

Discussion Guide

WEEK OF 5.19.24

Series: Gospel of Mark

Text: Mark 7:1-23

How to use this guide: This discussion guide is designed to help you facilitate a conversation around the Bible text. Begin your discussion with prayer. Then, read this week's passage. Next, work through some of the questions together. The goal is not to ask every question, but to have a good, free-flowing discussion. Do your best to ask at least one question from each section (introduction, understanding, and application), but beyond that, let the Holy Spirit guide your conversation. Also, if you heard some point from the sermon that you'd like to discuss, feel free to add that to your group's discussion.

QUESTIONS FOR INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

1. **Are there certain traditions that you practice in your family or personal life? If so, what are they?**
2. **What are some traditions we have in the church?**

While traditions can be valuable, they can also get in the way of doing what God wants us to do. Our study today highlights this danger. Like the Jewish religious leaders in Mark 7, people today are tempted to interpret Scripture in light of their religious traditions rather than evaluating tradition on based on the Word of God. But we must be willing to evaluate our preferences in light of God's Word. Whenever traditions and Scripture collide, we must choose the Word of God.

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

READ MARK 7:1-5.

1. **What are some practices of believers today that would be equivalent to eating with ceremonially unclean hands?**
2. **What are some things our church may subtly impose on people? What about our current culture in general?**

READ MARK 7:6-13.

Jesus separated Himself from the Pharisees and scribes by distinguishing between God's commandments, the authoritative laws of Scripture, and man-made traditions (v. 8).

1. **Why would someone place traditions over God's commands? Why is following Scripture always more important than following tradition?**
2. **What does it mean to be a hypocrite? Why did the religious leaders qualify? How are people**
3. **negatively affected spiritually by the hypocrisy of others?**
4. **In what ways do "religious" people today act like hypocrites? How do you avoid hypocrisy in your life?**

READ MARK 7:14-23.

1. **Why do you think Jesus made a big deal about adding rules and regulations that aren't prescribed in Scripture? What's dangerous about that?**
2. **The Epistle to the Galatians** was written to combat this type of adding more laws to the message of the Gospel. **Read Galatians 3:1-6.** What can we learn from this passage?
3. **Compare and contrast what the religious leaders said it took to be clean before God and what Jesus said it took to be clean before God?**

Jesus focused on the real problem—a sinful heart. Failure to conform to human standards and rules does not condemn us; our sinful hearts condemn us. No amount of religious activity can change the selfish nature of the heart or make it clean. Jesus is only one way. By trusting in Him, we can be changed from the inside out.

4. **Jesus didn't provide a direct solution to the problem of the heart. What truth about ourselves might Jesus be forcing us to acknowledge?**

QUESTIONS FOR UNDERSTANDING

QUESTIONS FOR APPLICATION

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Jesus' teaching challenged His disciples to acknowledge who they were at the deepest level. We cannot make ourselves clean and nothing outside us can make us clean. What is inside you is all yours and it isn't pretty. You must come to grips with the reality that you are your own biggest problem. ***The heart of your problem is the problem of your heart.*** You are fractured at your core. Nothing outside you can make you unclean—realizing this puts you on the path to true freedom because there is an external solution, and His name is Jesus Christ.

5. Read Jeremiah 17:9 and Romans 3:10. What do we learn about the depth and the scope of our wickedness problem? Is anyone exempt?

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

1. Whatever reigns and rules in your heart will overflow into actions and attitudes. How can we grow to be more aware of what is reigning and ruling in our hearts? What changes will you make in your own life to more effectively embrace the commands of God?

COMMENTARY

MARK 7:1-23

7:1-23. This is Jesus' longest conflict speech in the Gospel of Mark.

7:2. As in 2:18,24, the dispute occurred over the actions of Jesus' disciples. "Unclean... hands" refers to ritual cleansing, not hygiene.

7:3-4. These verses are an explanatory parenthesis. This is Mark's only reference to the Jews as a group. Wash their hands ritually (lit "wash their hands with the fist") could refer to washing with a fistful of water or washing up to the wrist. ***The tradition of the elders*** (cp. vv. 5,8-9,13) refers to oral traditions which had grown up around the written law. Such traditions became the heart of rabbinic Judaism and were considered *almost as authoritative* as the law of Moses. Apparently when the Pharisees returned from the marketplace, they did more than just ritually wash their hands; they thoroughly purified themselves.

7:5. Jesus replied in verse 8 that the **tradition of the elders** is merely "the tradition of men." The religious leaders were hypocrites because their actions were based on appearance and were not motivated from the heart. Their teaching reflected this because they ***appealed to the tradition of the elders*** instead of appealing to God's Word. To honor your father and mother meant to provide for them in their old age. By giving what was due to their parents to the temple, the religious leaders gave the appearance of devotion without the heart motivation.

