowding wherever Jesus went. Jesus was very popular. The Pharisees and some of the teachers of the law thought that the world seemed to be going to Jesus. They were very upset that their synagogues were empty every Sabbath day. Many of the teachers of the law performed ceremonial rituals by themselves, without any attendants. The Pharisees were afraid of Jesus' popularity and that Jesus' popularity was shaking their political power. They did not have their own people in their hearts. They only thought about management of the synagogue and maintenance of their political power. This became an issue to the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who were in Jerusalem. Finally, they chose several Pharisees and the teachers of the law who were very good at oratory and defense. They sent them to attack Jesus' company for not keeping the tradition of the elders. Verses 1-2 say, "The Pharisees and some of the teachers of the law who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus and saw some of his disciples eating food with hands that were `Unclean,' that is, unwashed." The rules and regulations, passed on to them as tradition, were very meticulous. The Pharisees and all the Jews did not eat unless they gave their hands a ceremonial washing, holding to the tradition of the elders. When they came from the marketplace they did not eat unless they washed. The problem was there were too many rules of tradition. They even had a rule about washing cups, spoons, knives and kettles.

To tell the truth, Jewish tradition came from the prophet Ezra and

Nehemiah. The people of Israel entered the promised land. They enjoyed [God's blessing](#) living in the land flowing with milk and honey. In the course of time, they completely abandoned God and only liked milk and honey and the good environmental conditions of Canaan. God's hope was to evangelize the superpower nation^Öthe people of Canaan^Öand spread the word of God to the whole world, even to the Philistines. God hoped Jerusalem would be a Bible center. "...and all nations will stream to it. Many peoples will come and say, 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths.' The law will go out from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem" (Isa 2:2-3). This was indeed a beautiful hope God had had for his people. God wanted to make his people enter the promised land and be one-to-one Bible teachers. And people of many nations would stream into Jerusalem, saying, "Teach us the word of God. We are thirsty." But contrary to God's hope, the people of Israel completely attached themselves to the culture of Canaan and lived as if they were Canaanites. They became totally useless to God. Then God sent them to Babylonia for 70 years of training to somehow be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. It was tragic that during the time of King Jehoiakim's reign, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon invaded the land and King Jehoiakim became his vassal for three years. After Jehoiakim, the king of Judah was Zedekiah. Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon. Then Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon marched against Jerusalem with his whole army. He conquered Jerusalem. Finally, King Zedekiah of Judah was arrested and his sons were killed before his eyes. Then they gouged out his eyes and bound him with bronze shackles and took him to Babylon (2Ki 25:7). God had blessed his chosen people by giving them divine discipline in Egypt and in the desert. After the divine discipline was over, God allowed them to enter the promised land. They should not have been tempted by the good things in Canaan. But they liked the things of the Canaanites and their cultural life and superficial idol worship and carefree living. Especially, they liked the abundant materials in Canaan. They liked the flowing milk and honey in Canaan. They intermarried with Canaanite women. They completely lost their privilege of being a chosen people. They could not maintain their blessing from God. They abused God's blessing. They liked the world more than God. They became very unspiritual. Finally they lost God's word, the Ten Commandments. Then God dragged them to Babylon as captives for further divine discipline. "In the first year of Cyrus King of Persia in order to fulfill the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah, the Lord moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia to make a proclamation throughout his realm and to put it in writing: ^ÑThis is what Cyrus king of Persia says: "The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and he appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah. Anyone of his people among you---may the Lord his God be with him, and let him go up"' (2Ch 36:22-23). In this way, God returned his people from Babylon by the help of King Cyrus of Persia.

