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**Grace Evangelical Church**  
**Sunday, February 28, 2010**  
**"Jesus' Truth or Man's Tradition"**  
**Mark 7:1-23**

Tevye says in "Fiddler On The Roof,"

A fiddler on the roof...

Sounds crazy, no?

But here, in our little village of Anatevka, you might say every one of us is a fiddler on the roof. Trying to scratch out a pleasant, simple tune without breaking his neck. It isn't easy. You may ask, why do we stay up there if it's so dangerous?

Well, we stay because Anatevka is our home. And how do we keep our balance? That I can tell you in one word!

Tradition

Tradition

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Tradition

"Because of our traditions, we've kept our balance for many, many years. Here in Anatevka we have traditions for everything – how to sleep, how to eat, how to work, how to wear clothes. For instance, we always keep our heads covered and always wear a little prayer shawl. This shows our constant devotion to God. You may ask, how did this tradition start? I'll tell you – I don't know! But it's a tradition. Because of our traditions, everyone knows who he is and what God expects him to do."

Yes, many traditions are with us, but how they all got started we probably are not sure, just like Tevye.

Of course, there is nothing wrong with tradition, however, if that tradition is tied to God's truth.

**This was the problem with the Pharisees, the religious leaders of the time in which Jesus lives. They had traditions without being tied to God's truth.**

This resulted in conformity to a certain life-style without any transformation of the heart, one's inner self.

Such can also happen in our culture today whether one is a follower of Jesus or not a follower of Jesus. We can conform to traditions without letting God's truth change our lives into becoming like Christ.

That's why our text today in Mark 7 is so relevant for us today as we live in a world that conforms to traditions without a change of one's heart to serve God.

Note what our text is telling us today about tradition and God's truth.

**I. Man's tradition leaves the individual weighed in God's balances and found wanting (Mark 7:1-7).**

**1. The teaching of the Old Testament Law – the Law of Moses (Leviticus 11:1-47; Deuteronomy 14:1-20; Exodus 30:19; 40:12).**

In Lev. 11:1-47; Deut. 14:1-20 certain things the Israelites could eat and certain things they couldn't eat. They were given dietary laws, which were ceremonial laws not ethical laws. The laws reflected the holiness of God, to keep the nation distinct from the other idolatrous nations, and to help them maintain physical health.

(2) In Exodus 30:19; 40:12, the Law required the Jewish priests to wash ritually before serving at the altar.

**2. The teaching in Jesus day by the religious leaders (Mark 7:1-4).**

The Pharisees had set themselves the aim of **living by the more strict priestly standards**, and so ritually washed their hands before daily morning prayer and before meals, as if the food eaten were priestly food.

When the religious leaders saw Jesus' disciples eating, they viewed them as eating with impure hands, meaning not dirty hands, but hands not washed according to their traditions (Mark 7:2-4). Of course the Old Testament Law said nothing about this.

### **3. The question asked of Jesus.**

That's why the Pharisees and scribes asked Jesus in Mark 7:5 why His disciples didn't wash their hands according to the tradition of the elders.

**They asked this question because the religious leaders believed that the Law of God has been broken. The traditions of men had become the "truth" of God, if you please.**

It's the same thing that happened in Mark 2:23-28, when the disciples were eating grain from the field on the Sabbath day. It's the same thing that happened to the Lord in Mark 3:1-6, when Jesus healed on the Sabbath day. In each case, the religious leaders had formed their tradition that such was breaking God's law, when in actuality the disciples and Jesus had the liberty under the Law to do what they were doing.

### **4. Jesus' response to the religious leaders charge against His disciples (Mark 7:6-7).**

Notice Jesus' response to the charge of the religious leaders that His disciples were not following God's truth – His Word.

He calls them hypocrites – counterfeits. They act like they keep the law of God, but they do not. They only keep their own laws they have made.

Then Jesus quotes from Isaiah 29:13 telling the religious leaders that they are like Israel of old. They honor Him with their lips but their heart is far from Him, that is their worship is vain or empty. They have made the precepts (commandments) of men the very doctrine (teaching) of God.

Jesus is telling the religious leaders in His day that those who add to God's teaching and seek to live by their man made rules are only living in conformity to their own thinking. As a result, there is no heart change in their lives in their worship of God. They are doing it like they want rather than having a heart change before the Lord in truly accepting Him as their Savior and Messiah, the God-man.

**They are weighed in God in God's balance and found wanting – yes, far from the kingdom of God. Why?**

They had rejected the teachings of God's truth, His written word, as well as the living Word, Jesus Christ. A relationship with God is not based upon man's performance using his rules or really using God's truth for it's a matter of the heart first of all.

