

Mark 7
November 12, 2023

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Q: How do you normally answer someone who says, “The church is full of hypocrites.” [Let people engage]

Q: Why do you think hypocrisy annoys or offends us? [Let people engage]

Q: How do you define hypocrisy? [Let people engage]

Transition: At this point in the Gospel of Mark, the Jewish religious leaders were now openly hostile toward the Lord and His ministry. Jesus had already violated their Sabbath traditions in Mark 2:23–3:5 (On Sabbath, Jesus and the disciples were in the grainfields picking some heads of grain. He also healed a man with a shriveled hand in the synagogue.) It was not unusual for them to follow Him from place to place simply to watch for something to criticize. In this case, they accused the disciples of failing to practice the Jewish ceremonial washing. These washings had nothing to do with personal hygiene, nor were they commanded in the Law. They were a part of the tradition that the scribes and Pharisees had given to the people to add to their burdens (Matt. 23:4). Let’s see how Jesus sets the record straight! Let’s begin.

BOOK:

Clean and Unclean

7 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.)

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.’ (Isa 29:13)

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 (set up) your own traditions! ¹⁰ For Moses said, ‘Honor your father and your mother,’ (Ex 20:12) and, ‘Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.’ (Ex 21:17) 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.”

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.’”

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.”)

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.’”

The Faith of a Syrophenician Woman

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 (unclean) 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 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.

The Healing of a Deaf and Mute Man

³¹ Then Jesus left the vicinity of Tyre and went through Sidon, down to the Sea of Galilee and into the region of the Decapolis. (the 10 cities) ³² There some people brought to him a man who was deaf and could hardly talk, and they begged him to place his hand on the man.

³³ After he took him aside, away from the crowd, Jesus put his fingers into the man’s ears. Then he spit and touched the man’s tongue. ³⁴ He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, “*Ephphatha!*” (which means, “Be opened!”). ³⁵ At this, the man’s ears were opened, his tongue was loosened, and he began to speak plainly.

³⁶ Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone. But the more he did so, the more they kept talking about it. ³⁷ People were overwhelmed with amazement. “He has done everything well,” they said. “He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.”

Process Observations/Questions:

Q: What did you most like about this passage? What resonated with you? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you least like about this passage? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you find in this passage that you didn’t understand? [Let people engage]

Q: What do we learn about Jesus in this passage? [Let people engage]

LOOK:

Jesus' response to the Jewish leaders was twofold: the leaders invalidated God's laws in order to keep their human traditions; and sin is a matter of the heart, not the diet. The Jews judged a man by his outward conformity to law. The spirit, attitude, and motive of an individual more clearly reveals his true nature. Man tends to look on outward appearances, but God ever looks on the heart.

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). The Bible Exposition Commentary (Vol. 1, pp. 133-138). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Throughout his Gospel, Mark's emphasis is primarily on what Jesus did. However, in this section of our study you will find Mark recording some of the important *teachings* of the Lord. Mark also describes His ministry among the Gentiles, which would be of special interest to Roman leaders. We see in this section three ministries of Jesus, the Servant-Teacher.

Teaching the Jews (Mark 7:1–23)

There are four stages in this drama, and the first is *accusation* (Mark 7:1–5). The Jewish religious leaders were now openly hostile toward the Lord and His ministry. It was not unusual for them to follow Him from place to place simply to watch for something to criticize. In this case, they accused the disciples of failing to practice the Jewish ceremonial washing. These washings had nothing to do with personal hygiene, nor were they commanded in the Law. They were a part of the tradition that the scribes and Pharisees had given to the people to add to their burdens (Matt. 23:4).

Our Lord had already violated their Sabbath traditions (Mark 2:23–3:5), so the Jews were eager to accuse Him when they saw the disciples eat “with defiled hands.” Why would such a seemingly trivial matter upset these religious leaders? Why would they feel compelled to defend their ceremonial washings? For one thing, these leaders resented it when our Lord openly flaunted their authority. After all, these practices had been handed down from the fathers and carried with them the authority of the ages! The Jews called tradition “the fence of the Law.” It was not the Law that protected the tradition, but the tradition that protected the Law!

But something much more important was involved. Whenever the Jews practiced these washings, they declared that they were “special” and that other people were “unclean”! If a Jew went to the marketplace to buy food, he might be “defiled” by a Gentile or (God forbid!) a Samaritan. This tradition had begun centuries before to remind the Jews that they were God's elect people and therefore had to keep themselves separated. However, a good reminder had gradually degenerated into an empty ritual, and the result was pride and religious isolation.