As soon as they came back to their country Judah, the prophets Ezra and Nehemiah wanted to rebuild the Jerusalem temple. Nehemiah worked as an administrator and Ezra as the Bible teacher in rebuilding the Jerusalem temple. When they checked to see how many people could join in rebuilding the Jerusalem temple, there were not many men who could work. Instead, there were many strange Jews. While living in the foreign country, they had mostly intermarried and joined in detestable practices like those of the Canaanites. When Ezra and Nehemiah carefully watched,

those children who came from intermarriage could not speak Hebrew. They were speaking many other kinds of languages. Then Ezra tore his tunic and cloak, pulled hair from his head and beard and sat down appalled. Then everyone who trembled at the words of the God of Israel gathered around him because of this unfaithfulness of the exiles. And he sat there appalled until the evening sacrifice (Ez 9:3-4). As for Nehemiah, he was very upset when he saw that the children of the chosen people could not speak the language of Judah. He rebuked them and called curses down on them and he beat some of the men and pulled out their hair. He also made them take an oath in God's name and said, "You are not to give your daughters in marriage to their sons, nor are you to take their daughters in marriage for your sons or for yourselves. Was it not because of marriages like these that Solomon king of Israel sinned?" (Neh 13:24-26)

Then Ezra taught the Bible to God's chosen people. The whole assembly responded with a loud voice: "You are right! We must do as you say" (Ez 10:12). At that time, Ezra was praying and confessing and weeping and throwing himself down before the house of God. A large crowd gathered around him. They too, wept bitterly and confessed their sins.

Here we see that before starting the rebuilding of the temple, Ezra and Nehemiah taught them the Bible, and through the Bible teaching let them repent of their sins. Nehemiah might have been a man of hot temper, even though he was a prophet. So he pulled out hairs which did not look like Jewish people's hair, while Ezra pulled his own beard and cried and repented.

This was the beginning of the formation of tradition as a chosen people. Therefore, we cannot say that tradition itself was all bad. They made many rules and these became traditions which they kept before God, and from their hearts. But when a long time had passed by, the people became habitual. At the same time, rules and regulations increased day by day. They did not read the Bible. Instead, they read and memorized the Mishnah and the Talmud. These were the books that compiled all the regulations and rules concerning their tradition. At first, they kept the tradition before God and from their hearts. The Jerusalem temple was soon rebuilt and the people read the Bible and repented their sins daily and they grew as a chosen people of God Almighty. But as time passed by their spirit and heart of tradition was gone. Only their superficial rituals remained. Look at verses 1-2. "The Pharisees and some of the teachers of the law who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus and saw some of his disciples eating food with hands that were 'unclean,' that is, unwashed." Eating with unwashed hands became a problem to the Pharisees and some of the teachers of the law who had come from Jerusalem. Jesus' disciples were carefree about eating food with unwashed hands, making noises of munching and crunching and laughing and emitting gas. The sound of gas emitting was like the sound of little Paul Chung's trombone.

On the other hand, the Pharisees and all the Jews did not eat unless they gave their hands a ceremonial washing, holding to the tradition of the elders. When they came from the marketplace, they did not eat unless they washed. And they observed many other traditions such as the washing of cups and frying pans and kettles. At that time, the handwashing ceremony was despicable. There were several stone jars before the entrance of any house. When they had a party and many guests came, the water supply was short. So the master of the banquet

gave an eggshell of water to each person for ceremonial handwashing. Suppose Shepherd David Hull were a Pharisee and he was washing to keep the handwashing ceremony with an eggshell of water. For any lady who saw him, marriage would be very difficult. Their ceremonial handwashing was so disgusting and habitual and superficial. But if anyone was caught not keeping the handwashing ceremony, he was severely punished. When Jesus was around Bethsaida, the Pharisees and some teachers of the law took a long journey to investigate whether Jesus and his company were keeping the handwashing ceremony or not. It is funny, even to us. To Jesus, they were hypocrites. The Pharisees and teachers of the law decided to make a big issue about this. So the Pharisees and teachers of the law said, "Why don't your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders instead of eating their food with 'unclean' hands?" (5) The Pharisees and the teachers of the law did not know what kind of people they were. They were despicable and men of ritualism. They were also oppressing others through many rules of tradition. When we study church history, the church oppressed people with seven sacraments. Among them was marriage. If their marriage was not ordained by the church, a man and woman could not marry. If someone died, and they were not ordained, it was thought they would go to hell. With seven sacraments the church really squeezed people, even kings and nobles of many nations. Naive people in the early centuries were terrified by the sacraments. They absolutely obeyed. We call the 15th century the Dark Age. The Church ruled and overruled people and kings and nobles with sacraments. After the Industrial Revolution, intellectualism opened people's eyes, but corrupted people's hearts with reasonable thinking.

