

# **A Study of Mark's Gospel**

Week Ten  
Mark 7:1-30

## **Day One**

1 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.)

vs. 1&2 – The Pharisees had come from Jerusalem not to learn from Jesus but rather to observe Him, probably to confirm what they already knew. He was not doing things according to their traditions. **Can you imagine that these men had devised regulations for how to wash one's hands so that one would not be unclean when one ate food?** And they then judged Jesus to be unclean because He did not follow the rules where their prescribed washings were concerned.

**Are you open to learn, even from someone with whom you don't agree, or have you pre-judged them, thus eliminating the possibility that you could learn from them? Don't answer too quickly. For example, do you only read Christian books or trust books that are written by a Christian author? If so, you may be missing the truth contained in other books because you have judged them to be "unclean."**

v. 3 – The Jews had made a ceremony out of washing up before a meal. It had become so ingrained in their daily regimen that they stopped thinking about what they were doing and why. **Have you done that in any area of your life? Don't answer too quickly. Is your prayer before you eat a ritual or are you giving sincere thanks for what you are about to eat?**

v. 4 – I am not against tradition. I do, however, question traditions that we do and don't think about why we are doing them. I have seen some who will stop in mid-meal if they forgot to say a blessing at the beginning of the meal. **Is that prayer now a ritual that cannot be missed or something bad will happen?** The Pharisees had developed an entire system of rules and regulations that they positioned as spiritual but in reality were only man-made traditions. We need to constantly evaluate our own practices to determine if we have any of those. If we do, that's not necessarily a bad thing, unless we make those traditions the standard by which we judge everyone else's spirituality.

## **Day Two**

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!"

v. 5 – The Pharisees confronted Jesus on what they considered to be an important topic. Mind you, they were having an interview with God and had the chance to ask Him anything they wanted to know about Scripture or spiritual things. How did they use their time? They asked Jesus why He and His disciples didn't wash their hands according to the tradition of the elders! What a waste!

**Are you making the most of your time with the Lord? Are you talking to Him, and allowing Him to talk to you, about important things? Or are you talking to God about trivial things that don't really matter?** Your prayer topics are an indication of where your heart is as it was for the Pharisees. They were more concerned with form and not substance. Don't make the same mistake.

v. 6 – Jesus got right to the point – those asking were hypocrites! They appeared to be religious, spiritual even, but they were not. They were substituting traditions for spirituality. It is easy to say spiritual-sounding things, but not as easy to walk those things out with sincerity of heart. The Pharisees majored in externals—the washing of hands and utensils—and minored in internal heart issues. Jesus tried to tell them that they had things out of focus, forgetting what the Lord had told Samuel:

But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7).

**Are you looking at outward appearances and missing heart matters? In your own life? In your relationship with others?**

v. 7 – Man is a religious being, seeking for ways to serve God by following a set of rules or a system. We look for things that we can do that will guarantee a certain response or outcome from God. Such worship and service, however, are in vain. No system can ever replace a relationship with the Lord that is active and conforming us to the image of Jesus. **What do you have, a system or a relationship?**

vs. 8&9 – I hear teachings that circulate the body of Christ and they sound spiritual using certain trite phrases, which include words like covering, submission, authority, God-will-honor-that, give-your-way-out-of debt, and name-it-and-claim-it faith. Some of them are spiritual but others are the traditions of men, but we accept them as the ways of God. I am not trying to make you fearful or skeptical, **but are you sure that what you believe is grounded in God's word and is truly according to His way and will?** Perhaps this would be a good time to re-examine what you believe about faith and practice and why you believe them.

### Day Three

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."

v. 10 – Jesus knew the culture in which He was raised, so He was ready to give an example of what He was talking about. It takes awareness to recognize your culture for what it is, whether for a company, church or country. It takes courage to confront that culture to point out its inconsistencies. Jesus had both. **Do you?** You may have one or the other, but without both, you will never be an agent for positive change.

Jesus also acknowledged that Moses was a historical figure, and Jesus attributed these commandments concerning family to Moses. I only raise that because some question whether Moses actually wrote the first five books of the Bible.

vs. 11-13 – The tradition of the elders concerning parents conveniently circumvented the Law that Moses had decreed. All one had to do was devote what he had to God and then that possession could not be used to help a needy parent. For example, “Mom and Dad, I would like to help you, but I dedicated and devoted my savings account to God and I can’t use it to help you. Sorry!” This must have been commonplace for Jesus to use it as an example of the tradition of man trumping the word of God.

