

## **7. Holding on to the Traditions of Men, What Is Clean and Unclean, Visit to Tyre and Return to Galilee**

This chapter contains comprehensive teachings of the Lord that cut to the very heart of Jewish error, as they had departed far from the teachings of the Old Testament in favor of their traditions. The principles taught here by the Lord are as applicable to 21<sup>st</sup> century religious error as they were to the teaching of the Jews in Jesus time. When testing false teachings in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, one ought to ask, "Is this teaching from God or men.

### ***The Traditions of Men***

Mark 7:1-4

*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.)*

The Pharisees and some teachers of the law had come all the way from Jerusalem. Mark previously has recorded how they were always out to get him. Here they are testing Jesus and once again trying to entrap him. The disciples were eating food without the ceremonial washing of their hands as Jewish tradition demanded. The ceremonial washing of hands and cooking utensils was not a requirement of the Law of Moses. This passage adds many details about the tradition of the Jews not found in Matthew 15:1-10, a parallel passage.

Paul also taught that we should not follow the traditions of men in Col 2:8:

*8 See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.*

In fact, Paul extended this prohibition to the ceremonial requirement of the Old Testament in Col 2:16-17:

*16 Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. 17 These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.*

Many are the traditions of men practiced today—Easter, Christmas, infant baptism, instrumental music, clerical vestments, separation of clergy and laity – the list is endless.

Mark 7:5-8

*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."*

Why did the disciples of Jesus not keep the traditions of the Jewish elders is the question that they raise. Jesus quoted Isaiah and applied the prophecy to these Jewish leaders. The point Jesus makes is that teaching and rules of men creates vain (empty) worship. The application is clear: one cannot keep the commands of God and hold to the traditions of men. An easy test of truth versus tradition is a simply question: where is that in the word of God.

Mark 7:9-13

*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! 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."*

In his refutation, Jesus picked a tradition that more than any other established the reputation of the Jews as being greedy and unscrupulous. Their unscriptural religious ceremony would actually excuse them from scripturally caring for their needy parents. Jesus notes that they do many things like that. How different is the teaching of Jesus? Paul taught in 1 Tim 5:7-8:

7 Give the people these instructions, too, so that no one may be open to blame. 8 If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

Matt 23 is an entire chapter where Jesus preaches against the traditions of the Jews, pronouncing woe upon woe on them for these departures from the word of God.

What can be wrong with these additions in faith and practice, one might ask? The answer is that human traditions nullify the word of God. If by tradition, men insert a new baptism, or name, or item of worship, etc., they "nullify the word of God."

### ***What Is Clean and Unclean***

Mark 7:14-19

*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.")*

By this teaching, Jesus declared all foods "clean." He thus set the stage to focus on the inward man and on what comes out of the inward man. The Lord repeats this lesson in order to convince Peter to take the gospel to the Gentiles whom the Jews considered unclean. The lesson to Peter came in the form of a dream, which he had three times in Acts 10:9-15ff:

9 . . . Peter went up on the roof to pray. 10 He became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance. 11 He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. 12 It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles of the earth and birds of the air. 13 Then a voice told him, "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat."

14 "Surely not, Lord!" Peter replied. "I have never eaten anything impure or unclean."

15 The voice spoke to him a second time, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean."

This declaration of the Lord, as the one in Mark, declares all food clean.

Mark 7:20-23

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.'"

All these sins are sins of the heart, and they make a person unclean. To find a sin not included in this list seems impossible.

What Mark recorded here, Matthew recorded in Matthew 15. Moderns often teach that Jesus did not forbid homosexuality and other forms of sexual permissiveness. *Sexual immorality*, coming from the Greek root that gives us our word pornography, includes all sexually immoral acts. Strong summarizes these:

porne (por'-nay); feminine; a strumpet; figuratively, an idolater: KJV - harlot, whore.

porneuo (porn-yoo'-o); to act the harlot, i.e. (literally) indulge unlawful lust (of either sex), or (figuratively) practice idolatry: KJV - commit (fornication).

porneia (por-ni'-ah); harlotry (including adultery and incest); figuratively, idolatry: KJV - fornication.

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Sexual immorality is only illustrative here. Jesus forbade all these evils. His teaching and its meaning is as true today as it was when he taught it.

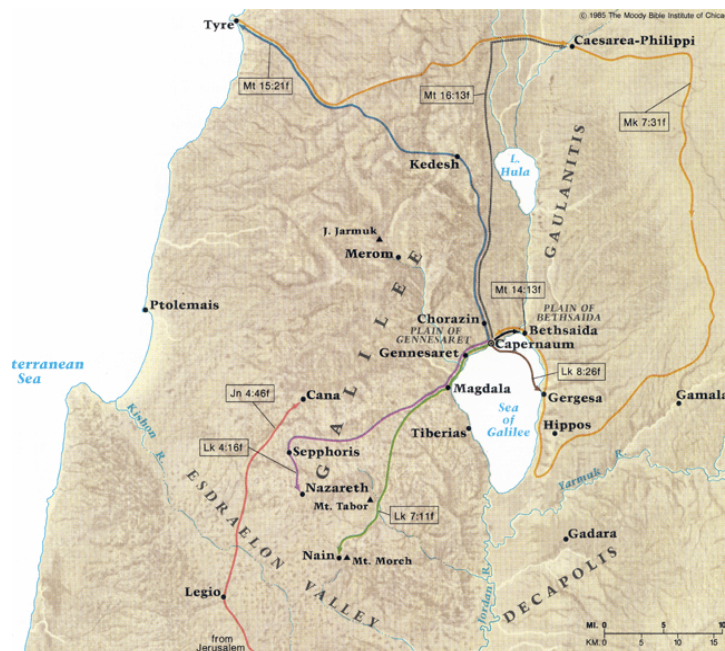
## Visit to Tyre

Mark 7:24-30

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.

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.

Jesus once again seeks solitude, perhaps to rest. Perhaps he was trying to escape the frantic crowds attracted to him, or to escape the notice of the Pharisees and leaders of the Jews stalking him. He is in a city, Tyre, which is not predominately Jewish. In fact, the woman was a Gentile of Syrian Phoenicia. Even as a Greek, she fell at Jesus feet and begged him to drive out the demon from her daughter. These facts are necessary to understand the allegory that follows.

Jews considered all Gentiles as dogs, one of the most derisive, contemptible insults possible (Muslims still refer to Christians as dogs). In the allegory, the children are the children of Israel. The bread is the bread of life. The dogs are the gentiles Jesus used this same figure in John 6:32-33:

32 Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. 33 For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."

Thus, he raises the issue of whether his word should go to the Gentiles before the Jews have all they want. Ordinarily, the answer, given the contempt of the Jews for the Gentiles, would be *no!* The desperate woman extends the metaphor by saying that in real life the dogs are allowed the crumbs from the children's table. The woman's desperation is akin to that of a starving dog eating crumbs as if to say, "Give me this one crumb from your table, Lord."

Jesus responded to her answer and her child was healed

## Return to Galilee

Mark 7:31-37

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. 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."

Sidon was about thirty miles north of Tyre. Jesus took a route that led him through Sidon to the Decapolis (a region of ten independent cities).

Mark 7 concludes with Jesus healing the deaf man, amazing and overwhelming the people by his power