These washings not only indicated a wrong attitude toward people, but they also conveyed a wrong idea of the nature of sin and personal holiness. Jesus made it clear in the Sermon on the Mount that true holiness is a matter of inward affection and attitude and not just outward actions and associations. The pious Pharisees thought they were holy because they obeyed the Law and

avoided external defilement. Jesus taught that a person who obeys the Law externally can still break the Law *in his heart*, and that external “defilement” has little connection with the condition of the inner person.

So the conflict was not only between God’s truth and man’s tradition, but also between two divergent views of sin and holiness. This confrontation was no incidental skirmish; it got to the very heart of true religious faith. Each new generation must engage in a similar conflict, for human nature is prone to hold on to worn-out man-made traditions and ignore or disobey the living Word of God. It is true that some traditions are helpful as reminders of our rich heritage, or as “cement” to bind generations, but we must constantly beware lest tradition take the place of truth. It does us good to examine our church traditions in the light of God’s Word and to be courageous enough to make changes. (Note that the word *tradition* in 2 Thes. 2:15 refers to the body of doctrinal truth “handed down” from the Apostles to leaders in the church. See also 2 Tim. 2:2.)

The next stage can be labeled *condemnation* (Mark 7:6–13) as Jesus defended His disciples and exposed the hypocrisy of their accusers. The first thing He did was to quote from the Prophet Isaiah (Isa. 29:13), and then He brought in the Law of Moses (Ex. 20:12; 21:17; Lev. 20:9). How could the Pharisees argue with the Law and the Prophets?

In defending their tradition, the Pharisees eroded their own characters and also the character of the Word of God. They were hypocrites, “playactors,” whose religious worship was practiced in vain. True worship must come from the heart, and it must be directed by God’s truth, not man’s personal ideas. What a tragedy that religious people would ignorantly practice their religion and become the worse for doing it!

But they were not only destroying their character; they were also destroying the influence and authority of the very Word of God that they claimed to be defending. Note the tragic sequence: teaching their doctrines as God’s Word (Mark 7:7); laying aside God’s Word (Mark 7:8); rejecting God’s Word (Mark 7:9); finally, robbing God’s Word of its power (Mark 7:13). People who revere man-made traditions above the Word of God eventually lose the power of God’s Word in their lives. No matter how devout they may appear, their hearts are far from God.

History reveals that the Jewish religious leaders came to honor their traditions far above the Word of God. Rabbi Eleazer said, “He who expounds the Scriptures in opposition to the tradition has no share in the world to come.” The *Mishna*, a collection of Jewish traditions in the *Talmud*, records, “It is a greater offense to teach anything contrary to the voice of the Rabbis than to contradict Scripture itself.” But before we criticize our Jewish friends, perhaps we should examine what influence “the church fathers” are having in our own Christian churches. We also may be guilty of replacing God’s truth with man’s traditions.

Once He had exposed their hypocrisy, Jesus then turned to the Law of Moses and indicted them for breaking the fifth commandment. They had an ingenious way of breaking the Law and not feeling guilty. Instead of using their wealth to support their parents, the Pharisees dedicated that wealth to God (“Corban”=“an offering, a gift”; see Num. 30) and claimed that the wealth could now be used only for “spiritual purposes.” However, they continued to get the benefit of that wealth, even though it technically belonged to God. These men claimed to love God, but they had no love for their parents!

The third stage is *declaration* (Mark 7:14–16). Jesus announced to the whole crowd that the source of holy living is from within, not from without. Actually, He was declaring null and void the entire Mosaic system of “clean and unclean” foods; but at that time, He did not explain this radical truth to the crowd. Later, He did explain it in private to His own disciples.

But this declaration was surely understood by His enemies. They realized that He was breaking down one of the “walls” that separated the Jews from the Gentiles. Of course, the Law itself was not set aside until Jesus died on the cross (Eph. 2:14–15; Col. 2:14), but the principle Jesus announced had been true throughout the ages. In every period of history, true holiness has always been a matter of the heart, a right relationship with God by faith. Ceremonial purity was a matter of external obedience to a law as evidence of that faith (Ps. 51:6, 10, 16–17). Moses made it clear in Deuteronomy that God wanted love and obedience to come from the heart, and not be merely outward obedience to rules (note Deut. 6:4–5; 10:12; 30:6, 20).

Our Lord’s *explanation* (Mark 7:17–23) was given privately to His disciples when they asked Him “concerning the parable.” His explanation seems obvious to us, but we must remember that these twelve men had been brought up under the strict Jewish dietary code that categorized all foods as either “clean” or “unclean” (Lev. 11). In fact, Acts 10:14 suggests that Peter kept a kosher household for years even after he had heard this truth. It is not easy to change our religious traditions.