II. These people honor me with their lips but their hearts are far from me (6-13)

Jesus was not happy with the Pharisees and teachers of the law from Jerusalem who came to investigate his company, seeing whether they kept the traditions, especially the handwashing ceremony. Jesus perceived that his people became ignorant. They thought that if they kept the rules and regulations of the traditions they could be chosen people and they would be saved. But Jesus said in verses 6b-7, "These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men." Of course, the people of Israel could maintain their identity in the midst of fiery persecutions and unbearable sufferings because of tradition. In the movie, "Fiddler on the Roof," the Jews were called fiddlers on the roof. They were always in a very dangerous situation. They were as endangered as a fiddler balancing on the edge of a roof. He could fall down on the ground and die at any moment. That had been the Jewish situation quite a long time. But they could survive because they had their own tradition. In the course of time, they were uptight with tradition and forgot the word of God completely. Because of their tradition they served themselves and they survived one way or the other. But they did not serve God. So God could not bless them. God blesses those who keep his words. In America, Matthew 6:33 is most popular. But many who take this verse don't believe that God will bless them if they keep this word. As a result, they are not exempt from the anxiety of future security.

At that time, they had a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe their own tradition. For example, Moses said, "Honor your father and mother," and "anyone who curses his father

or mother must be put to death" (10). But they said to their fathers and mothers, 'Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is Corban' (that is, a gift devoted to God). Many sons and daughters did not help their old fathers and mothers. They abused the rule of Corban. They justified not serving their old parents. "Mommy, I dedicated all my money as Corban. I am sorry I don't help you." Then their old parents understood. In this way, they nullified the word of God by their tradition that they had handed down. They did many things like that (13).

It is indeed difficult for anybody to honor God from their hearts. One father of a servant of God came to his son and asked him, "What do you teach to your students?" "I teach the Bible," answered the son. Then the father asked him, "Do you teach your students, 'Honor your father and mother'?" His father meant, "If you are a servant of God, you must support your parents first, before teaching your students." This way of bothering his son continued for eighteen years. But he did not care about his grandchildren. So when his only grandson saw him coming, he called out, "Daddy! Daddy! Elder Lee is coming," instead of saying, "Grandfather is coming." The law of God is love. The law of God is giving. Even if his father bothered him for so long, he should honor his father as father, even though his only son said to him, "The elder is coming." It is indeed a terrible thing to apply the rule of Corban to our parents. These days, even though the rule of Corban is not practiced, many young people are indifferent to their parents. We must teach young students to honor God and honor their parents. We should not honor God only with our lips. We must honor God from our hearts.

III. Nothing that enters from the outside can make him unclean (14-19)

Look at verses 14-15. "Again Jesus called the crowd to him and said, 'Listen to me, everyone, and understand this. Nothing outside a man can make him 'unclean' by going into him. Rather, it is what comes out of a man that makes him 'unclean.'" Probably they didn't understand what Jesus was saying.

