Pentecost 15 Mark 7:1-7, 14, 15, 21-23
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What a Blessing to Have God's Word…
I. To know the difference between man's rules and God's Word.
II. To show us the real problem and the only solution.

Dear Christian friends,

We have cute phrases to PICTURE it – "IN ONE ear and out the other" – "I might as well be talking to a **brick wall**." WHAT GOOD does it do to talk to a brick wall? None! That's the point! Those **phrases** express the frustration of SAYING something – TRYING to make a point – but you're just NOT **getting through**. "You might as well be talking to a **brick wall**!"

NOBODY KNOWS that frustration better than God. It's hard to miss **God's point** in today's readings. ***"So now, Israel, listen to the statutes and the ordinances that I am teaching you, …and put them into practice. Be people who do what the Word says, not people who only hear it."*** Would God have more success talking to a **brick wall**?

The devil would have us believe that God's Word is BORING and IRRELEVANT – that we're wasting our time **coming** to church – **going** to Bible class – **having** daily devotions. That's all a lie! **Looking at** these verses we exclaim, "WHAT A BLESSING TO HAVE GOD'S WORD!" **With God's Word** 1)we know the difference between **man's rules** and **God's Word** and 2)God's Word also shows us the **real problem** and the **only solution**.

I. To know the difference between man's rules and God's Word.

These verses center on a controversy that doesn't MEAN MUCH to us at first. Some ***"Pharisees saw some of (Jesus') disciples eating bread with unclean (that is, unwashed) hands."*** So they asked Jesus – ACCUSED Him! – ***"Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders? Instead they eat bread with unclean hands."***

God gave His OT people a **set of laws** we call the CEREMONIAL law. Included in that were laws about ***"clean/unclean."*** Unclean meant something was FORBIDDEN by God. BEING ***"unclean"*** meant guilt and separation from God. **For example**, pork was ***"unclean."*** Eating a pork roast was a SIN for God's OT people. God also established certain ***"ceremonial washings"*** for His OT people. But NOWHERE did God command His people to wash their hands **before eating**. That's was common sense but NOT a **divine command**. These Pharisees even admit that this was a ***"tradition of the elders."*** Nobody can MAKE SOMETHING A SIN that God doesn't say is a sin. Man's rules are not ON THE SAME LEVEL **as God's Word**.

Please understand – we NEED **rules** to provide some order. We HAVE THE RULE that church is at 8:00 and 10:30 on Sunday mornings (starting next week!). Traditions can be WONDERFUL. Thanksgiving **wouldn't be the same** without turkey and pumpkin pie. It wouldn't be Easter if we **didn't sing** "I Know that My Redeemer Lives."

Those are PRECIOUS traditions. But it would not be a sin to **have church** at 1:00 and 3:30 on Tuesday afternoons. It's NOT A SIN to have hot dogs at Thanksgiving or to sing "A Mighty Fortress" at Christmas. BREAKING or changing **manmade traditions** may be discourteous and disturbing but it's NOT A SIN.

While we can safely change or ignore **traditions** we DARE NOT **do that** with God's Word. People will try to. If a truth of God's Word is UNPOPULAR then call it a **tradition** and **ignore** it. We can especially see this in the AREA of **sexual morality**. Our society's views have **changed drastically**. TAKE YOUR PICK – sex before marriage – living together without being married – homosexuality and

gay marriage – sexual identity – **divorce**. How is the CHURCH TO RESPOND to such a flood of sin? **Many churches** treat the 6th commandment as a TRADITION that just doesn't work anymore. But God still says, ***"Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral."***

We dare never treat God's Word AS NOTHING MORE than **man-made** traditions. We dare never treat traditions and **man-made rules** AS EQUAL to God's Word. **Some** churches say you CAN'T DRINK any alcohol or you can't work on Sunday. IF a person wants to do that FOR THEMSELVES that's fine. But you can't say OTHERS HAVE to do it too. When I **was growing up** all women wore dresses to church and all men wore ties – NEVER shorts or tennis shoes. I was taught that was a SIGN OF RESPECT for God's house. I have to remind myself that it's NOT A SIN to **dress less** than that for church.

WHAT A BLESSING to **have God's Word** to show us the difference between **man-made** rules and **God's** Word! We have wonderful freedom in the gospel but BE CAREFUL! The devil will try to **use that freedom** to STIR UP TROUBLE. Do we use the common cup or **individual** cups? Do we pray the **new** or **traditional** Lord's Prayer? What color lights do we **put on** the church Christmas trees? It DOESN'T MATTER one bit! **None** of that is worth fighting over. We may have our PERSONAL PREFERENCES but **our personal opinions** are not equal to **God's** Word.

