



Mark 7

Tradition versus God's Commands

During the centuries after Jews returned home from exile in Babylon, Jewish religious teaching added many detailed comments to God's commands in the Old Testament. This chapter describes a major clash between Jesus and the Pharisees over what makes a person unclean before God. Look for what Jesus teaches about outward traditions and inner purity.

Read Mark 7:1-8

1. What reasons do the Pharisees find for criticizing Jesus' disciples?

For them, what is the standard of purity here?

Note: The disciples were eating with hands that were ceremonially defiled.

2. What accusations does Jesus make about the Pharisees?

*Note: The **Pharisees** were a religious party of the Jews that stressed strict observance of every detail of the traditional interpretations of the Law. **Teachers of the law (scribes** in the NASB) were professional students of the Law of Moses, and usually were members of the party of the Pharisees. They emphasized the importance of legal decisions made over many years that applied the Mosaic Law to daily life. By the time of Jesus, they considered this human commentary equal in importance to the written law given through Moses.*

Read Mark 7:9-13

3. How does Jesus illustrate the accusation he makes in verses 6-8?

*Note: When someone pronounced **Corban** (verse 11) on a piece of property or money, he dedicated it to God. This relieved that person from using it to help anyone else, but he could keep it in his own possession until his death.*

4. What contrast does Jesus draw between what Moses said and what they say?
5. What different things does Jesus say the Pharisees do with God's commands and with tradition (verses 8-9, 13)?

How can you guard against substituting traditions or new philosophies for God's commands?

6. How do the Pharisees judge their own and others' righteousness or standing before God?

Read Mark 7:14-23

7. Jesus emphasizes the importance of this teaching by calling the crowd to “**Listen...and understand...**” According to Jesus, what makes a person unclean?

What do the Pharisees think makes a person unclean (verses 1-5)?

8. What additional instruction does Jesus give the disciples about true defilement?

Note: The disciples receive this explanation because after the crowd leaves, they ask Jesus to help them understand. They also received the explanation of the parable because they asked (4:10).

9. Why, do you think, are **evil thoughts** the first on the list of what defiles a person?

What is the meaning of each of the things that follow?

Note: **Foolishness** (NASB) or moral **folly** (NIV) is treating sin as a joke.

10. Why is Jesus' analysis of the human condition as valid today as the day he said it?

11. If performing religious rituals doesn't make a person clean, what kind of cure do human beings need for inner defilement?

Read Mark 7:24-30

12. Locate Tyre and Sidon. What apparently is Jesus' purpose in going so far into Gentile territory? Compare Mark 6:31.

13. What do you learn about the woman and why she comes to Jesus?

What do you observe about the way in which she comes?

14. How would you explain Jesus' response to her request? Remember, tone of voice makes a big difference in the effect of what we say.

In verse 27 what does the word **first** suggest?

*Note: **Children** here refers to Israel, which was to receive the first offer of the gospel. The word used for **dogs** suggests household pets, an affectionate term.*

15. What suggests boldness and what suggests humility in the woman's response?

How does Jesus evaluate her answer?

What unusual element appears in this healing?

Read Mark 7:31-37

16. In this section and the previous one, what difference is there in:
 - location
 - problem
 - who initiates the interview

Why may the deaf man not have been involved in the faith that brought him to Jesus?

17. What are the specific stages in the healing of this man?

How would Jesus' actions begin to develop faith in the man?

How complete is the man's healing?

18. Why don't the people honor Jesus' request not to tell about this miracle since he granted their request to heal the man?

SUMMARY

1. According to Jesus' teaching in the first half of this chapter, what is every person's basic problem?

2. In your own words, state Jesus' definition of hypocrisy (verses 6-8).

3. In the two incidents of healing, what kind of response does Jesus seek and approve?

CONCLUSION

If a person's defilement is not an outward matter, his or her right standing with God cannot depend upon rituals or works. The cure for defilement, guilt before God, must treat not just the symptoms but the source of the problem, the human heart.