The human heart is sinful and produces all manner of evil desires, thoughts, and actions, everything from murder to envy (“an evil eye”). Jesus had no illusions about human nature, as do some liberal theologians and humanistic teachers today. He realized that man is a sinner, unable to control or change his own nature; *and that is why Jesus came to earth—to die for lost sinners.*

The Jewish dietary laws were given by God to teach His chosen people to make a difference between what was clean and what was unclean. (No doubt there were also some practical reasons involved, such as sanitation and health.) To disobey these laws was a matter of ceremonial defilement, and that was an external matter. Food *ends up* in the stomach, but sin *begins* in the heart. The food we eat is digested and the waste evacuated, but sin remains and it produces defilement and death.

This dramatic lesson on “truth vs. tradition” could only irritate the Jewish religious leaders more and make them want to silence Jesus. This increased opposition was the reason why He departed from the crowded places and took His disciples into Gentile territory.

Before we leave this section, however, it might be good for us to contrast man’s traditions and God’s truth.

Man’s traditions

God’s truth

Outward forms—bondage

Inward faith—liberty

Trifling rules

Fundamental principles

Outward piety

True inward holiness

Neglect, replace the Word

Exalts the Word of God

Helping the Gentiles (Mark 7:24–8:9)

Mark records three miracles that Jesus performed as He ministered to the Gentiles in the region of Tyre and Sidon. This is the only recorded instance of our Lord actually leaving Palestine. He

was practicing what he had just taught the disciples: there is no difference between Jews and Gentiles, for all are sinners and need the Savior.

Casting out a demon (vv. 24–30). Of the thirty-five recorded miracles in the Gospels, four directly involve women: the healing of Peter’s mother-in-law (Mark 1:30–31); the raising of the widow’s son (Luke 7:11–17); the raising of Lazarus (John 11); and the casting out of the demon as recorded here.

Jesus came to this area (about forty miles from Capernaum) so that He might have some privacy, but a concerned mother discovered He was there and came to Him for help. There were many obstacles in her way, yet she overcame them all by faith and got what she needed.

To begin with, her nationality was against her: she was a Gentile and Jesus was a Jew. Besides that, she was a woman, and society in that day was dominated by the men. Satan was against her, for one of his demons had taken control in her daughter’s life. The disciples were against her; they wanted Jesus to send her away and let Him (and them) have some rest. For a time, it looked as though even Jesus was against her! It was not an easy situation, and yet she triumphed because of her great faith.

Samuel Rutherford, the saintly Scottish minister who suffered greatly for Christ, once wrote to a friend: “It is faith’s work to claim and challenge loving-kindnesses out of all the roughest strokes of God.” That is exactly what this Gentile mother did, and we today have much that we can learn from her about faith.

When she first asked Him for help, Jesus did not even answer her! Encouraged by His silence, the disciples urged Him to send her away. When Jesus did speak, it was not to the woman but to the disciples; and His words seem to exclude her completely: “I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matt. 15:24). However, none of these barriers stopped her from pressing on with her plea.

The first time she cried for help, the mother addressed Jesus as “Son of David,” a Jewish title; but the next time she cried out for help, she simply said, “Lord, help me” (Matt. 15:25). It was then that Jesus spoke about feeding the children (Israel) first and not throwing their food to “the little pet puppies.” Jesus was not calling the Gentiles “dirty scavenger dogs” as did many of the proud Jews; He was giving her hope, and she took hold of it.

Her reply revealed that faith had triumphed. She did not deny the special place of the “children” (Jews) in God’s plan, nor did she want to usurp it. All she wanted were a few crumbs of blessing from the table; for, after all, “Salvation is of the Jews” (John 4:22). It must have rejoiced His heart when she took *His very words* and used them as a basis for her plea! She accepted her place, she believed His Word, and she persisted in her plea; and Jesus not only met her need, but commended her for her faith.

It is significant that the two times in the Gospel record when Jesus commended “great faith,” He was responding to the faith of Gentiles and not Jews: this Syrophenician woman and the Roman centurion (Matt. 8:5–13). It is also worth noting that in both situations, Jesus healed *at a distance*, suggesting the spiritual distance between Jews and Gentiles at that time (Eph. 2:11–22). Finally, the people of Tyre and Sidon were not known for their faith (Matt. 11:21–22), yet this woman dared to believe that Jesus could deliver her daughter.

Great faith is faith that takes God at His Word and will not let go until God meets the need. Great faith can lay hold of even the slightest encouragement and turn it into a fulfilled promise. “Lord, increase our faith.”

