CLEAN HANDS OR A CLEAN HEART?

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**TEXT: Mark 7:1-23**

**INTRODUCTION**

Ill. One Sunday after church service, on his way home a man began to fuss: about the sermon, he griped about the traffic, he complained about the heat, and he made a big deal about how late the meal was served. Then he bowed and prayed, giving God thanks for the food. Now, his son was watching him all this time. Just as they were beginning to pass the food he said, “*Dad, did God hear you when we left the church and you started fussin' about the sermon and about the traffic and about the heat?*” The father blushed and said, “*Well, yes, son, He did.*” *“Well, Dad, did God hear you when you just prayed for this food right now?*” And he says, “*Well, yes, son, He … He heard me.*” “*Well, Dad, which one did God believe?*”

That little story shows us a problem that afflicts far too many people today

Too often What we claim to be, and What we really are, are miles apart

We call this condition *hypocrisy*

This word comes to us from the Greek language and it is used to describe *actors in a play*

Ancient actors would carry different masks in their hands as they acted

The masks were attached to sticks and would be held in front of the face as needed

A Smiling Mask suggested Humor, a Frowning Mask suggested Sadness, etc.

We’ve all seen these masks illustrated in advertisements for Theater

These actors were called the ***hypokrites***

A word that means *one who wears a mask*

We use the word today to refer to people who pretend to be one thing when they are actually something else

-- People who pretend to be your friend while speaking behind your back are hypocrites

-- People who live one way at church and another way at home are hypocrites

-- People who are doing wicked things under the radar while acting like they are right are hypocrites

Now, there should be no one like that in the church,

But sadly, that’s just not the case

Some people claim there are too many hypocrites in the church

I say there aren't as many as they claim

It is just an excuse they use for not coming to church

When you hear that kind of talk, just tell them, “*Oh come on, one more won't make any difference*” or …

“*It is better to spend a few hours with them in church then to spend eternity with them in Hell*” or …

Just say, “*If the hypocrite is standing between you and God, at least the he’s closer to God than you are*”

There are a lot of ways to deal with these kind of people

Hypocrites are nothing new!

In this passage, Jesus has an encounter with a whole bunch of them

They have come from Jerusalem, (**v. 1**) which was like the Vatican of its day

They came to watch Him in order to find fault with Him and His ministry

When they arrive and begin to watch Jesus, it doesn’t take them long to find something to complain about

These men see the disciples of Jesus eating food without washing their hands and they are offended

They attack Jesus over this issue, but He turns the tables on them

They think the issue is one of Clean Hands,

But Jesus shows them that the issue is really about Clean Hearts

This text has a lot to say to us (as well)

We still have those people who are more concerned about Clean Hands than they are about Clean Hearts

Jesus is going to teach us that the inside of a person should match the outside of that person

-- He is going to teach us that what we are in our heart is what we really are!

-- He’s going to teach us that hypocrisy and legalism should have no place in our lives

-- He is going to teach us that true defilement comes from within, not from without!

I want to teach on this thought found in these verses

***“Clean Hands or Clean Hearts?”***

Let's watch Jesus as He reveals these religious hypocrites for what they are

As we do, let’s let Him speak to our hearts as well

It may be that you will see that in your quest for Clean Hands, you still have some Cleaning in the Heart to do!

**~~~Prayer~~~**

**I. THE “COMPLAINT” – vs. 1-5**

As these Pharisees and scribes watched Jesus and His men,

They noticed that His disciples were eating without washing their hands

**v. 2** tells us when they saw this, they found fault

The word **“*fault*”** means *to place blame*

In **v. 5** they then turned their attention to Jesus, because He was the leader of the disciples

He was their Rabbi, (pastor) and as such, He was responsible for their behavior

**A. The Jewish ‘Perspective’**

**v. 2** also tells us that the Disciples were eating with ***“unwashen hands”***

But, the disciples were not eating with dirty hands

This washing had nothing to do with hygiene

The situation is brought to light as Mark continues His narrative

According to **vs. 3, 4**, the Pharisees and the rest of the religious Jews were not to eat unless they had washed their hands a certain way

This was especially true when they returned from the marketplace, as they might have been in the presence of a Gentile and therefore defiled

For the Jews (and all religious people) everything revolves around ritual

These were ceremonial cleansings

The ceremony involved someone pouring water out of a jar onto another's hands, whose fingers must be pointing up

As long as the water dripped off at the wrist, the person could proceed to the next step

He then had water poured over both hands with the fingers pointing down

Then each hand was to be rubbed with the fist of the other hand

**Ill.** History tells us of a Jewish rabbi who was arrested by the Romans and nearly died of thirst in prison because he used up his daily ration of water trying to wash his hands after the prescribed manner

According to the end of **v. 4**, they not only had rules about their hands,

They also had elaborate rules about washing pots, pans, and plates

In the Jewish *Mishnah*, which is a compilation of Jewish oral laws written around 200 A.D.

