

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 10/23/2022  
Mark 7:1-13 “When Jesus Confronts Tradition”\*\*1  
Series: “*Mark: The Servant in Action*”

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Main Idea: There is a fundamental difference between Christianity and mere religion. The basic difference pertains to two problems illustrated by a confrontation that occurred between Jesus and the Pharisees in Mark 7:1-13.

- I. People who love tradition have a problem with Jesus (1-5).
  - A. Religious people tend to love their traditions (1-4).
    1. The Pharisees came to Jesus (1).
    2. The Pharisees carried baggage (2-4).
  - B. Religious people tend to impose their traditions on others (5).
    1. Tradition isn't necessarily wrong.
    2. Tradition can become a dangerous distraction.
- II. Jesus has a problem with people who love tradition (6-13).
  - A. He calls them hypocrites (6-8).
    1. Their talk sounds good.
    2. Their hearts are far from God.
    3. Their worship is meaningless.
    4. Their teachings are man-made rules.
  - B. He says they elevate man's ideas over God's Word (9-13).
    1. The Lord exposed one example (9-13a).
    2. The Lord indicated there are many others (13b).

Take Inventory: Ask yourself these important questions...

1. What do I love most about being a Christian?
2. What do I love most about my church?

We'll never love Jesus as we ought, if we love something else more. That something else could even be a good thing, as we'll see today.

As we've been journeying through the Gospel of Mark, tension has been brewing. In today's passage, it's going to start spilling out, as it were. I've entitled today's message, “When Jesus Confronts Tradition.” As I read our text, count the number of times we see that important word, tradition.

*Scripture Reading: Mark 7:1-13*

I read a story about a very poor holy man who lived in a remote part of China. Every day before his time of meditation in order to show his devotion, he put a dish of butter up on the window sill as an offering to God, since food was so scarce. One day his cat came in and ate the butter. To remedy this, he began tying the cat to the bedpost each day before the quiet time. This man was so revered for his piety that others joined him as disciples and worshipped as he did. Generations later, long after the holy man was dead, his followers placed an offering of butter on the window sill during their time of prayer and meditation. Furthermore, each one bought a cat and tied it to the bedpost.<sup>2</sup>

To borrow a phrase from the Fiddler on the Roof, “Tradition, tradition!” Oh how we tend to love our traditions! Just try changing the menu this Thanksgiving day.

“Tradition means giving votes to the most obscure of all classes, our ancestors,” said G.K. Chesterton. “It is the democracy of the dead.”<sup>3</sup>

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\*\*Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

<sup>1</sup> For a previous look at this passage, see the Mark series in 2004.

<sup>2</sup> [Source Unknown](#).

<sup>3</sup> G.K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*

It's so easy to do things *just because*. Just because we've always done it this way. Just because someone told us it's the right way. Just because we feel comfortable doing it this way.

Please realize this. There is a fundamental difference between Christianity and mere religion. The difference has to do with the answer to this question. *Why do we do what we do?*

It's a very practical question. If you want your family to be united, you need to be on the same page in answering, *why do we do what we do?* If a work place is to experience unity, the same is true. As for a church. *Why do we do what we do?*

What place should tradition have in our lives? We'll find out from Jesus this morning. We'll also see a vivid portrayal of the difference between Christianity and mere religion. The basic difference pertains to two problems, both of which surfaced in the confrontation that occurred between Jesus and the Pharisees in Mark 7:1-13.

Again, keep this reality in mind. We'll never love Jesus as we ought, if we love something else more. Case in point, tradition.

### I. People who love tradition have a problem with Jesus (1-5).

Oil and water don't mix. Man-crafted religion and Jesus don't mix either, although many try. And here's why. Such people are in the deadly grip of two tendencies.

**A. Religious people tend to love their traditions (1-4).** In verse 1 we meet the Pharisees again, along with the "scribes" or "teachers of the law." It's not the first time. The Pharisees, you'll recall, were the "separated ones" in Judaism (that's what their name means). They were very religious. They were also very uneasy about Jesus.