Healing a deaf man (vv. 31–37). The region of Decapolis (“ten cities”) was also Gentile territory, but before Jesus left the region, the people were glorifying the God of Israel (Matt.

15:30–31). The man they brought to Jesus was handicapped both by deafness and an impediment in his speech, and Jesus healed him. This miracle is recorded only by Mark and would be especially appreciated by his Roman readers, since the “ten cities” region was like a “Rome away from Rome.”

Jesus took the man away from the crowd so that the healing would be private and the man would not become a public attraction. Since the man was deaf, he could not hear our Lord’s words, but he could feel Jesus’ fingers in his ear and the touch on his tongue; and this would encourage the man’s faith. The “sigh” was an inward groan, our Lord’s compassionate response to the pain and sorrow sin has brought into the world. It was also a prayer to the Father on behalf of the handicapped man. (The same word is used in connection with prayer in Rom. 8:23, and the noun in Rom. 8:26.)

Ephphatha is an Aramaic word that means “be opened, be released.” The man did not hear Jesus speak, but the creation heard the command of the Creator, and the man was healed. Both the tongue and the ears functioned normally again. In spite of our Lord’s strict command for the people to keep quiet about the miracles, they told the news everywhere (see Mark 1:34, 44; 3:12; 5:43); and this resulted in a large crowd gathering and bringing people who were ill or handicapped. Even though Jesus was trying to enjoy some rest, He took time to heal them all. The result? These Gentiles “glorified the God of Israel” (Matt. 15:31).

Grassmick, J. D. (1985). *Mark*. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, pp. 132-136) Wheaton, IL: Victor Books

4. THE CONTROVERSY WITH THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS CONCERNING DEFILEMENT (7:1–23) (Matt. 15:1–20)

This passage returns to the theme of conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders (cf. Mark 2:1–3:6). It emphasizes the rejection Jesus encountered in Israel (cf. 3:6, 19–30; 6:1–6a) despite His public popularity (cf. 6:53–56). It serves as a fitting prelude for His ministry to Gentiles (7:24–8:10). The words “unclean” (7:2, 5, 15, 18, 20, 23) and “tradition” (vv. 3, 5, 8, 9, 13) bind the section together.

a. *The charge by the religious leaders (7:1–5) (Matt. 15:1–2)*

7:1–2. **The Pharisees** (cf. 2:16; 3:6) **and some Law teachers** (cf. 1:22) **from Jerusalem** (cf. 3:22–30) came to investigate **Jesus** and His followers again, presumably at Capernaum (cf. 7:17).

They critically observed **some of Jesus’ disciples eating food with “unclean” ... hands**. “Unclean” (*koinais*, “common”), as Mark explained for his Gentile readers, meant **ceremonially unwashed**. It was a technical term among Jews denoting whatever was contaminated according to their religious rituals and thus was unfit to be called holy or devoted to God.

7:3–4. These verses constitute an extended parenthesis in which Mark explained (*gar*; cf. 1:16), **for** the benefit of his Gentile readers who lived outside Palestine, the common Jewish practice of **ceremonial washing**.

The ritual washing regulations were observed by **the Pharisees and all the Jews** (a generalization depicting their custom) as part of **the tradition of the elders** which they followed scrupulously. These interpretations, designed to regulate every aspect of Jewish life, were

considered as binding as the written Law and were passed on to each generation by faithful Law teachers (scribes). Later, in the third century A.D., the oral tradition was collected and codified in the Mishnah which, in turn, provided the foundation for and structure of the Talmud.

The most common ritual cleansing was the washing of one's hands with a handful of water, a formal practice required before eating food (cf. TDNT "*katharos*," 3:418–24). This was especially important after a trip to **the marketplace** where a Jew would likely come in contact with an "unclean" Gentile or such things as money or utensils.

The comment that the Jews observed **many other traditions**, some of which Mark named, indicates that the issue under discussion involved the whole detailed question of ritual cleansing. For a loyal Jew, to disregard these regulations was a sin; to follow them was the essence of goodness and service to God.

7:5. The religious leaders directed their critical inquiry to **Jesus** who, as the disciples' Teacher, was held responsible for their conduct (cf. 2:18, 24). The Jewish leaders thought that the disciples' failure to observe ritual washing was a symptom of a deeper problem. Their concern was that the **disciples**, and Jesus, did not **live according to the tradition of the elders** (cf. 7:3).

b. Jesus' response and countercharge to His critics (7:6–13) (Matt. 15:3–9)

In reply Jesus made no reference to His disciples' conduct. Rather He addressed two issues underlying the inquiry: (a) the true source of religious authority—tradition or Scripture (Mark 7:6–13), and (b) the true nature of defilement—ceremonial and moral (vv. 14–23).