### **5. Over the years past Jesus' day.**

It's well to point out here as time went on that the Jews had overlaid the biblical Old Testament teaching with a vast amount of spoken teaching and oral tradition. They were trying to protect the law of God so they thought.

The tradition included 248 commandments (thou shalt) and 365 prohibitions (thou shalt not).

In the late 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D., these oral teachings were written down in what I called the Mishnah – a division of six divisions – agriculture, festivals, marriage, civil life, crime and ceremonies. To this was added a commentary called the Gemara. The Mishnah and the Gemara together what is called the Talmud. It's available for our perusal today.

But something else was taking place in Mark 7 regarding the Jesus' truth versus man's tradition.

## **II. God's truth rejected leads to tradition that brings disobedience to God (Mark 7:8-13).**

### **1. Jesus charge against the religious leaders (Mark 7:8).**

The religious leaders in holding to the tradition of men had neglected (continually dismiss) the commandment of God.

## **2. Jesus explains what the religious leaders in their tradition are doing to the truth of God (Mark 7:9-13).**

In rejecting God's truth, the religious leaders have conjured up their own tradition to approve of their sinful behavior.

Note what Jesus does. He uses the Word of God to expose the hypocrisy of the religious leaders in holding to their traditions over the truth of God's Word.

### **(1) Jesus quotes the 5<sup>th</sup> commandment from Exodus 20:12 & and then Leviticus 20:9.**

"Honor father and mother" (Exodus 20:12).

"He who speaks evil of father or mother, is to be put to death" (Lev. 20:9).

### **(2) Jesus points out how the religious leaders are disobeying God's truth. (Mark 7:11-13).**

Note verse 11, but you say, "If a man says to his father or his mother, whatever I have that would help you is Corban (meaning gift), that is to say give to God, you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or his mother; thus invalidating the word of God by your tradition which you have handed down; and you do many things such as that."

What Jesus is saying here is that the religious leaders instead of using some of their wealth to support their parents, they dedicated the wealth to God – it was called Corban, or a gift to the Lord. But then they used the gift as they pleased. Their parents would not receive any support financially.

The religious leaders claimed to love God, but they had no love for their parents. How hypocritical!! For God's truth taught them to show love to their parents!! They were disobeying God's word completely in the name of being a follower of God.

### **Neglecting what the Law (God's truth said), they used their money for selfish advantage.**

**Note Christ's progression of thought here in this passage.**

**(1) The religious leaders neglected, continually dismissed the truth of God's Word (Mark 7:8).**

**(2) The religious leaders set aside the commandments, the truth of God's Word.**

**(3) The religious leaders invalidated the Word of God – no longer relevant for their lives having no power for changing them for salvation or for living for Jesus.**

Jesus here exposed publicly the disobedience of the religious leaders to God's Word. By getting around God's truth by posing religious, they really showed their rebellious attitude to not do what God said in His Word.

Such action led Jesus to zero in what was the real problem with the Pharisees , really all of us.

## **III. God's truth exposes completely the wickedness of the human heart while pointing one to the need of the Savior (Mark 7:14-23).**

### **1. Jesus gives a parable about what's outside of man and what's inside of man (Mark 7:14-15).**

(1) Nothing outside of a man can defile a man if it goes into him.

(2) Things which proceed out of man are what defiles the man.

When in the house, the disciples, then, asked Jesus what the parable meant.

### **2. Jesus explains what the parable meant (Mark 7:17-23).**

#### **(1) Foods taken into the stomach don't defile a person (Mark 7:17-19).**

This meant, as Mark makes the comment, "He cleared all foods clean." Mark may have received this teaching from Peter (Acts 10:14-15 – what God has cleansed is not unclean – from the vision of the different animals on a sheet).

This was certainly a revolutionary teaching to the disciples and the religious leaders of that day. Jesus certainly knew the dietary laws of Leviticus 11, and the ceremonial defilement connected with those laws. But what He declared clean to eat was clean to eat!!

Already, Jesus is starting to show here how He would be the fulfillment of the entire Law of Moses as He lived a Law abiding life and would pay for the penalty of our breaking God's law in His death, burial and bodily resurrection.

**(2) Defilement of a person comes from his sinful heart – his mind, emotion, and will (Mark 7:20-23).**

Jesus gives a list of what can come out of a heart that is defiled that is sinful, totally opposed to God, yes, totally depraved – a heart that has inherited the sin nature of Adam and carries out all kinds of sins, that which misses God's mark of holiness.

