

Introduction

Several years ago Karen and I attended a service at a fairly large church in another city. It was very well organized and had parking lot attendants to greet us, and then more greeters at the door. They directed families with children to the children's ministry to drop off their children. The kids that we saw loved the children's ministry and were excited to be there. As we entered the auditorium, there were strobe lights flashing in the darkened room. There were also fog machines running and you could not see clearly across the room. As the worship service started I could not help but notice that the majority of people in the room were not participating in the songs of praise; they were watching the very professional worship team. The couple in front of us were drinking their lattes that they picked up in the lobby on their way in. It was like they were enjoying the pre-game show and waiting for the main event to get underway. The pre-recorded video announcements were given, and they were timed perfectly. There were three other services that morning and timing was an important detail, so the announcements were carefully planned out. The pastor's message that day was awesome. He did an outstanding job of preaching the passage. Even though many people that day were not engaged in the songs of praise, they were being presented with the word of God.

On another Sunday, Karen and I also attended a different church in another city, which had several hundred people in attendance. It was friendly, and the people seemed to be engaged in the songs of praise and worship. It was far more casual than the other church, and they did not appear to be overly concerned about the timing of every activity. They had a children's ministry, but there was not as much hype or entertainment. The message that morning was all about Calvinism. The church was going through some changes in their theology, and they were taking a year to go through the teachings of Calvin to make sure everyone was firmly rooted in his systematic theology. The pastor had a lot of quotes from reformed theologians, but not an abundance of scripture.

When Karen and I moved here we were looking for a church home to worship in and to serve. One of the churches we visited the people were pretty friendly. We were invited over for dinner at one of the elder's house. We quickly found out that they were very Calvinistic. The pastor told me that if I was not a five-point Calvinist I would not be allowed to teach even Sunday School. I told him that I have to teach the word of God, not the teachings of men. I cannot change 1 John 2:2 to say that Jesus died only for the elect. My Bible tells me that Jesus is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world." I told the pastor that I hold Scripture higher than the teachings of men. (For those unfamiliar with the teachings of Calvin, this is the "L" in TULIP, which stands for Limited Atonement.)

(1 John 2:2) "and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for *those of the whole world.*"

In our preaching class on Friday afternoons, there was a quote this week about the preaching today. It said, "Today's pulpit has lost its authority because it has largely ignored the Bible as the source of its message." There are lots of stories, and some of them are really touching. There are even services that focus on current movie themes. Many churches try to attract people with messages that they think will be of interest to them. In Jesus' day, He addressed the Pharisees because they were ignoring the commandments of God and were focusing on the traditions of the elders. Just as there was vain worship back then, there is a lot of vain worship today.

Why do I bring up these three church services that Karen and I attended? I bring them up to say that the passage today in Mark 7:1-13 is very relevant to the church today. In our passage, some Pharisees had come up from Jerusalem and they asked Jesus why His disciples were eating their bread with impure hands. They had not washed their hands according to the tradition of the elders. Jesus responded to them about the various teachings of men, like the washing of cups, pitchers, and pots. Then, He quoted from the prophet, Isaiah, about how the people honor God with their lips but their heart was far from God. They were worshiping in vain, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men. They were neglecting the commandment of God and holding to the tradition of men. Then, Jesus gave an example of how they set aside the commandment of God to honor their parents through one of their traditions. He ended by saying, "and you do many things like that." In the church today, there are many religious people who attend services. They are there physically, but their hearts are far from God. There are other places that are teaching the doctrines of men, but are not teaching the commandments of God.

This passage is not only relevant, but it is foundational. In Hebrews 6, we are given six foundational teachings. The first is repentance from dead works. The second is faith toward God. The third is instructions about washings. The fourth is laying on of hands. The fifth is the resurrection from the dead. The sixth and final foundational teaching is eternal judgment. Our text today mentions this third foundational teaching, the washing of cups, pitchers and pots. God thought that this was a foundational teaching that the New Testament church needed to have a firm grip on. Paul and the early church had to wrestle with this on a regular basis. Our passage today is both relevant and extremely important.

(Heb 6:1-2) "Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, {2} of instruction about washings and laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment."

This morning we will look at two characteristics of vain worship. We will see that vain worship is that which is merely outward, and does not come from the heart. Second, we will see that vain worship is through traditions based on the teachings of men, rather than the commandments of God. Finally, we will look at some specific applications for us. Let's read our text for today.

