

Mark 7:1-8

1 Now when the Pharisees and some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem gathered around him, 2 they noticed that some of his disciples were eating with defiled hands, that is, without washing them. 3 (For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, do not eat unless they thoroughly wash their hands, thus observing the tradition of the elders; 4 and they do not eat anything from the market unless they wash it; and there are also many other traditions that they observe, the washing of cups, pots, and bronze kettles.) 5 So the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, "Why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?" 6 He said to them, "Isaiah prophesied rightly about you hypocrites, as it is written, 'This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; 7 in vain do they worship me, teaching human precepts as doctrines.' 8 You abandon the commandment of God and hold to human tradition."

After Jesus is rejected in his hometown he goes about teaching in the villages and calls the twelve disciples. Then he does something very significant; he sends out his disciples in teams of two. There lies a valuable contemporary lesson for us today. The disciples proclaimed a message of repentance, cast out demons, anointed people with oil, and cured the sick. The lesson for us is that we are to be disciples and carry out the mission of Jesus. Jesus taught his disciples to carry out his mission. Therefore, our mission is one of discipleship, to continue the ministry of Jesus. Then Jesus and his disciples go by boat to a deserted place where they can get some rest. But the crowd problem follows Jesus. A multitude of people flocked to him and then we have the famous story of feeding five thousand men. It's important to note that the gospels only report the number of men. The crowd is much larger once you add the women and children. Then there is the second sea crossing where we have the famous story of Jesus walking on water and scaring the heck out of his disciples. They land at Gennesaret which is on the North West side of the Sea of Galilee. Once again Jesus encounters large crowds that want to be healed.

This brings us to today's Scripture which covers one of my favorite pet peeves; when tradition conflicts with the word of God. It is a source of a huge amount of complaints by many today and is one of the main reasons that many people fall from faith. It is a big problem within the realm of historic religion and contemporary religion. It is a reason for the Protestant Reformation and the American Reformation Movement. Now I want to be sure to point out that tradition is not necessarily a bad thing. There are many valid theological reasons for some of our traditions. Another thing I want to point out is that the elders that Jesus refers to includes all of the religious leaders, it is not like we know of the specific role of elders that we have in our churches today. The problem is when tradition conflicts with the word of God. Within the gospels we see the religious leaders put a high value on rituals, public display of piety, traditions, and law restrictions. This conflicts with the ministry of Jesus because Jesus put a high value on the word of God and the needs of the people that were being oppressed and neglected by the religious system. The Old Testament repeatedly emphasizes the duty of the Hebrews to care for widows, orphans, and immigrants. Jesus demonstrated a huge level of concern for those on fringes of society.

The conflict that Jesus addresses is one of doctrine; a contrast between what humans teach versus a doctrine that is actually focused on the will of God. The Scripture reveals how

important righteous doctrine is to God. Jesus teaches the significance of remaining true to doctrine that is focused on the will of God as opposed to the doctrine of human preference.

The Scribes and Pharisees came from Jerusalem. Now, this is a large distance that would have taken them several days to travel. Their goal is to undermine the popularity of Jesus and try to find a way to trap him. So, they have a fit over ritual hand washing which is more of a matter of antagonistic nit picking than a serious concern. They accuse Jesus of breaking tradition. Jesus defense is the scripture of Isaiah. So, Jesus is staying true to the word of God and the will of God. But the Scribes and Pharisees are not. So, he calls them hypocrites. I take this opportunity to emphasize that of all the things that Jesus condemns, at the top of the list is hypocrisy. He rebukes them for teaching human precepts as doctrine.

I'm going to talk for a minute about theological consistency. The same problem repeats over and over again in the Bible whereupon the will of humans transgresses from the will of God. This happened in the wilderness, during the conquest of Canaan, the period of the judges, during the monarchy, during the exile, into the New Testament, and today. The same solution is also presented and that is the Lord ruling over your life. The judges were righteous and the prophets spoke the word of God. Jesus is theological consistent with the Old Testament teaching about the Lord ruling over your life. The theological characteristics of Jesus match the theological characteristics of the true Old Testament prophets. He defends the word of God. Jesus commands loyalty to the word of God and teaches that religious action needs to coincide with pure hearts. In Old Testament times there were true prophets and false prophets. The false prophets preached whatever was popular. They told the people what they wanted to hear but they were not right with God. You can recognize true prophet by the word because it matches the will of God and the word of God. In New Testament times the word that Jesus preaches is the word of God. He emphasizes the will of God and rebukes hypocrisy. The religious leaders think that they are righteous but they follow human precepts that do not match the word of God and the will of God.

I was recently watching a true crime TV show about a girl that was murdered. The parents said "We forgive him." Everybody was amazed at their strength of faith and a lot of people praised them accordingly. However, later in the show the parents said "We wanted the death penalty." Now I hope you take the time to think about that and process it. If they want the death penalty for the perpetrator, then they haven't forgiven the man. Their words of offering forgiveness was contemporary rhetoric; they said what they knew they were supposed to say and it made them feel good to say it. However, the reality is that this is a case of hypocrisy. They feigned the piety of forgiveness when they actually wanted vengeance. Their words matches what is taught and approved of within society and within their religious realm. But it does not match the word of God as expressed through Jesus.

How do you know when you are following correct biblical doctrine as opposed to contemporary rhetoric or human precepts? The answer is the Bible. You have to know what the Bible teaches; you have to take the time to study the Bible. I encourage you to value the word of God over human precepts and make sure the Lord rules over your life.