



# THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MARK

Read Mark 7:1-23

## 1. Worship That Is Skin Deep Is No Worship At All

- Read Mark 7:1-8, Isaiah 29:13-14, Deuteronomy 6:5

Over the centuries, the religious leaders constructed additional rules and regulations to adhere to in addition to the Law that God had given the Israelites during Moses's time. These additional laws were man-made and burdensome and yet enforced on the people. In this passage the religious leaders judged Jesus' disciples for not adhering to these additional laws. They were not doing this because they wanted the disciples to love God in a more thorough way or to turn from sin. They were filled with pride and hypocrisy, and Jesus exposed that this was in their hearts. Their additional laws were not about heartfelt obedience to God, but about priding themselves in being able to keep their rules. From the outside they appeared to be extremely holy men, but on the inside they had no real love for God or the conviction to uphold his commands in worship to him.

- ❖ Q: Why do you think the Pharisees were so concerned about the fact that Jesus' disciples were not following the rules correctly?
- ❖ Q: What did the Pharisees have to gain from being so 'obedient' to the rules?
- ❖ Q: Do you ever find yourself criticising other Christians for not doing things (obeying rules) that you think they should be doing? Do you judge yourself by the same standards?
- ❖ Q: Why do you think a critical spirit is more an indication of self-righteousness rather than an indication of being someone who is concerned for God's laws?
- ❖ Q: Do you think our obedience to Christian rules impresses God at all? Explain your answer.

## 2. The Greatest Act Of Worship Is Obedience To God's Instruction As Laid Out In The Scriptures

- Read Mark 7:9-13

In addition to focusing on man-made laws to make them appear holy, the religious leaders took their hypocrisy to another level. Jesus used the example of "Corban" to reveal how deceptive they were in order to appear holy, allowing them to disobey God's commands without anyone noticing. Corban was a man-made law that allowed them to devote their possessions to God. Those possessions were not to be used for any other purpose. It seemed noble, but it allowed those with deceptive and ungenerous hearts to redirect the money to a "higher cause" instead of obeying God's commands in how they should use their money. So although the Pharisees and teachers of the Law appeared to be great followers of God, Jesus exposed them for being nothing but self-serving and self-righteous.

Man-made rules and regulations will never move us towards God, they only lead to deception and place heavy burdens on us that God never intended for us to carry. We cannot serve or worship God on our own terms. We worship and serve God by obeying his word, and we do this out of a heart of love towards him and not out of a sense of duty or out of desire to appear holy. Some of us may find ourselves struggling with the desire to be obedient from the heart. We find it easier to keep to the rules we have set for our own morality and Christian living and find comfort in the parameters we have set for ourselves. If we are convicted about that and want to change our desire for obedience, we can simply ask God and say, "Lord, I am not willing but I am willing for you to make me willing."

- ❖ Q: What does this issue of Corban show us about what man-made rules and regulations do to our hearts?
- ❖ Q: What is the difference between obeying God's word from the heart and obeying God's word out of a sense of obligation?
- ❖ Q: Can you think of an example in your own life where you are following God because you feel obliged to do so?
- ❖ Q: In what ways do you appear more holy to your Christian community than you really are? What rules are you keeping in order to appear holy rather than out of a desire to love and worship God?
- ❖ Q: Why would admitting our sins and failings to one another be a good step in dealing with disobedient hearts?
- ❖ Q: What does God want us to do if we are struggling with even *wanting* to obey him from the heart?





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### 3. The Heart Of The Problem Is The Heart. Pure Worship Requires A Pure Heart

- Read Mark 7:14–23, Jeremiah 17:9, Ezekiel 36:26

The disciples did not understand what Jesus meant when he taught about what makes a person clean or unclean. So he took them aside and explained to them that being unclean was really an issue of the heart and not something that they could ever fix by trying. In essence, all of the external laws that they kept did nothing whatsoever to affect the sin in their hearts. He wanted them to understand that in order to be “clean” and therefore acceptable to God, that they would need new hearts.

Jesus came so that he could deal with sin once and for all, and to give us new hearts that would be able to authentically obey God.

For those of us who struggle and want to hold on to our own ways of following God, we need to let them go. We need Jesus. He is the only one who can set us free from self-righteousness and allow us to obey God from the heart. We need to admit our need for him again and turn to him to help us worship him in spirit and in truth.

- ❖ Q: Why do you think the disciples did not understand Jesus’ teaching on what it meant to be clean or unclean?
- ❖ Q: How are we able to be considered “clean” before God? What does being clean mean in our context as gentile Christians?
- ❖ Q: What rules, regulations or disciplines do you hold onto tightly in order to make you feel that you are somehow acceptable to God?
- ❖ Q: In what ways do we as Christians subtly hold other people to certain standards in order to make them feel that they are “acceptable” to God? Is there anything but faith in Christ that makes them acceptable to God?
- ❖ Q: If we are struggling with our own self-righteousness, what can we do about it?