Two Characteristics of Vain Worship

1. Vain Worship Is Not From the heart (lip service)
2. Vain Worship is based on the traditions of men (based on the teachings of men)

(Mark 7:1-13) "The Pharisees and some of the scribes gathered around Him when they had come from Jerusalem, {2} and had seen that some of His disciples were eating their bread with impure hands, that is, unwashed. {3} (For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they carefully wash their hands, *thus* observing the traditions of the elders; {4} and *when they come* from the market place, they do not eat unless they cleanse themselves; and there are many other things which they have received in order to observe, such as the washing of cups and pitchers and copper pots.) {5} The Pharisees and the scribes asked Him, "Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat their bread with impure hands?" {6} And He said to them, "Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: 'THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME. {7} 'BUT IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE PRECEPTS OF MEN.' {8} "Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men." {9} He was

also saying to them, "You are experts at setting aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition. {10} "For Moses said, 'HONOR YOUR FATHER AND YOUR MOTHER'; and, 'HE WHO SPEAKS EVIL OF FATHER OR MOTHER, IS TO BE PUT TO DEATH'; {11} but you say, 'If a man says to *his* father or *his* mother, whatever I have that would help you is Corban (that is to say, given *to God*),' {12} you no longer permit him to do anything for *his* father or *his* mother; {13} *thus* invalidating the word of God by your tradition which you have handed down; and you do many things such as that."

1. Vain Worship Is Not From the Heart

Some Pharisees and scribes had come up from Jerusalem and find fault with Jesus' disciples. This was not their first time to find fault. In Mark 2:1-12 Jesus had just forgiven a paralytic of his sins and they reasoned in their hearts that Jesus was blaspheming. Jesus confronted them and then healed the paralytic, telling him to pick up his pallet and go home.

In Mark 2:16, the Pharisees and scribes saw Jesus eating and drinking with tax collectors and sinners, they found fault with Him about that. He told them that He came to call sinners, not the righteous.

In Mark 2:18, they found fault with Him because His disciples were not fasting.

In Mark 2:23-28, they found fault with Him because His disciples were passing through the grain fields and picked some heads of grain and ate them. They accused His disciples of breaking the Sabbath. Jesus explained the Sabbath was for man, not man for the Sabbath.

In Mark 3:1-6, Jesus healed a man with a withered hand, and they found fault with Him. Mark records in verse 2, "They were watching Him to see if He would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse Him." In verse six, "The Pharisees went out and immediately began conspiring with the Herodians against Him, as to how they might destroy Him." These Pharisees and scribes were looking for opportunities to accuse Jesus and to destroy Him. They had not come up from Jerusalem to seek the Messiah.

In Mark 3:22, the scribes accused Jesus of being possessed by Beelzebul, and casting out demons by the ruler of the demons. The scribes were vicious in their attacks, and their attacks were not even logically sound. Jesus said that a kingdom divided would not stand. In other words, Satan would not be casting out his own demons.

Jesus has just done his biggest miracle yet. He had supernaturally fed 25,000 or more people with two fish and five loaves. All these people had personally experienced this miracle. The crowds wanted to take Him by force and make Him king. His fame and popularity was increasing, and the Pharisees are jealous and looking for any way possible to destroy Him. At His trial before Pilate, Matthew records that he knew they had handed Jesus over because of envy. It was not because of His wrongdoing. They were full of envy. So, some of them came up from Jerusalem to look for an opportunity to accuse and destroy. And, they found an opportunity. They observed that Jesus' disciples had not ceremoniously washed their hands. The disciples were aware of basic cleanliness and the importance of washing your hands. This is not about eating food with dirty hands. The Pharisees had come up with specific laws about how to wash your hands, and the disciples had not followed the Pharisaical laws about cleansing your hands.

(Matt 27:18) "For he knew that because of envy they had handed Him over."

Mark goes on to record that according to the tradition of the elders, they did not eat unless they cleanse themselves first. They also had to wash their cups, pitchers, and pots. These were laws that the elders, scribes and pharisees had come up with that went way beyond God's laws. In 200 A.D., which is not too long after Jesus' life, a certain Rabbi by the name of Jehuda put together all the laws and materials on the cleansing of cups, pots, and pitchers, and these books became known as the Mishnah. There were thirty chapters in the Mishnah just on how to ceremoniously cleanse pots and pans. There was another whole volume with laws about cleansing your hands and fists. I don't know how many chapters were in that volume, but there were lots of laws on the cleansing of hands. The Pharisees had a lot of ceremonial laws.