**Note the sins that can come from the spiritual heart of man that is completely separated from God:**

\*Evil thoughts – that which is against God and against one's fellow man. Thinking that which is not pure, right, and good. Christ starts with the mind, for that's what controls the rest of our emotions and our will.

\*Fornications – immorality – pre-marital sexual relationships, lewdness, prostitution, and other types of immorality including pornography.

\*Thefts – taking what is not rightfully yours.

\*Murders – willfully taking innocent life.

\*Adulteries – sinful relationships outside the marriage union;

\*Deeds of coveting – wanting what is not rightfully yours;

\*Wickedness – doing what is wrong, that which is against God.

\*Deceit – not being truthful, not keeping one's word.

\*Sensuality – licentious behavior, no control over one's desires.

\*Envy – an evil eye.

\*Slander – juicy gossip about someone – putting the other person down while building up one's self.

\*Pride – arrogant, not teachable.

\*Foolishness – ignorant of spiritual things.

All spiritual hearts can have sinful thoughts and can carry out sinful acts. All of us have sinned and come short of the glory of God.

Certainly, Jesus exposed the Pharisees for who they really were. They have a spiritual heart problem. Substituting their tradition for the truth of God's Word showed conclusively that they were standing before God in judgment needing His forgiveness and grace

It's the same for all of us here today. Due the sinfulness of our spiritual hearts, we stand before God condemned needing His eternal forgiveness and grace.

**3. Only Jesus provides us His forgiveness and grace through faith in Him along with a new nature – His very LIFE.**

(1) Through faith in Christ we have redemption (payment for our sin) through His blood the forgiveness of our sins (Ephesians 1:7; 2:8-9).

(2) Through faith in Christ we receive His nature, His very life (II Peter 1:4).

We are partakers of the divine nature.

Christ's mind, emotion, and will.

**4. Relying on the Holy Spirit's power within us, we can say "no" to sin, and "yes" to righteousness doing God's will (Galatians 5:16-26).**

This is what Galatians 5 is all about.

We are instructed by the truth of God's Word to keep walking (present tense & a command) in the Holy Spirit so that we don't fulfill the lusts of the flesh, give evidence of what the old nature is still like in our lives (Galatians 5:16).

Then the Scripture gives us a list like unto what Christ gave in Mark 7 (cf. Galatians 5:17-21).

But, then (Galatians 5:22-23) the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.

When the believer let's the Holy Spirit be active in his or life, the sinful evidences of the old life will be rendered inoperative and the life of Christ as set forth in the fruit of the Spirit will become vary apparent in one's life.

In fact the believer living in the power of the Holy Spirit will have insight into knowing the difference between living by Jesus' truth and living by man's traditions.

### **Note what these insights are.**

#### **(1) Insight into the meaning of the word, tradition.**

The believer needs to know that the word, tradition, is used differently in the Scripture. In fact, II Thessalonians 2:15 & I Corinthians 11:2, use the word tradition to refer to the doctrine, the oral teaching that Paul has given to his readers, and is now in written form in the Word of God. The word, tradition, then, can refer to the teachings of God's word that live and abide forever. So it can be used to refer to the truth of God's Word, to Jesus' teachings.

At the same time, the same word, tradition, can be used for man's traditions as we have considered in our text in Mark 7, where Christ refers to the "tradition of men." How the word is used is determined by the context.

#### **(2) Insight regarding the traditions of men.**

##### **1. The believer will know that the traditions of men are based upon man's way of thinking or a distortion of the truth of Jesus, or the Word of God.**

Usually the first is easy to see but the latter is not the easiest. That is where we need the discernment of the Holy Spirit through the Word of God.

##### **2. The believer will also understand that the traditions of men are fulfilled through performance.**

The Jews told Jesus that his disciples' hands were impure because they were not washed according to their man-made traditions. Performance was the basis for acceptance in the **traditions of man**.

##### **3. The believer will know that keeping the traditions of men leads to pride and arrogance as one carries out his traditions while others don't.**

The Pharisees always thought that they were better than the others because they kept their traditions that the others didn't. The Pharisee told God that he was thankful that he wasn't like the tax collector. He fasted twice a week and gave tithes of that he received. Performance is what drives the traditions of men.

##### **4. The believer will know that the traditions of men only can cause one to conform to the tradition. No inner transformation takes place.**

That's why the Pharisees questioned Jesus why his disciples didn't carrying out washing of their hands as they did. Outward conformity to a tradition of men was the evidence that showed one was keeping the tradition.