Back in Mark 2:16 they criticized Jesus for associating with sinners. In 2:18 they confronted Him because His disciples didn't fast and in 2:24 because they picked and ate some grain on the Sabbath. In 2:24 they got upset with Him because He healed a man on the Sabbath. In 3:6 the Pharisees began to plot how they might kill Jesus.

A transition is occurring in Jesus' ministry. He's begun His third and final year of public ministry. The crowds have been thick, but that's changing. In Mark 6 Jesus fed 5,000 with five loaves and two fish, and consequently, the crowd wanted to make Him king by force (according to John 6). But Jesus declined and preached a message announcing Himself to be the Bread of Life, and saying that only by eating His flesh and drinking His blood could men gain eternal life. That message shattered His popularity, as John records in John 6:66, "From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him."

Ironically, something else occurred at the same time. While the once curious were leaving Him, His critics came looking for Him.<sup>4</sup>

Notice verse 1, "Now when the Pharisees gathered to him, with some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem..."

1. *The Pharisees came to Jesus (1).* Though hard to believe, it's true. There were people who hated Jesus, particularly the religious elite. They were threatened by Him and jealous of Him. He didn't fit into their system. He wasn't one of them. Eventually, and in accordance with the decree of God, they chose to eliminate Him, or so they thought.

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<sup>4</sup> John 7:1 indicates the Jews in Judea were seeking to kill Jesus.

Here they came to spy on Him, to trap Him. And what amazes me is that He let them come near. He didn't shun them. He faced them. See the Savior's love here, my friend. He *loved* these religious hypocrites, for He had come to save them, too. Even religious sinners need Jesus.

So the Pharisees came to Jesus. Mark makes it clear they didn't come empty-handed.

2. *The Pharisees carried baggage (2-4)*. I don't mean luggage, either. Verse 2 says, "They saw that some of his disciples ate with hands that were defiled, that is, unwashed."

The problem isn't dirty hands. The problem is ceremonial cleanness. That's what bugged the Pharisees.

You might be surprised to know there are a lot of God-given rules pertaining to cleansing in the Old Testament. God gave the Israelites many instructions regarding cleansing. But why? It's because God was teaching Israel an important lesson. Before a sinner can enjoy fellowship with Him, that sinner must be *cleansed*.

Unfortunately, the majority of Jews missed the point. As time passed, they focused on the law and missed the intent of the law. They actually took God's good law and expanded it, adding a host of man-made laws to it.

Mark, who is writing for a Roman audience that would be unfamiliar with Jewish laws, offers a parenthetical explanation in verses 3-4. Notice the parentheses in the ESV. "(For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands properly, holding to the tradition of the elders, <sup>4</sup> and when they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they wash. And there are many other traditions that they observe, such as the washing of cups and pots and copper vessels and dining couches.)"

Barclay gives us an example of how tedious these rules were: "Before every meal, and between each of the courses, the hands had to be washed, and they had to be washed in a certain way...First, the hands were held with finger tips *pointing upwards*; water was poured over them and had to run at least down to the wrist; the minimum amount of water was one quarter of a log, which is equal to one and a half egg-shells full of water. While the hands were still wet each hand had to be cleansed with the fist of the other...This meant that at this stage the hands were wet with water; but that the water was now unclean because it had touched unclean hands. So, next, the hands had to be held with finger tips pointing downwards and water had to be pointed over them in such a way that it began at the wrists and ran off at the finger tips. After all that had been done the hands were clean."<sup>5</sup>

You say, "Well, it does sound a little obsessive-compulsive, but it's not so bad to want clean hands, is it?"

Again, it's not about clean hands. In Jewish eyes, if you didn't wash your hands this way, you were considered unclean in the sight of God.

Barclay continues, "A Rabbi who once omitted the ceremony was buried in excommunication. Another Rabbi, imprisoned by the Romans, used the water given to him for handwashing rather than for drinking and in the end nearly perished of thirst, because he was determined to observe the rules of cleanliness rather than satisfy his thirst."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Barclay, p. 165.