It’s said to have over 35 pages of instructions devoted to washing alone

**The Jewish ‘Perspective’**

**B. The ‘Problem’ with their Perspective**

The problem with their rules is that they were not from God,

In **v. 3** we notice that they were **“*the traditions of the elders*”**

The **“*traditions of the elders*”** came into being with good intentions

But, that’s all they were … Traditions, not Bible

(Big difference People!)

Jesus has a lot to said about Traditions

(We’ll get into that in our next point)

The *Mishnah* said that *traditions are the fence around the Law*

In an effort to protect the Law from people, the ancient Jews added to the Law given by God

They added restrictions that went beyond what the Law taught

The Jewish leaders believed that their Traditions helped people keep the Law better

And they believed their Traditions protected the Law from the people

Unsaved people are always trying to earn God’s favor

Here are some examples of how they added to God’s Law

-- Looking in the mirror was forbidden, because if you looked into the mirror on the Sabbath and saw a gray hair, you might be tempted to pull it out and thus perform work on the Sabbath

-- You also could not wear your false teeth on the Sabbath; if they fell out, you would have to pick them up and you would be working

-- In regard to carrying a burden, you could not carry a handkerchief on the Sabbath, but you could wear a handkerchief. That meant if you were upstairs and wanted to take the handkerchief downstairs, you would have to tie it around your neck, walk downstairs, and untie it. Then you could blow your nose downstairs!

-- The rabbis debated about a man with a wooden leg:

 if his home caught on fire, …

… could he carry his wooden leg out of the house on the Sabbath?

-- Someone could spit on the Sabbath, but you had to be careful where.

If it landed on the dirt and you scuffed it with your sandal, you would be cultivating the soil and thus performing work

It's easy to see how foolish these man-made rules had become

Again, the problem with their rules is they were not from God, but from man

Their rules were not God's rules; they were rules made by men seeking to control other men

And that is exactly what religion does today

We still have these Legalist around

There are plenty of people who feel the need to try and force us to live by their rules

They want to tell you how you can dress; where you can go; what you can do and so on

You can't wear a tie chain, because it’s gaudy

You can’t wear wire rimmed glasses because you will look like John Lennon

You can't wear open toed shoes because that’s what the Hollywood crowd does

Your hair is too long. Your hair is too short

You can't eat at a certain restaurant because it has a bar, etc.

Silly rules by silly People is all they are!

The problem with man's rules is just that …

They are man's rules and not the Lord's

When God's Word says something is wrong, then it is wrong without question

But when the Bible is silent on an issue, you have to decide based on Biblical Principle and Precedence

God's way is for us is to weigh every action against the following considerations …

**I Corinthians 6:12 - “*All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any*”**

**I Corinthians 10:23 - “*All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not*”**

**I Thessalonians 5:22 - “*Abstain from all appearance of evil*”**

**I Corinthians 8:13 - “*Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend*”**

These are only a few

The person who has to keep man-made rules is weak

That is according to **Romans 14:1 – 15:1 …** (Turn there)

They use rules as fences to restrain their flesh, just as the ancient Jews did

Instead, we are to walk in the Spirit that we won’t fulfill the desires of our Flesh

And we need to be careful that our Liberties don’t cause another to fall

We must do all things to the Glory of God

**THE “COMPLAINT”**

**II. THE “CONFRONTATION” – vs. 6-14**

So, these men are upset with Jesus because His disciples do not perform the ritual washings of the Jews

In these verses, Jesus reveals the Hypocrisy of their Hearts

**A. Jesus Condemns their Legalism – vs. 6-9**

The word *“legalism”* does not occur in the Bible

It is a term Christians use to describe a doctrinal position emphasizing a system of rules and regulations for achieving both salvation and spiritual growth

Legalists believe in and demand a strict literal adherence to rules and regulations

Doctrinally, it is a position essentially opposed to Grace

Those who hold a legalistic position often fail to see the real purpose for the Old Testament Law of Moses,

Which is to be our ***“schoolmaster”*** to bring us to Christ

**Galatians 3:24 – *“Wherefore the Law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith”***

At the same time, let me just say, that we don’t have liberty to do whatever we want either

**1.** They Uphold their Traditions

He quotes **Isaiah 29:13** in **v. 6** and accuses them of elevating their traditions to the point that they carry more weight that the Word of God

***“Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near Me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour Me, but have removed their heart far from Me, and their fear toward Me is taught by the precept of men:”***

History reveals that the Jewish religious leaders came to honor their traditions far above the Word of God

**Quote:** A Rabbi by the name of Eleazer said, *‘He who expounds the Scriptures in opposition to the tradition has no share in the world to come.’* The Mishna records*, ‘It is a greater offense to teach anything contrary to the voice of the Rabbis than to contradict Scripture itself’*

**2.** They laid Aside God’s Commandments

In **v. 8**, He tells them that they have **“*laid aside the commandments of God*”** in favor of their manmade rules and traditions

In **v. 9**, He tells them they have actually **“*rejected*”** the commandments of God so that they can keep their traditions!