7:6–8. Jesus quoted Isaiah 29:13 (almost verbatim from the Septuagint) and applied Isaiah's description of his contemporaries to His questioners whom He called **hypocrites** (occurring only here in Mark).

They were "hypocrites" because they made an outward profession of worshiping God but gave Him no genuine **worship** from **their hearts**, the hidden centers of their thoughts and decisive choices (cf. Mark 7:21; 12:30). Their worship (a pious act) of God was **in vain** (*matēn*, "futile") because like the Jews of Isaiah's day they were teaching the **rules of men** as authoritative (divine) teachings.

Consequently, Jesus charged them with abandoning **the commands of God**, His Law, and instead adhering **to the traditions of men**. He redefined their oral tradition (cf. 7:3, 5), emphasizing its human origin (cf. vv. 9, 13), and He straightforwardly rejected its authority.

7:9. Jesus restated His charge that the religious leaders were clever at sidestepping God's Law **in order to observe** their **own traditions** (cf. v. 8). He supported this verdict by citing a striking illustration (vv. 10–12) which exposed their sin.

7:10. **Moses** clearly set forth the divine command (cf. v. 13) regarding a person's duty toward his parents. He stated it positively (Ex. 20:1, the fifth commandment; cf. Deut. 5:16) and negatively (Ex. 21:17; cf. Lev. 20:9). Such responsibility included adequate financial support and practical care for their needs in their old age (cf. 1 Tim. 5:4, 8). A person who treated his parents with contempt would face the **death** penalty.

7:11–12. Jesus quoted a scribal tradition that sidestepped the divine command. The words, **But you say**, are emphatic, showing the contrast with Moses' words (v. 10). In their "tradition" it was possible for a person to declare all his possessions to be **Corban** and thereby absolve himself from the fifth commandment.

"Corban" is the Greek (and Eng.) transliteration of a Hebrew term used to refer to a **gift devoted to God**. It was a dedicatory formula pronounced over money and property donated to

the temple and its service by an inviolable vow. Such gifts could only be used for religious purposes.

If a son declared that the resources needed to support his aging parents were “Corban” then, according to scribal tradition, he was exempt from this command of God, and his parents were legally excluded from any claim on him. The scribes emphasized that his vow was unalterable (cf. Num. 30) and held priority over his family responsibilities. So they **no longer let him do anything for** his parents.

7:13. **By their tradition** they nullified **the Word of God**. **Nullify** translates *akyrountes*, from *akyroō*, used in the papyri for annulling contracts. To sanction religious donations at the expense of violating God’s command regarding one’s duty to parents was to set human tradition above God’s Word.

The “Corban” vow was only one example of **many** other **things like** it (e.g., restrictive Sabbath rules; cf. 2:23–3:5) where scribal tradition distorted and obscured the Old Testament.

c. Jesus’ explanation of real defilement (7:14–23) (Matt. 15:10–20)

At this point Jesus gave a more direct reply to the defilement question (cf. Mark 7:5). He addressed the crowd first (vv. 14–15) and gave a general principle applicable to everyone. Then He explained the principle to His disciples privately (vv. 17–23).

7:14–16. Following a solemn call to attentive hearing and careful consideration by **everyone** (cf. 4:3), **Jesus** disclosed to **the crowd** the true source of defilement. Negatively, **Nothing outside a man** (generic, “person”) by going into him **can make him “unclean”** (cf. 7:2). Jesus spoke in a moral not a medical sense. A person is *not* defiled morally by what he eats even if his hands are not ceremonially washed.

Positively **What comes out of a man** (person; cf. vv. 21–23) **makes him “unclean.”** A person *is* defiled morally by what he thinks in his heart even though he may scrupulously observe outward purity rituals. So Jesus contradicted the Rabbinic view by stating that sin proceeds from within and not from without (cf. Jer. 17:9–10). He also demonstrated the true spiritual intent of the laws regarding clean and unclean food in the Mosaic Law (cf. Lev. 11; Deut. 14). A Jew who ate “unclean” food was defiled not by the food, but by His disobeying God’s command.

7:17. **After they left the crowd and entered the house** (probably in Capernaum; cf. 2:1–2; 3:20), **His disciples asked** for an explanation of the **parable** given in 7:15. Their failure to understand Jesus’ words and works is emphasized throughout 6:32–8:26 and is traced to their hardness of heart (cf. 6:52; 8:14–21).