Jesus responds to the Pharisees and scribes by saying, "Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, "This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far away from Me. But in vain do they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men." This is a quote from Isaiah 29:13, and God also said that "their reverence for Me consists of tradition learned by rote." These man-made laws became traditions that were passed down. The Pharisees and scribes were doing these religious things, but their hearts were far from God. In Isaiah 1:10-20, God likens the Jewish people to Sodom and Gomorrah. In other words, their sins had come up to God and He had had enough of it. He told them that He had no pleasure in their sacrifices of bulls, lambs and goats. He said their offerings were worthless. Their incense was an abomination. God hated their celebrations of the new moon and sabbath. These feasts had become a burden to God and He was weary of them.

(Isa 1:10-15) "Hear the word of the LORD, You rulers of Sodom; Give ear to the instruction of our God, You people of Gomorrah. {11} What are your multiplied sacrifices to Me?" Says the LORD. "I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed cattle; And I take no pleasure in the blood of bulls, lambs or goats. {12} When you come to appear before Me, Who requires of you this trampling of My courts? {13} Bring your worthless offerings no longer, Incense is an abomination to Me. New moon and sabbath, the calling of assemblies—I cannot endure iniquity and the solemn assembly. {14} I hate your new moon *festivals* and your appointed feasts, they have become a burden to Me; I am weary of bearing *them*. {15} So when you spread out your hands *in prayer*, I will hide My eyes from you; yes, even though you multiply prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are covered with blood."

God gave the remedy through Isaiah. He told them to repent. He told them to wash themselves, and make themselves clean. He was not talking about ceremonial cleansing of pots and pitchers. God was talking about cleansing themselves of their sins. He said, "Remove the evil of your deeds from My sight. Cease to do evil. Learn to do good. Seek justice. Reprove the ruthless. Defend the orphan. Plead for the widow." Then God added, "Come now, and let us reason together, though your sins are as scarlet, they will be white as snow. Though they are red like crimson, they will be like wool." God wanted their hearts to be cleansed. Worship that does not come out of a clean heart is vain worship.

(Isa 1:16-20) "Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from My sight. Cease to do evil, {17} learn to do good; seek justice, reprove the ruthless, defend the orphan, plead for the widow. {18} Come now, and let us reason together," says the LORD, "Though your sins are as scarlet, they will be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they will be like wool. {19} If you consent and obey, you will eat the best of

the land; {20} but if you refuse and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword." Truly, the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

In Psalm 51, which is also known as the Penitent Psalm, David is repenting of his sins, and he asked God to wash him whiter than the snow, and to blot out all his iniquities. He asked God to create in him a clean heart. David said, "For You do not delight in sacrifice... You are not pleased with burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, You will not despise." David knew that anything sacrificed to God out of a wicked heart was not a pleasing sacrifice.

(Ps 51:7-17) "Purify me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. {8} Make me to hear joy and gladness, Let the bones which You have broken rejoice. {9} Hide Your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquities. {10} Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me....{16} For You do not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it; You are not pleased with burnt offering. {17} The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise."

In Psalm 50, God had another word about presenting sacrifices to Him. He said, "{7} Hear, O My people, and I will speak; O Israel, I will testify against you; I am your God, your God. I do not reprove you for your sacrifices...{22} Now consider this, you who forget God, or I will tear you in pieces, and there will be none to deliver. He who offers a sacrifice of thanksgiving honors Me; and to him who orders his way aright I shall show the salvation of God." God wanted them to worship Him with a pure heart and a grateful heart. Worshiping God was not about the bulls and goats; it was about worshiping Him with their whole heart.

In Deuteronomy 6:4-5, Moses wrote that we are to love the Lord our God with all our heart and with all our soul and with all our might. We are to worship God with our whole heart, and with our whole life. The Pharisees had all these outward things they were doing, but their hearts were far away from God.

(Deut 6:4-5) "Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! {5} You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might."

Jesus called them hypocrites. This was not the only time that Jesus came down hard on the religious leaders. He was full of compassion for sinners, but He came down hard on the religious leaders because of their hypocrisy. In the Sermon on the Mount, He came down hard on their hypocrisy. They gave to the poor to be seen and honored by men (Matt 6:2). They prayed in public so that they could be seen by men (Matt 6:5). They fasted to be seen by men (Matt 6:16). In Matthew 23, He gave seven woes to the Pharisees and scribes. He said that they cleaned the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of robbery and self-indulgence (Matt 23:25). He told them they were whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness (Matt 23:27). The Pharisees gave the appearance of being righteous, but they were full of evil and uncleanness. They were hypocrites. Their worship was in vain because it was not from a clean heart. Their worship was all external and outward. It was seen by men, but because it was not from the heart it was vain.