##### **5. Not keeping the traditions of men leads to a sense of false guilt.**

It is false guilt (sense that a person has done something wrong) because that guilt comes from a tradition that is only made by man. It has nothing to do with breaking a commandment of the Lord, which produces true guilt. This means that man's traditions bring bondage – slavery to an sin - - where eternal issues, like forgiveness and grace, eternal life, true lasting hope are not personally experienced.

Looking back over each of these 5 statements, I trust that you see the various cults, world religions, and ideas of men, the many traditions of men. Some try to mix the ideas of men and the Word of God together, while others are just the ideas of men. Regardless, they are the traditions of men.

All of the cults and world religions, though, have one thing in common. They are all based upon **performance**. They are like the Pharisees. They think that somehow by doing the good it will out weigh the bad.

In addition to the common thread of performance, for any kind of change to take place in a person's life there has to be **conformity** to the particular teaching or idea.

**6. The end result of following the traditions of men is bondage to one's ideas or religion that provides no eternal forgiveness and eternal life. There is no lasting grace and love.**

Where does the performance of man in conformity to his own man-made traditions lead? **To spiritual bondage** – no true lasting forgiveness. No eternal life. No eternal hope beyond this life.

**People, good people, and bad people are all in the same boat, sad to say. They are stuck in their performance, pride, conformity, and bondage, living in a hopeless spiritual box with no way out.**

Unless there is the other side of the coin.

**(3) Insight into Jesus' truth, the Word of God.**

**1. Jesus' truth is eternal while men's traditions are here today and gone tomorrow.**

That's why Jesus, although living under the Law of Moses, used the Old Testament to point out to the Pharisees that God's Word was the eternal and final authority to point out that man's traditions were pleasing to God, in fact they were false. That's why the Lord quoted from Isaiah, Exodus and Deuteronomy. The word of God lives and abides forever (I Peter 1:24-25).

**2. Jesus' truth deals with acceptance not performance.**

The individual who accepts Jesus Christ as personal Savior is not basing God's salvation on what he can do for God, but rather on what Christ has done for Him in being His substitute to pay the penalty for his or sin through His death burial and bodily resurrection. One's performance before God will never gain His acceptance. God accepts the believer through faith in Jesus Christ as his or her personal Savior.

The Pharisees never understood that. Many do not understand that today. The only "work" anyone has to do to gain salvation is to accept Jesus Christ as personal Savior. Performance is out. Acceptance of Christ is in and then the believer finds out that he or she is totally accepted by God (Ephesians 1:6 – accepted in the Beloved).

**3. Jesus' truth does away with our number one problem – pride.**

That is what Ephesians 2:8-9 is all about. God's salvation for us is all of God lest anyone should boast. If we could boast that would be sin, and then our salvation would be tainted with our sin. God provides us His salvation so we just have to accept Christ. Pride is gone. We come humbly to God for His salvation, because He does for us what we do not deserve.

**4. Jesus' truth transforms not conforms.**

Men's traditions only provide us something to transform. It is done only through human effort. When we accept Christ as personal Savior, we are transformed supernaturally by the power of the Holy Spirit as we believe the Word of God about Jesus Christ. God does something miraculous in us by His Spirit (John 3:3).

It is not only a new birth, a transformation at salvation, it is a daily transformation as we let the Holy Spirit produce the life of Christ through us (Romans 12:1-2). Be not conformed to this old world with the traditions and sins of man, but be you transformed by the renewing of your minds, yes through a daily encounter with Christ in the Word of God.

**5. Not obeying God's word produces a true guilt, a true sense one has done wrong for one has disobeyed God. Confession of sin is to God who forgives (I John 1:9).**

**6. Jesus' truth liberates from bondage, not causes bondage.**

The gospel of Jesus Christ liberates the believer from the bondage of sin – its penalty, and its power, and eventually after this life, liberated from the very presence of sin. That's why Paul tells the Romans that once they were slaves to sin but now they are slaves to righteousness (Romans 6:18).

How great is that to know that as a believer in Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit, one has the power to please God, to be liberated from the bondage of sin – its penalty, and now one can serve the Lord in righteousness and truth.

## **7. There is a caution here for all of us.**

As a dedicated follower of Christ, one can also fall into the performance trip.

By that I mean a disciple of Christ can think that **his or her performance is what gains one's acceptance before God** in an on-going relationship with Him.

**So the more one does** as a disciple of Christ, the more, one thinks that God will be pleased and bless me. Sometimes, it's easy to have that attitude without even thinking about it.