7:18–19. Jesus’ question, **Are you so dull?** is literally, “So then are you *also* without understanding?” It showed that they, like the crowd, did not comprehend His teaching despite the instruction He already gave them.

Jesus amplified the negative truth that **nothing ... from the outside** of a person **can defile him** morally (cf. v. 15a). The reason is that food (or any other item) does not enter **his heart**, the control center of the human personality, and thereby affect his moral nature. Rather, it enters **his stomach** (a nonmoral agent).

The concluding sentence of verse 19 is an editorial comment by Mark (cf. 2:10, 28; 3:30; 13:14), to emphasize the significance of Jesus’ statement for his Christian readers in Rome, some of whom may have been confused over Jewish food laws (cf. Rom. 14:14; Gal. 2:11–17; Col. 2:20–22). He simply pointed out that **Jesus declared all foods “clean”** for Christians. The early church was slow to grasp this truth (cf. Acts 10; 15).

7:20–23. Jesus repeated and amplified the positive truth that **what comes out of a person is what defiles him** morally (cf. v. 15b). This is confirmed by noting what things come **from within, out of a person's heart** (cf. v. 19).

The general term translated **evil thoughts** precedes the verb in the Greek text and is viewed as the root of various evils which follow. Evil thoughts generated in a heart unite with one's will to produce evil words and actions.

The catalog of evil Jesus gave has a strong Old Testament flavor and consists of 12 items. First, there are six *plural* nouns (in Gr.) depicting wicked acts viewed individually: **sexual immorality** (*porneiai*, “illicit sexual activities of various kinds”); **theft** (*klopai*); **murder** (*phonoí*); **adultery** (*moicheiai*, illicit sexual relations by a married person); **greed** (*pleonexiai*, “covetings”), insatiable cravings for what belongs to another; **malice** (*ponēriai*, “wickednesses”), the many ways evil thoughts express themselves.

Second, there are six singular nouns depicting evil dispositions: **deceit** (*dolos*), cunning maneuvers designed to ensnare someone for one's personal advantage; **lewdness** (*aselgeia*; cf. Rom. 13:13; Gal. 5:19; Eph. 4:19; 2 Peter 2:2, 7), unrestrained and unconcealed immoral behavior; **envy** (*ophthalmos ponēros*, lit., “an evil eye,” a Heb. expression for stinginess; cf. Prov. 23:6), a begrudging, jealous attitude toward the possessions of others; **slander** (*blasphēmia*), injurious or defaming speech against God or man; **arrogance** (*hyperēphania*, used only here in the NT), boastfully exalting oneself above others who are viewed with scornful contempt; **and folly** (*aphrosynē*), moral and spiritual insensitivity.

All these evils defile a person, and have their source **from inside**, from one's heart. So Jesus took the focus of attention away from external rituals and placed it on the need for God to cleanse one's evil heart (cf. Ps. 51).

5. THE CURE OF THE SYROPHOENICIAN WOMAN'S DAUGHTER (7:24–30) (Matt. 15:21–28)

This is the first of three events Mark recorded from Jesus' third excursion beyond the borders of Galilee (for the three excursions see Mark 4:35; 5:20; 6:32–52; 7:24–8:10). On this journey He actually went out of Palestine, apparently for the only time. These events in Gentile territory are an appropriate sequel to Jesus' teaching in verses 1–23 and a fitting preview of the proclamation of the gospel to the Gentile world (cf. 13:10; 14:9).

7:24. **Jesus left that place**, probably Capernaum **and went to the vicinity of Tyre**, a Mediterranean seaport city in Phoenicia (modern Lebanon) about 40 miles northwest of Capernaum. Because of excellent, early Greek manuscript support, the words “and Sidon” (cf. NIV) should be included (cf. v. 31).

Jesus went there not to minister publicly to the people but to secure privacy, previously interrupted (cf. 6:32–34, 53–56), in order to instruct His disciples. That is why He **did not want anyone to know** He was there. But **He could not conceal His presence** since news of His healing power had preceded Him (cf. 3:8).

7:25–26. An unnamed **woman, whose little daughter was demon-possessed** (cf. 1:23; 5:2), **came** immediately (*euthys*; cf. 1:10) **and fell at His feet**, an expression of deep respect as well as personal grief over her daughter's condition (cf. 9:17–18, 20–22, 26). She kept asking **Jesus to drive the demon out of her daughter**.

Mark stressed the woman's non-Jewish identity: she **was a Greek**, not from Greece, but a Gentile by culture and religion. She was a Syrophenician **born in Phoenicia**, part of the province of Syria. Matthew called her a “Canaanite woman” (Matt. 15:22).

