

“MAKING THE WORD OF GOD OF NONE EFFECT” (Mk. 7:1-13)

Mk. 7:1 Then came together unto him the Pharisees, and certain of the scribes, which came from Jerusalem. 2 And when they saw some of his disciples eat bread with defiled, that is to say, with unwashen, hands, they found fault. 3 For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, except they wash their hands oft, eat not, holding the tradition of the elders. 4 And when they come from the market, except they wash, they eat not. And many other things there be, which they have received to hold, as the washing of cups, and pots, brasen vessels, and of tables. 5 Then the Pharisees and scribes asked him, Why walk not thy disciples according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashen hands? 6 He answered and said unto them, Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. 7 Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. 8 For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do. 9 And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition. 10 For Moses said, Honour thy father and thy mother; and, Whoso curseth father or mother, let him die the death: 11 But ye say, If a man shall say to his father or mother, It is Corban, that is to say, a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; he shall be free. 12 And ye suffer him no more to do ought for his father or his mother; 13 Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered: and many such like things do ye.

This is a shortened version of the more full account in Mt. 15:1-20. The centrality of its message is of increasing relevance to our world today. In church and religious affairs, we are sadly witnessing the abandonment of true Biblical Christianity within the United Kingdom, including Scotland ... once known for its faithful adherence to the Word of God. In many regions it seems as if ‘the final nails are being hammered into the coffin’ ... and yet the Scriptures remind us, **II Thess. 2:3** Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day [*i.e. the day of the Lord's return*] shall not come, except there come a falling away first.

Jesus is once again confronted by the Pharisees. It is amazing when people have nothing better to do than to weary and make trouble for others ... but that is what these Pharisees were determined to do. They followed Jesus just about everywhere. They were imbedded in their religion, *i.e. the tradition of the elders* (v.3,5,8,13). If you asked them what they believed they would have brought you to the writings and oracles of the rabbis and their traditions ... It would never have crossed their minds to bring you to the Word of God which had been given to them centuries earlier, the Old Testament ... the same Word of God that had distinguished them from the other nations ... the same Word of God under which they had been so richly blessed.

Sadly, though, they had turned away from it until their religion became intoxicated by centuries of superficial and empty traditions. Consequently, their worship was unacceptable to God. It was full of religious rhetoric, with no valid foundation in Scripture, and its exponents imprisoned the minds of their Israelite people in confusion and apathy. Religion was dead for God was no longer at the centre of what they believed, and the ancient law He had given to Moses had become cast aside and confined to history.

The message of the Old Testament Scriptures was simple, **Dt. 6:1** Now these are the commandments, the statutes, and the judgments, which the LORD your God commanded to teach you, that ye might do them in the land whither ye go to possess it: **2** That thou mightest fear the LORD thy God, to keep all his statutes and his commandments, which I command thee, thou, and thy son, and thy son's son, all the days of thy life; and that thy days may be prolonged. **3** Hear therefore, O Israel, and observe to do it; that it may be well with thee, and that ye may increase mightily, as the LORD God of thy fathers hath promised thee, in the land that floweth with milk and honey. **4** Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: **5** And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. **6** And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart ... And such was the benchmark of true religion, - the religion God intended for His people. Unfortunately, this living faith upon which their nation had been founded had well-nigh gone and was by and large a thing of the past for the religion the Pharisees taught had no bearing whatsoever in enjoying a loving relationship with God, in obedience to and in accordance with His Word.

And that was really the problem associated with the Gospel Jesus preached. He, - and it, - collided with the spurious religion of His day ... the religion being propagated by the Pharisees, the scribes, the priests, and the Sadducees. Jesus didn't go looking for trouble, but trouble came looking for Him, **Mk. 7:1** Then came together unto him the Pharisees, and certain of the scribes, which came from Jerusalem.

Now, even though Jesus attracted great crowds there were not many who truly, genuinely followed Him, - they preferred His methods to His message. They liked the things He did, not necessarily the things He said. They wanted Him to keep doing the miracles, but they weren't particularly interested in His Gospel message.

Instead, they preferred to blindly accept the form of religion they were brought up with ... So the choice the majority of people made was this ... it is better to 'stay in' with what you know, rather than to leave and potentially enter uncertainty.

So, in the final year of Jesus' ministry His popularity began to wane, as compared to previous years, resulting in Him facing increasing animosity and resistance. John 6:4 dates this period in Mk. 7:1-13 at the Feast of Passover, i.e. the Passover one year before His death ... In His final year of ministry He also particularly focussed on training His twelve disciples.