When one operates by performance, it is easy to think **one is better than others** because of all that one does "for the Lord."

Operating by performance one may start to think that conforming to a certain life-style is the way to go by establishing man-made traditions for one's behavior. Such can produce false guilt when one doesn't live up to one's own expectations. All of this causes a person to live in bondage to a way of living established by one's own thinking.

**Which means that a believer who lives by performance will be like the Pharisees, thinking that those who don't live by his or her man-made traditions, are not really as spiritual as he is.**

Operating by performance, using man-made traditions, has crept into some evangelical groups, who then set themselves apart from other groups who don't operate by performance using their man-made traditions.

**Of course this doesn't mean that some man-made traditions if held to are wrong. It's how a believer responds to them in putting them to practice in his life.**

**If the believer carries out man-made traditions to gain more acceptance before God, that is sin before God.**

**If on the other hand the believer carries out certain man-made traditions because of his or her own convictions, based upon his or her own acceptance by God, motivated by His love, God is pleased. A person is to be convinced in his own mind in his traditions as Romans 14:1-12 tells us.**

For a family can have certain traditions that they carry out in a specific holiday season. Or how certain things are done in a family or by an individual. Such as, schedules in a family. The child may say, "Well my friends don't have to be at home this time, or help around the house like we do here."

Traditions, if carried out in the right attitude of doing it for the Lord because of God's blessings, can be very fulfilling, yes eternally fulfilling.

In whatever the believer does, he must be motivated by God's love not by selfish ambition basing one's life on his performance. Read Ephesians 2:10. The works are already there for us to do motivated by our love for Christ. We serve the Lord because we are blessed. We can do no more to become blessed by the Lord.

**Perhaps we should stop and ask ourselves questions like this.**

**1. Does my life in Christ operate by outward forms or an inward trust in Christ and His unchanging written Word?**

**2. Do I live by changing rules or the unchanging commands and principles of God's Word?**

**3. Do I show outward piety, conformity to rules, but miss true inward transformation and holiness by the Holy Spirit at work in my life?**

**4. Do I neglect and replace the Word of God with my own thoughts and ways, or does God's Word have first place in my life?**

**5. Are traditions I hold to helpful for my walk with the Lord if God's truth is not replaced?**

Perhaps we need to think through what our spiritual disciplines are and why we do them. Is there a biblical basis for them? Think through what we do during the various yearly holidays, birthday and anniversary celebrations. What about what we do at the church with the times of our services, our worship service, and our different ministries? Do these have a biblical basis? God's word gives us liberty in these areas as we work things out for our individual lives, our family lives, and our church life in His will for His glory.

**6. Does God's Word have the final say in my thoughts, words, and actions?**

**Let's summarize what we have been saying today regarding Jesus' truth and Men's Traditions.**

<b>Men's Traditions</b>	<b>Jesus' Truth</b>
May use some Scripture or all of man's thinking.	Totally God's eternal and unchanging written Word.
Changing and trifling rules.	Unchanging absolute direction and principles for living.
Fulfillment through performance.	Fulfillment through acceptance by God – motivated by His love.
Outward conformity leading to outward piety.	Inward transformation producing Christ-likeness in one's life – true holiness.
Causes pride.	Causes humility for one realizes it is only by God's grace that he can live for his Lord.
Produces false guilt and spiritual bondage with no way out of life's box.	Provides true liberty so one can serve the Lord with enthusiastic joy to His glory. True guilt comes when one disobeys the Lord and His Word – Forgiveness comes through confession to the Lord.

Yes, our God wants to protect us from the performance trap of just going along with no on-going supernatural changes taking place in our lives.

The Lord wants our lives to be genuine. What you see is what you get. Our talk and walk must match. In the New Testament times when a person went to buy a statue, he would put it out in the sun to see if any wax had been used to fill any defects in the statue. If there were a defect, the sun would reveal it by melting the wax. In the same way the SON, through the Holy Spirit, continues to work in our lives to convict us of any sin, so that we would confess that sin, and continue to be genuine in our lives for HIM doing His will.

At the same time the Lord wants to continually transform our lives into His image. He doesn't want us to be like the man in northern Maine who turned 100. A reporter was sent to interview him. The reporter said to him, "I imagine you have seen a lot of changes over the years. The elderly man crossed his arms and said, "Yes, I have been agin' everyone of them."

**Let's live this week by the truth of Jesus motivated by His love in the power of the Holy Spirit letting Him change us into the Lord's likeness so that He will be glorified in all that we think, do, and say!!**