7:27. Jesus' reply was appropriate to His purpose for being there (cf. v. 24), and was on a level the Gentile woman could grasp. It was cast in figurative language: **the children** represented His disciples (cf. 9:35–37); **the children's bread** represented the benefits of His ministry to them; and the **dogs** (lit., "little dogs," house pets, not outdoor scavengers) represented the Gentiles (not in a derogatory sense here).

Jesus was telling the woman that His first priority in being there was to instruct His disciples. It is not appropriate to interrupt a family meal to give the dogs food from the table. So it was not appropriate for Him to interrupt His ministry to His disciples to give His services to her, a Gentile. But Jesus' reluctance to help stimulated her faith.

Other interpreters understand a broader theological meaning in Jesus' words: the children (unbelieving Israel) must be fed (Jesus' mission); their bread (special privileges including first claim on Jesus' ministry) must not be thrown to the dogs (Gentiles) because their time for feeding (worldwide proclamation of the gospel) had not yet come. Though this view is true theologically, it overplays Mark's point.

7:28. The woman accepted Jesus' statement with the words, **Yes, Lord** ("Sir," a title of respect). She realized He had the right to refuse her request. However, feeling no insult in the analogy He used, she pressed it a little further: **Even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs.**

Her point was that the dogs get some food *at the same time* as the children and thus do not have to wait. There need be no interruption in His instructing the disciples for all she humbly requested was a crumb, a small benefit of His grace for her desperate need.

7:29–30. Because of **such a reply**, which demonstrated her humility and faith, Jesus told her to **go** home (cf. 2:11; 5:34; 10:52), and assured her that **the demon had left her daughter**. The words "has left" indicate the cure was already complete.

When **she** returned **home**, she **found** that **her child** was resting peacefully, **and the demon was gone**. This is the only miracle recorded in Mark that Jesus performed at a distance without giving any vocal command.

6. THE HEALING OF THE DEAF MAN WITH DEFECTIVE SPEECH (7:31–37)

This miracle is recorded only by Mark. It concludes a narrative cycle, 6:32–7:37, with the people's confession about Jesus (7:37). This event prefigured the opening of the disciples' "ears" (cf. 8:18, 27–30). A second narrative cycle begins in 8:1 and climaxes in the disciples' confession (8:27–30).

7:31–32. **Jesus left ... Tyre** (cf. v. 24) **and went** north 20 miles **through Sidon**, a coastal city, and then turned southeastward, avoiding Galilee, to a place on the eastern side of **the Sea of Galilee** within **the region of the Decapolis** (cf. 5:20).

Some people there **begged** Jesus **to place His hand** (cf. 5:23) **on a man who was deaf and could hardly talk** (*mogilalon*, "speaking with difficulty"). This rare word occurs only here and in the Septuagint of Isaiah 35:6, a passage promising the coming of God's rule on earth. This promised intervention was already taking place in Jesus' ministry (cf. Mark 7:37; 1:15).

7:33–35. In healing this man, Jesus used sign language and symbolic acts (which Mark did not explain) that uniquely suited the man's needs and caused him to exercise faith. Jesus **took him aside** privately (cf. 6:32) in order to communicate one-to-one with him **apart from the crowd**. By touching his **ears** and **tongue**, spitting (on the ground) and looking **up to heaven** (to God; cf. 6:41), Jesus conveyed what He was going to do. His **deep sigh** may have reflected

compassion for the man but it was likely Jesus' strong emotion as He battled the satanic powers that enslaved the suffering man.

Then Jesus gave the Aramaic command **Ephphatha!** meaning **Be opened!** (lit., "be completely opened") This word could easily be lip-read by a deaf person. This Aramaic word may indicate that the man was not a Gentile.

Immediately (*euthys*; cf. 1:10) **at Jesus' command the man's ears were opened, his tongue was loosened, and he could speak** clearly. Defective speech usually results from defective hearing, both physically and spiritually.

7:36. The more **Jesus commanded** (lit., "kept commanding") the people to be silent, **the more they kept** proclaiming the news (cf. 1:44–45; 5:20, 43). He wanted to minister in the Decapolis region without being regarded as a popular "Miracle-worker."

7:37. Jesus' miracle left the people **overwhelmed with amazement** (*exēplēssōnto*; "struck out, overwhelmed"; cf. 1:22; 6:2; 10:26; 11:18) beyond all measure (*hyperperissōs*, a forceful adverb used only here in the NT).