Look at verse 17. "After he had left the crowd and entered the house, his disciples asked him about this parable." "Dear sir, what does it mean that nothing outside a man can make him unclean by going into him; rather, it is what comes out of a man that makes him unclean? We don't understand what you are talking about. It sounds very easy but it is very hard to understand." Look at verses 18-19a. "'Are you so dull?' he asked. 'Don't you see that nothing that enters a man from the outside can make him "unclean?" For it doesn't go into his heart but into his stomach, and then out of his body.'" Here Jesus is telling the truth that food goes into the stomach. Food never goes into the heart. Therefore, even if his disciples ate with unwashed hands, they were not illegal. It is right that food goes into our stomach and then passes out of our body. Food never goes into our hearts. Here Jesus is speaking of the heart problem. Jesus learned that his chosen people had no discernment between good and evil. So he taught them, in a way they could understand, what is evil and what is good. As we studied, in Ezra and Nehemiah's time, those Jews who lived as captives in Babylonia became evil because they struggled only to survive and didn't keep their hearts pure before God. The mind is not the center of a man. The heart is the center of a man. Even if your mind is brilliant, if your heart is corrupted, in spite of your wishes you cannot finish undergraduate courses due to the corruption of

your heart. For example, it is clear evidence that Vietnamese students, who don't understand English enough, have occupied Harvard University to a remarkable percentage. It is not because they are smart; it is because they are men and women of heart. Therefore it is necessary that we edify our hearts every day to be right before God. If one's heart is corrupted, he is not happy even if he has achieved a lot. We Christians are children of God. "Children of God" sounds good, but in reality we must deny ourselves and take up our cross daily and follow Jesus. "Take up daily" and "deny oneself" in this generation is unthinkable. It is unthinkable. No. No. It is unthinkable. Egoism is taken for granted. Denying oneself is unthinkable. But we must deny ourselves and take up our cross and follow Jesus in order to keep our hearts pure. Who is happier: One whose heart is corrupted, or one whose heart is pure in the sight of God even if his life is hard enough following Jesus? You know the answer very well. You know that those whose hearts are pure before God are happy and smiling all the time. These days young people look old because they cannot recognize themselves due to their corrupted hearts. We must remember that food does not go into the heart, but into the stomach. We must keep our hearts pure and be happy all the time.

#### IV. A corrupted heart produces all kinds of evil (20-23)

Look at verse 20. "He went on: ^ÑWhat comes out of a man is what makes him ^Ñunclean.' For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and make a man ^Ñunclean.'" Here Jesus tells us that when one's heart is corrupt, he produces all kinds of evils. First, evil thoughts. Many people look very vague or sleepy because they are intoxicated by evil thoughts. Many young people live like prostitutes or male prostitutes. It is because their hearts are corrupted. Sexual immorality rules and overrules their lives. There is no way to stop their immoral life. I saw a young girl. One time she was going around with a La Hispaniola boy. He looked like her second younger brother. Now she has become a roommate of an aged man who looks like her professor. She really wants to be a good Christian. But because sexual desire rules and overrules she becomes helpless. These are sentimental sinners. On the other hand, there are iron-hearted sinners. They commit theft, murder, adultery. They are full of greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. These people will do anything if they can earn one dollar. In the U.S. there are many shooting events because of a few dollars. In the movie, "The Bridge over the River Kwai," an English captain earned from Japanese soldiers the privilege as an officer not to work. Then he built a huge bridge which the Japanese wanted to use to supply weapons. When the English captain's arrogance was satisfied, he could build the enemy's bridge to supply weapons over the bridge. Arrogance makes a man indiscriminate.

Today Jesus taught us the heart problem compared with tradition. Tradition is good for helping suffering people to some degree. But tradition is made by man and it doesn't help men to keep their hearts pure to the end. But if we have the word of God in our hearts we can keep our hearts pure. We must think about this problem. We must meditate on the word of God. Even if you have everything, if your heart is impure, you are a living dead. You have no joy. You have no happiness. You have no motivation. You have no meaning of your own

existence. These days many young people use the principle of Corban. This is not good. We must come to Jesus and talk with him and listen to him and keep his words in our hearts. We must keep our hearts pure. Then God will give us fountain-like happiness in our souls.