At this time too, the Pharisees from Jerusalem, - the ‘expert’ and most eminent scholars, - arrived in Galilee to show the local religious leaders how to stand up against Jesus and to curtail His influence and ministry. Some of the methods they used were outright belligerent, while at other times they pretended to be more conciliatory. ... *They* were the professionals, and men of great standing ... whereas Jesus was merely a carpenter-turned self-styled self-called preacher! ... They reckoned there would be no real problem ... and they would deal with Him successfully and quickly! ... That is what they planned.

So they looked for opportunities. It didn’t take very long because they picked up on something the disciples were doing which was contrary to the ‘traditions of the elders’. Now, these traditions were manmade, - they did not come from the Law of Moses, or from anywhere out of the Old Testament Scriptures. Instead, they were put together by religious men sitting round a table with ideas and rules to strengthen their hold over the ordinary people, ² And when they saw some of his disciples eat bread with defiled, that is to say, with unwashen, hands, they found fault. ³ For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, except they wash their hands oft, eat not, holding the tradition of the elders.

They were not suggesting the disciples were, dirty or unsanitary. They were not suggesting the disciples did not wash their hands before eating. What they were asserting, though, was that the disciples were not washing their hands in a certain ceremonial way ... the exact way the elders insisted you had to. And if you didn’t wash your hands that particular way, according to the tradition of the elders you were deemed unclean and considered unfit to eat.

... How *were* you to wash your hands? Did you have to wash up to your elbows? Did you have to put your left hand in the water before your right hand? ... Commentators are not sure, but it definitely would have been *something* ridiculous! ... And it was with these regulations, - concocted over many centuries by the rabbis, - that the Pharisees from Jerusalem were judging Jesus’ disciples. It is interesting they could not find anything to confront Jesus about personally, so they had to resort to some silly manmade judgments to raise against His disciples ... very petty, very childish, very silly ... in fact, very beneath them!

So that is what the problem was about. It had nothing to do with Scripture, but with their ‘tradition’ ... a tradition they had elevated above Scripture. In other words, they were not confronting Jesus about breaking any God-given law,

but their resistance to Him was based upon their own traditions and manmade compilations. Scripture had nothing whatsoever to do with the discussion they were having.

If they would have been true guardians of their religion and faith they would have remembered how God gave His perfect law to Moses on Mount Sinai ... and how the first five books of the Bible (the Pentateuch) were given, and then added to by the rest of the Old Testament. They ought to have been concerned about God's law, and not man's made-up regulations in the religious councils. They should have been urging their people to keep God's law instead of the internal reports, amendments, and proposals coming out of the assembly of the Pharisees ... men who knew not God, nor followed after His true doctrines and teachings. They had all their educational qualifications, and papers, and motions, and procedures ... but God was not considered anywhere at any time in any way. ... It was a general assembly of vain God-denying religious lawmakers ... who had, - over the years, - orchestrated a religion, without the leading and directing of God! God had been left out!

And Mark also mentions how they were expected to wash their cups, and pots, and other dining implements ([7:4](#) *And many other things there be, which they have received to hold, as the washing of cups, and pots, brasen vessels, and of tables*), ... which you would do anyway ... but if you did not do it in a certain precise way it was considered unclean and unacceptable! In fact, there are thirty whole chapters in an ancient document known as the *Mishnah* given over to how you should carry out these duties. The *Mishnah* is the Jewish oral tradition which is the rabbinical commentary giving instruction on how to live out the commands of Scripture ... and it even tells you exactly how you are to do the cleaning! ...

It was *not* about sanitation though, but it *was* about manmade laws and manmade traditions and manmade regulations geared towards binding the people in empty religion. ... And you could be very sure, if you kept rigidly to those traditions and yet failed in one of them, the Pharisees would soon let you know! ... And as well as the *Mishnah* there was also the *Gemara* to help you understand the *Mishnah* which was the commentary on the *Torah*. And then you also put the *Mishnah* and the *Gemara* together and you had the *Talmud*. ... And the rabbis in Babylon wrote their own *Talmud* with letters that were four times larger than the *Talmud* written by the competing rabbis in Jerusalem. ... And, as if there wasn't enough already, another tome called the *Midrash* was introduced, - it was a further rabbinical commentary on the

books of the Bible. All in all, you were bound to get caught out somewhere 'along the line' ... It was unavoidably inevitable!

It was also ridiculous, and that is what lay behind this confrontation with Jesus. They were not quoting Scripture ... they were quoting the traditions of the elders. ... Traditions which lacked Divinely-inspiration, traditions which did not have God as their author, and traditions that were in many cases antagonistic and contrary to what was contained in the inspired Word of God.

