



Growth Group Questions
February 16, 2025
“Tradition”

CONTEXT

Most scholars believe the gospel of Mark was written for Gentile believers who were not familiar with the Jewish purification laws. Thus, Mark goes out of his way to explain unclean hands and the Jewish custom of washing. He also emphasizes that Jesus made it clear that there were no longer any unclean foods (verse 19b) which would have been a major conversation when Mark was writing this gospel.

The Hebrew scriptures taught that only priests were required to wash before entering the tabernacle. Otherwise, cleansing was only required by what is described in Leviticus 15. Over time, though, the Pharisees had extended the list. By the time of Jesus, it included touching lepers, Gentiles, Samaritans, dead people, and tax collectors. It had gotten so extreme that to translate the Hebrew scriptures into Assyrian made you unclean

There is a serious disagreement between the Pharisees and Jesus regarding the oral traditions the Pharisees had created around issues such as washing. The Pharisees accepted an evolving oral tradition that was equally authoritative to the teachings of the Old Testament. The fact that Jesus’ disciples ate with unclean hands in verse 5 could not be sustained by the law of the Old Testament, but the oral tradition allowed this point to be made.

In verse 14 Jesus moves to discussing the inner things that corrupt. It is not things from the outside that make us unclean, but the condition of our hearts. Jesus was really concerned about a movement of inward purity and morality and not a focus on obeying rituals and following certain customs. Ultimately, you could not be cleansed by your outward actions. Jesus was the only one who could cleanse and save.

In verse 17 Jesus takes the disciples aside in order to instruct them, but once again they are not able to understand the parable/riddle he had just told them. He asks them why they are so dull! Even though they had been with him for all his journeys, they were still having a hard time comprehending what he was trying to teach people.

SCRIPTURE

Mark 7:1-8

¹The Pharisees and some of the teachers of the law who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus ² and saw some of his disciples eating food with hands that were defiled, 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.^[a]) 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 defiled 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 merely human rules.”^[b]

⁸ You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to human traditions.”

Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Vindication of Tradition: The 1983 Jefferson Lecture in the Humanities*

“Tradition is the living faith of the dead, traditionalism is the dead faith of the living...It is traditionalism that gives tradition such a bad name.”

Mark 7:14-23

¹⁴ Again Jesus called the crowd to him and said, “Listen to me, everyone, and understand this. ¹⁵ Nothing outside a person can defile them by going into them. Rather, it is what comes out of a person that defiles them.” ¹⁶^[a] ¹⁷ After he had left the crowd and entered the house, his disciples asked him about this parable. ¹⁸ “Are you so dull?” he asked. “Don’t you see that nothing that enters a person from the outside can defile them? ¹⁹ For it doesn’t go into their heart but into their stomach, and then out of the body.” (In saying this, Jesus declared all foods clean.) ²⁰ He went on: “What comes out of a person is what defiles them. ²¹ For it is from within, out of a person’s heart, that evil thoughts come—sexual immorality, theft, murder, ²² adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. ²³ All these evils come from inside and defile a person.”

Jeremiah 17:9

⁹ The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?

Zechariah 3:3-4

³ Now Joshua was dressed in filthy clothes as he stood before the angel. ⁴ The angel said to those who were standing before him, “Take off his filthy clothes.” Then he said to Joshua, “See, I have taken away your sin, and I will put fine garments on you.”

Zechariah 3:8

⁸ “Listen, High Priest Joshua, you and your associates seated before you, who are men symbolic of things to come: I am going to bring my servant, the Branch.

Mark 7:24-30

²⁴ Jesus left that place and went to the vicinity of Tyre.^[a] He entered a house and did not want anyone to know it; yet he could not keep his presence secret. ²⁵ In fact, as soon as she heard about him, a woman whose little daughter was possessed by an impure spirit came and fell at his feet. ²⁶ The woman was a Greek, born in Syrian Phoenicia. She begged Jesus to drive the demon out of her daughter.

²⁷ “First let the children eat all they want,” he told her, “for it is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to the dogs.” ²⁸ “Lord,” she replied, “even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.” ²⁹ Then he told her, “For such a reply, you may go; the demon has left your daughter.” ³⁰ She went home and found her child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

QUESTIONS:

1. When you think about traditions in the church, what comes to your mind? Which religious traditions have influenced your life?
2. Pastor Paul quoted Jaroslav Pelikan on the difference between tradition and traditionalism. What do you see as the difference between the two?
3. How can our traditions get in the way of our honoring and worshipping God?
4. In Mark 7:14-23, Jesus radically redefines what is clean and what is unclean. What can we learn from this passage of Scripture?
5. Pastor Paul said that we cannot fix the condition of our hearts on our own. What does that mean to you?
6. What does the Bible tell us about how God works to heal our hearts?
7. In Mark 7:24-30 we read the story of the Syrophenician woman who begged Jesus to heal her daughter. What strikes you the most about this story?
8. What lessons can we learn from the story of this woman?
9. As you read through Mark 7 this week, is there any passage that particularly spoke to your heart?

PASTOR PAUL’S SERMON QUESTIONS:

1. What do you do to make sure you are not “missing” Jesus?
2. How are you building on the “living faith” of those who have gone before you?