It is a priority with God for families to help their members and for children to honor their parents, with practical financial help when necessary. It is important that we stay aligned with God’s priorities. For instance, God puts a high priority on helping the poor. The Western church puts a high priority on facilities. We will pay the utility company whatever they say we owe them for air conditioning, but we often won’t help the poor. That is an example of man’s traditions overriding God’s priorities. Am I against buildings? Absolutely not! I just don’t think they should be built or maintained at the expense of God’s clearly-stated priorities.

Jesus said there were many such inconsistencies like the example He gave. **Can you think of any other examples in modern church life or society? How about missions work?** We collectively pay millions of dollars on pizza for youth gatherings to baby sit young people, but don’t spend nearly that much on missions work. If you can’t think of any other examples, then you may be so much a part of your culture that you aren’t aware of where it has dulled your senses and lulled you to sleep.

## Day Four

14 Again Jesus called the crowd to him and said, "Listen to me, everyone, and understand this. 15 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.'" 16 ["If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear."] 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 man from the outside can make him 'unclean'? 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.")

v. 14 – The context for this passage is the tradition of men overriding the word of God, and Jesus directed the crowd's attention to the issue of foods making someone unclean. This was certainly related to why the Pharisees maintained such rigid rules concerning washing, because they believed that eating something external that was unclean could make someone spiritually unclean. Jesus was pointing out that this wasn't possible.

v. 15 – I read this verse and I don't think it's that dramatic, but this would have been quite a shock for Jesus' audience. Jesus taught that it was what came out and now went into someone that made that person unclean. He was undoing the whole rule of keeping a kosher house and diet, the very heart of strict Judaism. Many are attracted to this seemingly spiritual practice, but it is worthless, according to Jesus. When you keep a kosher home or kitchen, you must follow strict rules or else the food is unclean. Jesus taught that this was a useless practice. Even His followers grappled with what He said here for decades after Jesus was gone. It was a hard practice to change.

v. 16 – This verse is not included in the New International Version, so I brought it in from the New American Standard Updated Version. I don't think it harms the meaning or context here and, in my opinion, reinforces the controversial nature of what Jesus said. He was undoing the whole dietary regulations of the Jews, rules that He had been raised with all His life. Jesus came to reform Judaism and not to make a few adjustments. This is why the Apostle Paul was so adamant that the Law as a means to God could not be tolerated as a source of spirituality.

v. 17 – The disciples considered this teaching a parable, because it was so difficult for them to comprehend. They had been taught since childhood to keep a kosher diet and not Jesus was insinuating that they had believed the wrong thing, that it was a tradition of men and not a command of God. Many years later, Peter was still grappling with this issue:

About noon the following day as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. He became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance. He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles of the earth and birds of the air. Then a

voice told him, "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat. "Surely not, Lord!" Peter replied. "I have never eaten anything impure or unclean" (Acts 10:9-14).

When the Lord told Peter to kill and eat, Peter responded by saying, "No, Lord!" You don't say no to your Lord, but Peter's dietary regulations were his lord in this instance, so he could say no to a direct command from God! That is how powerful culture and the traditions of men can be. **Do you have any such cultural, traditional habits that have that strong of a hold on you and your thinking?** Don't answer too quickly. Ask God to show you if you do.

vs. 18&19 – The traditions of men had dulled the disciples and they will do the same thing to you and me. Jesus appealed to logic to make His case. Anything a man ate is digested and eliminated. **How could there be a residual of uncleanness from something that was so transient and temporary?** Heart matters were a different story, however, and could easily defile a man.

### Day Five

20 He went on: "What comes out of a man is what makes him 'unclean.' 21 For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, 22 greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. 23 All these evils come from inside and make a man 'unclean.'"

v. 20 – Jesus went on to explain that sin, not food, is what defiles a man or woman. The Jews wanted to regulate what went into a man and felt that was the path to holiness. On the other hand, God wanted to regulate what came out of a person as the means to holy living. The Jews felt that they could behave however they wanted to behave as long as they maintained the correct eating habits. Where did this system come from? It was part of the futile Old Testament regulations that were to show the Jews that they could not perfectly keep the Law. They would then recognize their need for a Savior. Instead, they developed an intricate system, believing that, if a person followed that system, they could serve God and be holy. The system that was to create futility actually became their source of religiosity.

vs. 21&22 – Jesus gave some examples of what could come out of a person that would make that person unclean, and it makes so much sense. **How could pork make someone unclean? Don't arrogance, evil thoughts, and sexual immorality have more serious spiritual implications than eating shellfish? Isn't murder worse than not washing your hands properly before you eat?**