The church can learn a lot about worship from this. The church is full of sin and uncleanness. The statistics are sobering. Pornography, fornication, adultery, cheating on taxes, homosexuality,

and a host of other sinful patterns are prevalent in the church. Yet, we come to church, and do our religious duty and appear to be righteous. Jesus told us that if our brother had something against us, we were to lay down our offering and first be reconciled to our brother, and then we were to come back and present our offering. Our worship cannot just be outward activities; it needs to come from our hearts.

(Matt 5:23-24) “Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, {24} leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering.”

He said in Psalm 96:9, “Worship the Lord in holy attire...” Our theology and song in church today is “Come, come as you are and worship.” God says to get right before Him and to order your way aright. God says to repent and let your sins be washed away. He does not despise a broken and contrite heart. God says to get reconciled with your brother and then come worship. We don’t go to church the way we are. Worship comes from the heart and we need to have our hearts right. The hearts of the Pharisees were not right, so their worship was in vain.

2. Worship that Is Based on the Traditions of Men

In our text today, Mark uses the word, “tradition,” five times. In verse three in describing how they washed their hands, they were observing the traditions of the elders. In verse five, the Pharisees and scribes asked Jesus why His disciples did not walk according to the tradition of the elders. In verse eight, Jesus said, “Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men.” In verse nine, He said, You are experts at setting aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition. In verse thirteen, He said that they were invalidating the word of God by their traditions which were handed down.

- (Mark 7:3) “(For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they carefully wash their hands, *thus* observing the **traditions** of the elders;”
- (Mark 7:5) “The Pharisees and the scribes *asked Him, "Why do Your disciples not walk according to the **tradition** of the elders, but eat their bread with impure hands?"
- (Mark 7:8) “Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the **tradition** of men.”
- (Mark 7:9) “He was also saying to them, "You are experts at setting aside the commandment of God in order to keep your **tradition**.”
- (Mark 7:13) “*thus* invalidating the word of God by your **tradition** which you have handed down; and you do many things such as that.”

There is nothing wrong with traditions. Paul praised the Corinthians because they held firmly to the traditions that he had delivered to them. There were apparently some great traditions that he passed down to them.

(1 Cor 11:2) “Now I praise you because you remember me in everything and hold firmly to the traditions, just as I delivered them to you.”

In 2 Thessalonians 2:15, Paul exhorted the brethren to stand firm and hold to the traditions which he had taught them by word of mouth or by letter. Paul is not talking about the traditions of the elders. There were some good traditions that he had taught them and they were encouraged to

walk in them. Some of the traditions had to do with living holy lives. In 2 Thessalonians 3:6, Paul commanded them to keep away from every brother who leads an unruly life and not according to the tradition that they had received from him. So, whatever traditions these were, they pertained to living holy lives.

(2 Thess 2:15) “So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word *of mouth* or by letter from us.”

(2 Thess 3:6) “Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from every brother who leads an unruly life and not according to the tradition which you received from us.”

Paul was very aware of the difference in good and bad traditions. He told the Galatians that before he was saved, he was advancing in Judaism beyond many of his contemporaries because he was extremely zealous of his ancestral traditions. In his life as a Pharisee, Paul was wrapped up in these same traditions of men that Jesus was confronting the Pharisees. As a believer and an apostle, Paul warned the Colossians not to be taken captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ (Colossians 2:8). There is a clear distinction between these ancestral traditions and the traditions of Christ. The difference is clearly defined by Jesus. He contrasted the commandments of God with the traditions of men. Any tradition that contradicts the commandments of God is vain worship. We have to be very careful about the traditions that we keep.

(Gal 1:14) “and I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions.”

(Col 2:8) “See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ.”

Jesus gave one example of their traditions, and it related to the honoring our father and mother. The commandment to honor our father and mother was given in Exodus 20:12. In Exodus 21:17, God said that “He who speaks evil of his father or mother, let him be put to death.” Obviously, honoring your parents is important to God. The Pharisees and scribes had come up with a tradition where you could declare that your money was “Corban,” which meant it was dedicated to God. If their parents were needy, they were freed from spending their money on taking care of them, because it was promised to God. When they declared their money as Corban, they did not have to put it in the tithe box; they retained possession of it, and had freedom to use it for a number of things, but it gave them a great excuse from not helping their parents or other needy people. Declaring something Corban made you look spiritual while not giving to help anyone.