Jesus condemns their blatant hypocrisy!

These men are rank legalists

They teach the people that the way to be right with God is to keep all the rules

If you can do everything right, …

God will be pleased with your life and He will accept you

Nothing could be farther from the truth!

That crowd is still with us today!

They think their rules are more important than anything else

If people walk like they think a person should walk

Then that person is accepted by them

If they wear their hair just right; have on the right kind of clothes; stay away from the wrong places; do the right things on certain days and so on

They are accepted

If not, then they are condemned

Just so you know, Legalism and those who try to enforce their rules on others are not right

Of course, it's not just me they bother

Jesus hates that attitude as well

Just read **Matthew 23:1-36** …

**B. Jesus Exposes Their Hypocrisy! – vs. 10-13**

Jesus blows the lid off one of their traditions

Here is one of their Traditions that says they don’t have to obey the Word of God

Jesus talks about the practice of **“*Corban*”** in **v. 11**

That word means *a gift offered to God*

The Commandments of God are very clear

God said in the 5th Commandment – **Exodus 20:12**

**“*Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee,*”**

And in **Exodus 21:17** He says - **“*And he that curseth his father, or his mother, shall surely be put to death*”**

Part of the idea of honoring someone's parents included the necessity of providing for their needs as long as they lived

Most of us still believe in that today (at least some of us do)

Well, the Jews found a way around it

If they said that their money or possessions were “*Corban*” or “*a gift offered to God*”

Then they had to use that money or those goods in sacred matters

And of course, this was politically motivated

Thus, they were off the hook regarding the care of their parents

They would just tell the Parents that their stuff was dedicated to the Lord

Talk about cold hearts!

Jesus tells them that they have made the Laws of God ineffective by their traditions – **v. 13**

Again, this same attitude still exists today!

People have their rules, but they don't live by them

When the rules become an inconvenience, they find a way around them

That is called hypocrisy!

Another problem with the “*rule makers*” is that they are the most mean-spirited people in the world!

They are busy crossing their T's and dotting their I's,

But they are never too busy to pass judgment on those who don't keep the same rules

That's why there is often more compassion, sympathy and acceptance at the local bar than there is at the local church!

This is called hypocrisy!

There had never arisen a prophet like Jesus

He spoke with divine authority

He acted with sovereign power

He literally fulfilled the Scriptures

Love, Wisdom and Power filled everything He did

He performed many amazing and startling miracles

Yet, the legalistic Pharisees would not believe that He was from God because He allowed His men to eat without washing their hands

How utterly hypocritical and spiritually blind they were!

Sadly, that same attitude is still with us!

Jesus is about to teach us that it does not matter what you do on the outside; true spirituality is what you are on the inside!

**THE “COMPLAINT”**

**THE “CONFRONTATION”**

**III. THE “CLARIFICATION” – vs. 14-23**

**Ill.**  The story was told me of a fella who drove an old, beat up Firebird. The thing smoked like a chimney, and so did he. He was always trying everything to stop smoking. He even tried those patches when they first came out. One day, after work, he was out in the parking lot and he had put one of those nicotine patches on his car. He said, “*Well, they are supposed to stop smoking, aren't they?*”

He was just messing around having a good time. But, his external efforts did nothing to fix the heart of the problem. It would have taken a new engine to solve that car's problem.

That same is true with man

A religious patch will not fix the problem of the heart

A new heart is what is needed

**Ezekiel 36:26 – *“A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh”***

**A. The ‘Clarification’ – vs. 14-20**

In these verses Jesus sheds some much needed light on this subject

**1.** Jesus Explains – **vs. 14-16**

He tells the crowds that it is not what comes into the body, like eating with unwashed hands, that causes spiritual defilement;

It is those things that arise from within the heart of a person that defile him or her

**2.** The Disciples are Confused – **v. 17**

They ask Jesus what He means

He gives them a quick lesson in anatomy - **vs. 18,19**

He reminds them that what goes into the body passes through the body

It goes in one end and out the other

But it does not affect the heart, or the inner man

It may cause sickness of the body, but it cannot cause sickness in the soul

Jesus is telling us that external things cannot cause spiritual defilement!