The crowd's climactic confession is a general statement about their understanding of Jesus, based on previous reports (cf. 3:8; 5:20). The words **the deaf** and **the dumb** are plural in Greek, viewing them as two classes of people. **Even** should be rendered "both." Mark probably intended an allusion to Isaiah 35:3–6 in the crowd's confession.

Church, C.L. (1998). *Mark In D. S. Dockery (Ed.), Holman Concise Bible Commentary (pp. 434-435). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.*

CONFLICT WITH TRADITION (7:1–23)

The "conflict" with the Jerusalem Pharisees and scribes occasioned by the disciples' eating with unwashed (ritually defiled) hands prepares for the following three narratives in which Jesus and the disciples overcame barriers to ministry to the Gentiles. Verses 3–4 are Mark's explanation for his Gentile readers. This "conflict" was of crucial importance to the later mission of the church: would Jesus' disciples be bound to follow "the tradition of the elders"?

Jesus' response to the Jewish leaders was twofold: the leaders invalidated God's laws in order to keep their human traditions; and sin is a matter of the heart, not the diet. Mark again explained an Aramaic term—*corban*—for his Gentile readers. Apparently, such an offering to God could be retained during the giver's lifetime but could not be used for any other purpose, somewhat like an irrevocable living trust. In calling His disciples to heed the weightier matters of God's law, Jesus affirmed God's Old Testament revelation as the heritage of the church. Verse 19b is Mark's comment, which the disciples did not immediately grasp (Acts 10), on the significance for the Gentile mission of Jesus' teaching on what really defiles.

JESUS AND THE GENTILES (7:24–37)

Jesus' response to the Syrophenician woman has a harshness that leaves us uncomfortable: Jews used "dogs" as a derogatory term for Gentiles whom they regarded as unclean as "muts" searching streets for garbage. Interpreting the diminutive as "puppy" does not solve the dilemma either, for a "house pet" does not share the family status of a child. Status in God's household is not a matter of race. Mark 3:35 has already paved the way for a larger family of those who do God's will. The key word in the narrative is "first," which leaves open later ministry to Gentiles. Jesus' role was first Jewish Messiah and then Savior of the world (compare Paul's bringing the

gospel to the Jews first and then to the Greeks, Acts 13:46). Jesus commended the persistent faith of this “unclean” woman who knew there must be a place for her in God’s grace. In 8:1–10 Jesus would feed a Gentile crowd with bread as He had God’s Jewish children (6:30–44).

As a resident of the Decapolis, the league of ten Greek-speaking cities, the deaf-mute probably was a Gentile. As with the Jewish paralytic, friends brought him to Jesus. Experiencing God’s grace makes it impossible to keep the good news of Jesus secret. Ironically, the Gentile crowd recognized that Jesus met the expectation of the Jewish Messiah (see Isa. 35:5).

Leavell, L.P. (1972). *Mark*. In H. F. Paschall & H. H. Hobbs (Eds.), *The Teacher’s Bible Commentary* (p. 624). Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers.

Conflict and Withdrawal (Mark 7:1–37)

The passage—In chapter 7 we find Mark’s record of the continuing conflict between Jesus and Jewish tradition. In verses 3, 5, and 8 we find the word “tradition.” This is the oral law, not God’s revelation recorded in the Old Testament. They had come to look upon their man-made rules as sacred and binding.

Beginning in verse 10 we find an illustration of their hypocrisy. The word “Corban” in Hebrew means “gift.” One of the Ten Commandments requires that honor be given parents. This includes provision for their physical needs. Some were known to evade this parental duty by giving their estate to the Temple rather than to parents. It was easy from that point to find a loophole and keep one’s property, giving it neither to the Temple nor one’s parents. The hypocrisy is in saying one has given his property to God, and neither doing this nor caring for aged parents.

In verses 14–23 Jesus clarifies and condemns the sin of the spirit, not just the sin of the flesh. The Jews judged a man by his outward conformity to law. The spirit, attitude, and motive of an individual more clearly reveals his true nature. Man tends to look on outward appearances, but God ever looks on the heart.

A second withdrawal is described in 7:24–30. This one takes Jesus into Gentile country. This is a difficult passage to interpret, but can be seen as a test of this Greek woman’s faith. There is also the possibility that Jesus did this as a lesson for the twelve. Some have suggested it may reflect an inner struggle with Jesus.

Another withdrawal, this time away from Phoenicia, is recorded in verses 31–37. Returning to the area around the Sea of Galilee, a deaf and dumb man was brought to him for healing. He could speak, but with an impediment. The importance of this healing may be in light of the fact that the man was a Gentile who was healed by a Jew. In the presence of the twelve the wall of separation was beginning to be destroyed.

The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). Mark 7. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.