It is interesting to me, and I hope to you, that there is no hierarchy of sin in the list that Jesus mentioned. Sin is sin, and it is all capable of defiling the people who indulge its pleasures. I remember in my Catholic days when we distinguished between venial (minor) sins and mortal (serious) sins. It seems like that teaching was and is a tradition of men, for they all seemed equally as serious to Jesus. They should all be equally as

serious to us or else we run the risk of negating the word of God by giving preference to our own traditions.

v. 23 – We can deal with external sins and well we should. If I feel like hitting you, I can refrain. But the desire to hit you is a heart matter. I can ask God to change me, and cooperate with that process. At the end of the day, however, only God can change me on the inside. That is why religious man prefers to deal with externals, for he is still basically in charge of his own life and spirituality. When you move to heart matters, only God can change a man at that level.

So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God — through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin. Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death (Romans 7:21-8:2).

### Day Six

24 Jesus left that place and went to the vicinity of Tyre. 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 evil 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.

v. 24 – Jesus was always on the move, maximizing His exposure to as many people as possible. Tyre was a Phoenician coastal city and was quite a distance from Jerusalem, about 200 miles. How did Jesus get there? He walked or rode a donkey. Presumably He went there to get away from the Jewish crowds and controversy that He had been stirring up.

It didn't work, for Jesus was a celebrity even as far north as Tyre! It's hard to keep good news a secret and the famous healing rabbi, Jesus, had come to Phoenicia. The people were so desperate for spiritual and physical relief that they spread the word and soon Jesus was ministering to the needs of people there.

Yet it was no coincidence that Jesus was there, for this foreshadowed the great outreach to the Gentiles that was to characterize the ministry of His disciples. While the Jews considered this place and most of its inhabitants unclean, Jesus did not. That is often the case. The people I don't want to relate with are those that are special to God. **Is there anyone that you would prefer not to minister to?** Then they are probably the very people among whom God wants you to minister.

v. 25 – Who was among the first to come to Jesus in Tyre? It was not only a Gentile but a female Gentile, wanting help for her daughter who had an evil spirit! This story is told right after Jesus declared that all foods were clean. Then He declared that all people are clean, including women and Gentiles. This would have presented a real problem for a Jew as did the food and washing issues that Jesus had just addressed.

The people of God are always down on someone it seems, concerned that this group of people will contaminate them or is cut off from God's grace because of their ethnicity or sin. **What group is it today? Perhaps AIDS victims, maybe homosexuals, certainly Muslims and still women. In America it would be the Iranians as I write and in Africa it would be resident in tribalism. Is there any group that you are not fond of, that could affect your ability to minister and represent God's grace?**

### Day Seven

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 their dogs." 28 "Yes, Lord," she replied, "but 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.

v. 27 – I always felt like this was such a harsh response to the woman's request for help, so out of character for Jesus. I think He was portraying the attitude that most Jews would have had to this woman, perhaps modeling it so the disciples could see how it looked and sounded. They probably agreed with His assessment of the situation, for the things of God, in their mind at least, were the exclusive property of the Jews.

I have to think that Jesus had "read" this woman accurately and knew she would not back down from her request, even after He gave her a bit of a hard time. She did not disappoint Him.

v. 28 – The woman was fearless. She did not go home, despondent or bitter over what Jesus had said. She had also "read" Jesus well and knew that He was merciful and compassionate. His initial response did not deter her focus, and that was to see her daughter healed. You and I need the same faith focus. We need to be steadfast in seeking God for help, even if He seems "reluctant" to offer that help. **Have you given up on some faith project or need? Perhaps this is a good day to renew your faith and pursuit of God.**

v. 29 – Wow, that sure was quick and easy! The woman asked, Jesus demurred, she responded and her response won the day. Jesus told her that her daughter was healed. Jesus did not even have to be present for the girl to be delivered from her demon. That is not only a testimony to the power of God, but also to the power of faith. And faith is no respecter of persons, as this story shows. A Gentile woman, living in a Gentile land, had as much access to God through her faith as did a Jew. Yet the disciples would be slow to comprehend this truth and struggle with it for a few more years.

v. 30 – The woman had great faith and went home to find her child in bed, exhausted perhaps from her ongoing ordeal with an evil spirit. It is interesting that the mother knew it was an evil spirit and made a specific request to Jesus. The woman knew her daughter did not need counseling, she needed deliverance. It is important to recognize the nature of the spiritual problem and then to get help that matches the problem.

Mark is customarily brief in his own accounts but Matthew gives us much more information where this story is concerned. You may want to read that account in Matthew 15:21-28. As you read, I hope you are moved by the power of this woman's faith and the compassion of this man Jesus.