

LESSON 10



JESUS VERSUS TRADITION

Scripture Text: Mark 7:1-23

How did Jesus judge the place given to tradition? What was the attitude of Jesus toward variation in doctrine allowed by man's traditions? How much part does tradition have in dividing the people of God? Is it right or wrong to follow tradition? When we point to the teachings of men and their creeds as the final authority for doctrine or action, we deceive the precious souls of honest-hearted people. In the lesson today let us look at how Jesus dealt with tradition.

MEMORY VERSE: *But he answered and said unto them, Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?*
Matthew 15:3

God's Command or Man's Tradition

Mark 7:1-4 The scribes and Pharisees denounced the disciples of Jesus because they ate their bread with unwashed hands. **The Jews, except they wash their hands oft, eat not, holding the tradition of the elders.** They respected man's ideas more than God's laws.

Mark 7:5-9 **The Pharisees and scribes asked him . . .** They had come from all parts of Palestine to hear and see and question Jesus. Jesus' stern reply was that Isaiah had **prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.** Isaiah had foretold the doings of these people many years before (Isaiah 29:13). The washing was not for cleanliness but was a ceremonial form. Jesus went to the root of the matter. He set the commandments of God and the commandments of men, heart service and lip service, on opposite sides and showed them they had chosen the wrong side. They had set men's commands in place of God's. Jesus called it vain worship. He went on to tell them that they were rejecting **the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition.** Their worship was empty and useless. Jesus called them **hypocrites.** To reject God's way is to reject God and brings rejection from God to us.

An Example

Mark 7:10-13 Jesus pointed out one commandment they had set aside and replaced with their own. God had said through Moses' law, **Honour thy father and thy mother** (Exodus 20:12). The penalty for cursing parents was death (Exodus 21:17; Leviticus 20:9). These Jews had made a tradition that one was freed from obligation to parents if he made a vow to give his gift to God instead. This would enrich the temple treasury and themselves with money he should have used to support his parents. This made **the word of God of none effect.** They had come to regard man-made rules above the divine law of God. This is sin.

We see here the simple teaching of Jesus standing out against the perverted hearts of the religious leaders of His day. To them religion was a matter of hand washing, of certain sacrifices, and of the observance of customs. With their blessing, a child could refuse help to his parents and let them starve. Additional Scriptures concerning tradition are found in Galatians 1:14; Colossians 2:8; 1 Peter 1:18.

Defilement Is From Within

Mark 7:14-23 Nothing from without . . . entering into him can defile . . . All such things are outward. They are separate from, or foreign to, the real person. **But the things which come out . . . defile the man.** Why? Because it is produced by the heart. It is part of the life, part of the real person. The act is of the same kind as the heart is. The root and the seed are both parts of the same plant. The heart brings forth the fruit of the life. Therefore, what comes out defiles the man if it is evil, or it blesses him if it is righteous.

Jesus listed thirteen sins which defile the heart where they are found. (Those named are not all the sins that exist but are a representative list.) Whatever is in the heart will come out and expose the individual for what he is. A corrupt fountain cannot bring forth sweet water neither can a clean fountain bring forth bitter water (James 3:11-12).

Outward forms, dress, or images cannot save us, but they can damn us. Deeds alone do not save or damn us. But deeds do not occur alone and of themselves. They are the outgrowth of the desire of the heart. The inward thought and the outward deed are so closely bound together and so alike in character that we can scarcely separate them. But God penetrates down to the very depth of the heart when He judges. He knows the very intent of the heart. He knows our thoughts afar off. Our environment, family, companions, social status, burdens, advantages or disadvantages do not make us saints or prevent us from being saints. They influence us, but the final result depends on how the heart meets them.

Some Questions to Ask Ourselves

The heart is the soil from which springs all good or bad. It is good to examine our hearts. Some things we should look for: Is my dependence upon outward things? Does Jesus Christ live within me? What are my motives in all that I do? Can any religion which rests upon any outward form or act or possession stand in the Judgment? **Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life** (Proverbs 4:23). If the inside is right, the outside will be also.

What About Smoking and Drinking?

We hear it said, "A glass of beer doesn't hurt anyone." Is this true, since nothing entering in can defile? But what condition is in the heart that desires to drink intoxicants or smoke tobacco? It is lust. It is the giving of the mastery of our desires to something unworthy rather than to Christ (Romans 6:16). It is a willingness to destroy some of the service which the mind and body should render to God. It is to treat lightly the wasting of the possessions of God which we hold in trust—talents, influence, and money. It is a carelessness as to the sorrow one causes others. It is because of these attitudes within the heart that God says no drunkard **shall inherit the kingdom of God** (1 Corinthians 6:9-10).

JUST A THOUGHT

**Hardening of the heart ages people more quickly
than hardening of the arteries.**

This lesson is adapted from a lesson by Mary Lehmann.
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