7:6-7. The word for ***hypocrites*** referred to an actor who hid behind a mask. Thus, the word meant "pretender." Jesus' quotation from Isa 29:13 clearly defined what a ***hypocrite*** was and focused on God's condemnation of those who taught as doctrines the commands of men.

7:8-9. Jesus accused the scribes and Pharisees of disregarding the *command of God* while keeping the *tradition of men*. They made their oral traditions more important than God's law.

7:10. By quoting the fifth commandment (Ex 20:12; Dt 5:16) and Ex 21:17 (Lv 20:9), Jesus introduced a specific example of what He charged in Mk 7:8-9.

7:11-13. "You say" is emphatic and pits the rabbis' teaching against God's Word. The rabbinic custom of Corban (modified from Lv 27:28; Num 18:14) allowed a person to devote all his material goods to the Lord. Dedicating a gift to the temple that would have gone to support one's parents was a practice called "Corban," which means, "a gift devoted to God." This gift, though dedicated to the temple, did not have to be paid during the owner's lifetime; it just had to be verbally promised to the temple, thus keeping it in the hands of the owner for his personal use instead of being used to help his parents. In Jesus' day, Corban became a loophole that allowed the people to violate God's command to honor their parents. The rabbis shamefully allowed Corban to excuse sons from meeting the material needs of their aging parents. You do many other similar things emphasized that the Corban practice was representative of other hypocritical Pharisaic practices.

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7:14-16. Jesus broadened His audience to the crowd and expanded His topic to true defilement. Verse 15 is the heart of His teaching. A person is defiled by what comes out, not what goes in.

Jesus cut to the heart of the matter. He called the whole crowd to him and announced that the source of godly living was from “within and not from without.” Notice that Jesus took the religious leaders to a deeper level in answering their objections to “unwashed hands” by proceeding to talk about “unclean foods.” Jesus in essence was rejecting the religious leaders’ approach to God’s Word. They were concerned about surface piety and purity, while Jesus was concerned about internal purity. This alone brings true godliness.

7:17-18. The disciples asked Jesus privately about the parable of verse 15. Jesus repeated what He had said and rebuked them for their lack of understanding.

Jesus gave a general announcement to the crowd about the *source of true holiness*, but he gave a more detailed private explanation to his disciples. Jesus’ statements to the disciples seemed to puzzle them. These statements ran counter to their Jewish upbringing about dietary restrictions and godly living. Jesus said, “Don’t you see that nothing that enters a man from the outside can make him unclean? For it doesn’t go into his heart but into his stomach, and then out of his body.” He was declaring that true obedience results from a love of God from the heart—not the outward acts of keeping the rules. True holiness is internal. Jesus said, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God” (Matt. 5:8). Our heart attitude—not the keeping of rules—determines the purity and power of our relationship to God.

Notice the phrase, “In saying this Jesus declared all foods ‘clean.’” This indicates the source from which true defilement originates. The Jewish dietary laws were about ceremonial impurity. Jesus was saying that the food we eat is digested and the waste is eliminated, but sin begins in the heart and produces true impurity in our lives. Jesus implied that our fellowship with God is not affected by unclean hands or unclean foods, but by personal sin.

7:19. What goes into a person’s stomach doesn’t defile because it is digested and eliminated. Recall that Mark was written under Peter’s influence and that Peter learned in Ac 10:15 that all foods are clean. Thus, the parenthetical statement of Mk 7:19 indicates that Mark, Peter, and others looked back afresh on Jesus’ saying and realized that He had pronounced all foods clean. They failed fully to grasp this when Jesus originally uttered it.

7:20-23. Jesus showed how the observance of external rules does not correct the “nature” of the heart. The heart is the core for motivation, deliberation, and intention. He gave a list of behaviors and characteristics that come from the heart. Jesus gave us this list to illustrate His point about internal defilement. The first seven are plural and indicate repeated acts. Sexual immoralities include all illicit sexual practices outside marriage. “Evil actions” is a term for maliciousness. The last six evils are all singular, indicating attitudes. Stinginess is literally “the evil eye.” It refers to jealousy, envy, covetousness, and a grudging attitude. Blasphemy includes slander of others (cp. 2Tim 3:2). The word for *pride* refers to exalting oneself above others. *Foolishness* is lack of moral judgment.

Our wicked thoughts and affections, words and actions, defile us, and these only. As a corrupt fountain sends forth corrupt streams, so does a corrupt heart send forth corrupt reasonings, corrupt appetites and passions, and all the wicked words and actions that come from them. A spiritual understanding of the law of God, and a sense of the evil of sin, will cause a man to seek for the grace of the Holy Spirit, to keep down the evil thoughts and affections that work within.

“Evil thoughts” is the spring from which all the other “bad” attitudes and activities arise. Jesus was making it clear that doing the right things does not mean that a person is “right” on the inside. No amount of hand washing can change the selfish nature of the heart or make it clean. There is only one way. His name is Jesus. By trusting in him for our salvation, we can be changed from the inside out.