The Pharisees' argument with Jesus showed they MISSED THE WHOLE POINT of God's Word. WHAT A BLESSING to have God's Word…

II. To show us the real problem and the only solution.

The common people – the people IN THE PEW – had been misled by these NIT-PICKING Pharisees. ***"(Jesus) called the crowd to Him and said, 'Everyone, listen to Me and understand. There is nothing outside of a man that can make him unclean by going into him. But the things that come out of a man are what make a man unclean.'"*** The real problem is NOT DIRTY HANDS but dirty HEARTS!

Go back to those OT ***"clean/unclean"*** laws. They covered the OT Jews' worship and social life – what they **ate**, how they **dressed** and **worked** their fields. You read them and think, "WHAT A HASSLE! What a blessing that we **don't have to** follow them!"

With all those rules God was making some VERY IMPORTANT points – truths that STILL APPLY today. **One** is the God is God of our WHOLE life. We can't leave our faith at the **church doors**. We don't give God AN HOUR a week and **the rest** is ours. There ISN'T ONE AREA of our daily lives that God doesn't claim control over.

With those rules God was also telling the Jews, "You're MINE and you are DIFFERENT." **We Christians** live in the world but we are not to live like the **unbelieving world**. We belong to God. We are God's children. We have a WHOLE DIFFERENT OUTLOOK on life. We live so that ***"whether we eat or drink or whatever we do, we do it all for the glory of God."*** The goal of our lives is NOT GETTING AHEAD and having a GOOD TIME but going to heaven!

That's easy to SAY. But is that really true of your/my life? Can you HONESTLY SAY God always comes first in your life? Do you faithfully and daily ***"deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Jesus"***? And you call yourself a Christian!? Do you see the REAL PROBLEM? The problem isn't that GOD ISN'T CLEAR about **how He expects** us to live. The **problem** is not dirty hands but DIRTY HEARTS!

"In fact, from within, out of people's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual sins, theft, murder, adultery, greed, wickedness, deceit, unrestrained immorality, envy, slander, arrogance, and foolishness. All these evil things come from within and make a person unclean." Paul has a

similar list in Galatians 5 and then adds, ***"Just as I warned you before, those who continue to do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God."***

Let's not ignore the sin Jesus accused these Pharisees of – **hypocrisy**. OUTWARDLY these Pharisees were very religious people. They were in church every week - they were big givers – ACTIVE members – leaders. They were – to use Jesus' words – ***"hypocrites."*** It was ALL PRETEND – all FOR SHOW. ***"These people honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me."*** Only God can see into a person's heart and tell if he's a hypocrite. We can ONLY WARN a person **about being** a hypocrite. We need to constantly check **ourselves** so that we DON'T TURN INTO hypocrites.

So what's the **solution**? It's not washing your hands before eating. Cleaning up our LIVES **won't save** us because that still doesn't touch our DIRTY HEARTS. More rules **won't help**. Laws can control OUTWARD BEHAVIOR to a **certain extent** but the law can never change the heart. It's against the law to lie – steal – murder, etc. – but that doesn't stop people from doing that.

WHAT A BLESSING to have God's Word show us the ONLY REAL **solution**. Through Isaiah God says, ***"Come now, and let us reason together. Though your sins are like scarlet, they will be as white as snow. Though they are as red as crimson, they will be like wool."*** That happens when our sins are WASHED AWAY in the **shed blood** of God's own Son. That happens when we ARE CLOTHED **by faith** with the sinless life Jesus lived for us. The only solution to our **sinful hearts** is the eternal Son of God born man to **be the Savior** of all people. We could never live that **perfect life** God demands from us. God's Word says, "TAKE HEART – Jesus is ***'your Righteousness.'*** Jesus lived that perfect life for you." We really should go to hell for all our sins. But God's Word takes us to Jesus' cross and says, ***"Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."*** God's Word explains that **on the cross** Jesus PERSONALLY PAID for every one of our sins in full. God's Word tops it all off by **showing us** Jesus risen from the dead – promising us eternal life in heaven the minute we die. WHAT A BLESSING to **have God's Word** and to know that God doesn't hold our sins against us but HAS FORGIVEN them all **for Jesus' sake**. WHAT A BLESSING to **have God's Word** and to know that CLINGING to Jesus we are going straight to heaven when we die.

It's because it is SUCH A BLESSING to **have God's Word** that God so emphatically says, ***"Listen to the statutes and the ordinances that I am teaching you, and …put them into practice. Be people who do what the Word says, not people who only hear it."*** God isn't talking to a BRICK WALL. He's talking to you and me! Amen.

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