(Ex 20:12) “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the LORD your God gives you.”

(Ex 21:17) “He who curses his father or his mother shall surely be put to death.”

Mark concludes with a remark that they do many things such as that. They had many traditions and laws that invalidated the word of God. These Pharisees valued these traditions more than

God's Word. We have to be careful that we do not fall into the same things. As a teacher, I want to study and teach the Word of God to others. I want to help them understand and apply the Scriptures to their lives. But, we have to be careful about elevating my teaching or any other teaching of a man above the Scriptures. I tell people that the Scriptures are always true. I may not understand them, but it is my lack of understanding, not an error in the Scriptures. We have to have a high regard of the Scriptures.

(Mark 7:13) “*thus* invalidating the word of God by your tradition which you have handed down; and you do many things such as that.”

One of the last things that God spoke to us in the Bible is in Revelation 22:18-19. He tells us that we are not to add to the Scriptures and we are not to take away from the words of this prophecy. We have to be very careful not to add or take away anything from the Scriptures. We must be careful that we do not teach things that invalidate the word of God. The early reformists understood this. They had five solas, and one of these was sola scriptura. Sola scriptura means “scripture must govern over church traditions and interpretations which are themselves held to be subject to scripture. All church traditions, creeds, and teachings must be in unity with the teachings of scripture as the divinely inspired Word of God.”

(Rev 22:18-19) “I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book; {19} and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book.”

This is partially based on 2 Timothy 3:16-17, which states that “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness.” You will find this as the first thing mentioned in our statement of faith on our website. We believe in the authority of the scriptures. Everything we do must fall in line with the Scriptures.

(2 Tim 3:16) “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness;”

Conclusion and Applications

Jesus responded to the accusations against His disciples by rebuking the Pharisees for their vain religion. Their religion was about looking spiritual to others, and it was not from the heart. Second, they had invalidated God's commands with their own traditions.

This morning, we are going to close with a tradition. This tradition was established by Christ at the Last Supper. In Luke 22: 19, after sharing the cup and bread with His disciples, He said, “This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.” The disciples understood that they were to keep doing this as a remembrance of what Jesus was going to do for us. He was going to be arrested and crucified right after sharing this supper with them, but they were to keep celebrating the Lord's Supper as a remembrance of what He had done for us.

(Luke 22:19) “And when He had taken *some* bread *and* given thanks, He broke it and gave it to them, saying, “This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.”

The Lord met with the Apostle Paul and one of the things that He spoke to Paul about was the Lord's Supper. In 1 Corinthians 11:23-26, he wrote, “For I received from the Lord that which I

also delivered to you..." Paul was probably the most influential leader in the New Testament and the Lord wanted to make sure that Paul established this tradition in all the churches. So, the Lord met with Paul and gave him this tradition. We celebrate this tradition, because it is one that God told us to celebrate.

(1 Cor 11:23-26) "For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; {24} and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me." {25} In the same way *He took* the cup also after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink *it*, in remembrance of Me." {26} For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes."

Today, as we partake of the elements, I want to encourage us to do two things. First, we want to do this from our heart, not just a religious activity. Second, we want to do it with a heart of gratitude. When Jesus led the apostles, He gave thanks for the bread. We want to give thanks to the Lord for His body that was broken for us. We want to give thanks for the New Covenant that He established with us through His blood.

Introduction (Mark 7:1-13, Heb 6:1-2)

1. Vain Worship Is Not From the Heart (Mark 2:1-12, 2:16, 2:18, 2:23-28, 3:1-6, 3:22, Matt 27:18, Isa 29:13, 1:10-20, Ps 51:7-17, Ps 50:7-22, Deut 6:4-5, Matt 6:2, 6:5, 6:16, Matt 23:25, 23:27, 5:23-24, Ps 96:9)

2. Worship that Is Based on the Traditions of Men (Mark 7:3, 7:5, 7:8, 7:9, 7:13, 1 Cor 11:2, 2 Thess 2:15, 3:6, Col 2:8, Gal 1:14, Ex 20:12, 21:17, 7:13, Rev 22:18-19, 2 Tim 3:16)

Conclusion and Applications (Luke 22:19, 1 Cor 11:23-26)