**3.** The Old Nature Defined - **v. 20**

Jesus reveals that spiritual defilement is always the result of a defiled heart

Every sin we commit, whether it is a sin of the body or of the mind, has its birth in our heart

When we do the wrong things we do

We do them because of the defilement within

Keeping external rules will not change the heart

The heart can only be changed, and spiritual defilement cleansed away, by the new birth

**John 3:3, 7 – *“Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” “Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again”***

Jesus is able to take a defiles sinner and wash them in His blood

**Psalm 51:7 – *“Purge me with hyssop, (blood) and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow”***

**The ‘Clarification’**

**B. The ‘Identification’ – vs. 21-23**

Jesus gives us a partial list of the attitudes and actions that cause spiritual defilement

These are the things that make us unclean in the sight of God,

Not breaking the foolish rules made up by foolish men

Let's examine this list and see what condition our own hearts are in today

**1.** Evil Thoughts

This is the root of all that follows

When an evil heart conjures up evil intentions, the evil person will carry them out

**2.** Adulteries

Illicit sexual activity by married persons

**3.** Fornications

This word translates from the Greek word “*porneia*”

And it refers to any illicit sexual activity

The origin of sexual sin in not in the body, it is the result of a defiled heart!

**4.** Murders

The taking of another's life

By the way, we are guilty of murder if we have hatred in our heart toward another person

**I John 3:15 – *“Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him”***

**5.** Thefts

Taking that which belongs to another for your own use

This covers a lot of territory, even the tithe

**Malachi 3:8, 9 – *“Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed Me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings”* *“Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed Me, even this whole nation”***

**6.** Covetousness

Wanting everything, everyone else has

**7.** Wickedness

This word means “*malice*”

The intention or desire to do evil; ill will

It refers to all the ways that evil thought manifest themselves in a person's life

It is deliberate acts of meanness!

**8.** Deceit

This word refers to cunning maneuvers designed to ensnare someone for one's personal advantage

It is the idea of someone trying to work undercover to bring someone else down

Sneaky, deceptive people fall into this category

**9.** Lasciviousness

This word refers to unrestrained, shameless behavior

It’s an attitude that says, “*I will do as I please and I do not care what anyone thinks about it!*”

**10.** An Evil Eye

This is a Hebrew expression that speaks of envy and jealousy

It looks at the blessings of another and desires them for itself

It is envious when others prosper

**11.** Blasphemy

Injurious or defaming speech directed at either God or man

Gossip and cursing fall into this category

**12.** Pride

The boastful exalting of oneself

It's the attitude that says, “*Look at me, see what I have done. No one is as good or as great as I am*”

This is an overbearing attitude that is the opposite of humility

**13.** Foolishness

This word refers to those who are morally and spiritually desensitized

They cannot see their sins; neither can they sense the Lord working in and around them

With this kind of person, there is no spiritual illumination

There is no spiritual discernment

They do not know God and there is no desire to know Him either

Even if the outside is right, these things will defile you when they reside in your heart

The sad part is we all have these tendencies**,** and they need to be combated

Here's the problem, slapping a religious patch on a defiled heart will not make things right

The religious Jews did everything by the book, but they were still responsible for sending Jesus to the cross

Outwardly, they looked clean, inwardly, they were defiled

**CONCLUSION**

Jesus always told it just like it was

He told the Pharisees and the scribes exactly what they were

He told His disciples exactly what resided within the their hearts

Right in the middle of our text …

**v. 16** - Jesus said this, “***If any man have ears to hear, let him hear*”**

Has the Lord spoken to your heart?

The whole point of this passage is this

*The problem with mankind is a problem of the heart*

**Jeremiah 17:9 – *“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?”***

That is where the Lord looks when He looks at us

**I Samuel 16:7 – *“But the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him:***

***… for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart”***

That is where sin originates

**Matthew 12:34, 35 – *“O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh” “A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things”***

That is the part of man that needs to be changed,

**Again Ezekiel 36:26 – *“A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh”***

*Are you a hypocrite?*

Don’t hide behind a mask, pretending to be one thing when, in reality, you are another?

You're not hiding it all that well

Your secret is not safe!

Are you a hypocrite?

I would rather be called anything than a hypocrite!

*Are you a legalist?*

Do you expect everyone to live just like you do?

Do you stand in judgment of them when they don't?

*Do you have a defiled heart?*

What if God were to drag the contents of your heart out into the open?

Would you ever recover from the shame and the embarrassment of being exposed for what you really are?

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