Sad to say, the majority of the people all knew what the elders and the rabbis said ... but very few of them knew what the Word of God said! These were a people gravely darkened by religion! In fact, you could take their religion and see how it had developed into nothing more than superstition for they even believed in the infallibility of the words of some of their rabbis, for example, a certain famous Rabbi Tahaneth wrote, "Whosoever has his abode in the land of Israel and eats his food with washed hands may rest assured that he shall receive eternal life". ... So whether or not you get to enjoy eternal life depends upon whether or not you wash your hands in a certain way!

It is so sad what some people 'make up'! The Pharisees had no concept of and therefore they did not mention the importance of the relationship between God and the heart, soul and mind of the believer. They did not consider it important the state of the heart within ... only the outer external traditions. But it is not the work on the outside that saves anyone, - it is not baptism, or belonging to a church, or any 'points' you can work to achieve that saves you, - ... salvation is a matter of the heart and its condition before God. Sadly, these Pharisees had no comprehension whatsoever about being right with God.

And so Jesus spoke very directly to them, - 'hypocrites' He called them, - as He quoted from Is. 29:13, *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. ... Manmade religion leads away from God ... it is only the religion which has Him in the centre that leads the seeking soul to find Him. And sadly, Jesus summed up their feeble efforts, ⁷ in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. ⁸ For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men.*

Jesus broke their traditions, - He did not deny it ... and the disciples also broke their traditions, - He did not deny that either ... but the traditions of the rabbis served to do nothing less than undermine the truth of God. ... And here is how Jesus judged them ... It wasn't as if they did it innocently, but they had obstinately and knowingly rejected God's truth, for the Saviour told them, ⁹ And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition. You know what you are doing so there's no excuse!

And then He mentioned the matter of *Corban* (v.11). *Corban* simply means 'devoted to God' ... and if something was 'devoted to God' it could not be used for anything else, - it was sacred and holy unto no one and nothing else, except God. And the example Jesus used was of a son whose parents were in need of his help financially. Now, the son ought to have helped his parents, - ¹⁰ For Moses said, Honour thy father and thy mother. However, the son wanted to hold on to everything he had and didn't want to give to his parents. So, he used this religious ruling constituted by the 'tradition of the elders' to withhold the money from his parents, claiming it now belonged to God. He had no intention of giving it to anyone for he intended to keep it all for himself! It was his way round it though ... to be able to hold on to the money ... by using the excuse ... "It's *Corban*"!

To sum it all up, Jesus said, ¹³ Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered: and many such like things do ye. ... And that is what they were doing ... These religious hypocrites were invalidating the Word of God by their manmade traditions. Theirs was an unbiblical religion, - a religion bereft of God. A Judaism foreign to what God intended for His people ... a departure from the Old Testament teachings, including the Law of Moses which they purported to uphold.

And that is why they were in the darkness, and why they could not recognise and acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God. They could not see the clear evidence ... even when He stood in front of them! Traditions of men determined their understanding of the Word of God and it blinded their spiritual sight. How sad when we see it, even in our own times, and even in our own country when religious men and women do the same ... oblivious to the danger! ... It really is a terrible indictment, invalidating the Word of God by traditions and regulations which are blatantly in opposition to it. No one can expect any blessing, only inevitable judgment.

Look around you today and see what is happening in many churches, even churches that describe themselves as 'evangelical'. The world has not simply crept in ... Instead, we have reached the point when 'the doors have been flung so ridiculously widely open' that just about anything and everything is permissible ... and no wonder the message is not going forth as it ought to! No wonder, there is weariness and a lethargy that is holding many of God's professing people down.

If Scripture only comes second, we cannot expect God to work in favour of His Church. Manmade rules, - even those made within a religious structure, - are of no significance unless they rely on God's perfect, living and infallible Word. If we love His Word, we shall want to keep it and be obedient to it ... and nothing will be allowed to take its place.

What did these people, - these Pharisees, - need to do? They needed to repent ... like Nicodemus ... and like Paul, the Pharisees of Pharisees, who discovered all the manmade institutions of the rabbis and the other religious autocrats were guiding him to Hell until he realised, **Phil. 3:7** But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. **8** Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ ... That is a reformed, converted, and saved former-Pharisee talking!

False religion, - be it in the guise of Baptist, or anything else, - is of no benefit to anyone ... and it inevitably leads to a lost eternity ... And that is not what Christ intended for His true people. Instead, He came as the Truth to bring the truth for He said, **32** ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

I trust we all genuinely accept the truth ... the eternal truth based upon God's Word, and not on man's rebellious and erroneous folly. I trust we seek to keep God's Word, uphold it, live it, and declare it for *that* is what He has saved us and called us to do. Amen.