<sup>6</sup> Barclay, p. 165.

You say, “Well again, it sounds extreme, but a person’s entitled to do what he wants to do, isn’t he? I mean, especially since he’s doing it for God.”

The problem is, he’s not really doing this for God, but for himself. And he doesn’t stop with himself. Religious people who love their traditions *never* let it stop there.

**B. Religious people tend to impose their traditions on others (5).** Notice verse 5, “And the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, ‘Why do your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?’”

The scribes and Pharisees tried to get at Jesus through His disciples. Since a teacher is responsible for the conduct of his pupils, they confronted Jesus with a question. *Why do they eat with defiled hands?*

Again, the issue is *not* hygiene. The issue is holiness, and specifically, how a person becomes holy. The key phrase here is “tradition of the elders.”

What was the “tradition of the elders?” It refers to the Jewish oral law. God had given His people the Torah, the Old Testament law. These written covenant stipulations were summed up in the Ten Commands. Concerning the law, God said (see Deut 5:33), “Do this and you will live.”

Many indeed wanted to please God. In fact, some wanted to please Him so much that they developed guidelines which were intended to help people keep God's law. They handed down these extra-biblical guidelines to their children. The word “tradition” in verse 2 means “a handing down.” The Jews passed from one generation to the next this oral law which was based on the Old Testament, until finally it was written down in the Mishnah (in the second century AD). In Jesus’ day it was still in oral form.

Though the original intent may have been noble, the outcome was enslaving. In essence, the Jews had an immense system of manmade laws that eventually possessed as much authority, if not more, as did God's Law.

Don’t miss this. The criticism that the Jewish leaders leveled against Jesus' disciples had to do with Jewish oral tradition, not Scripture.

Before we write off the Jewish leaders as extremists, allow me to remind you that we do the same type of thing. We add guidelines to clarify God's Word so as to help us define and promote godliness.

Here's an example. God's Law says, “Thou shalt not commit adultery (Ex 20:14; the seventh commandment).” That's God's Law, and it's a non-negotiable. Immorality is wrong. Always. Doing anything that would harm a marriage relationship is wrong.

Since that’s true, in order to protect themselves from violation of the seventh commandment, what do Christians often do? They create other guidelines intended to serve as a hedge to keep them from violating God's Law.

Many (if not most) of us do this. We might say, “It’s wrong for me, as a married man, to have a lunch meeting, or be alone in a car, with a person of the opposite sex.”

Someone else might say, “In our home, we will not subscribe to cable television, since there is so much immorality on it.”

At Scioto Hills, there are guidelines that campers are asked to abide by, that pertain to modesty in dress, and so forth.

So the question is this. Is there anything wrong with having these extra-biblical standards? The answer is, no. In fact, the aspiration is noble.

But there is a potential danger. What is it? It’s when we elevate our personal standards and make them equivalent with God's commands. It's one thing to have personal convictions. It's another to treat these personal convictions as though they are a

God-given standard, equal with the God-given standard of His Word, the Scriptures. That's dangerous, and it often leads to another dangerous outcome, which is imposing our personal convictions on others, and making them a test of spirituality.

To say I won't subscribe to cable television is one thing. To say no good Christian will do that is quite another.

Here's where the tension enters. We like our personal convictions. That's why we have them. They are *convictions*, and we've adopted them for what we consider to be good reasons.

Now, plug that into the situation in Mark 7. Is there anything inherently wrong with having hand-washing guidelines? No. What's the problem? It's when those guidelines become a test, a *requirement* for spirituality. When it moves from being a *good* idea, to *God's* idea that must be obeyed. That's what had happened in first century Judaism.

Please don't miss this. The Jews' criticism in verse 2 had *nothing* to do with God's requirements. Jesus taught His disciples to obey God's Law. In fact, He clearly stated in Matthew 5:17, "Think not that I am come to destroy the Law, or the prophets; I am not come to destroy but to fulfill." And if there's any question regarding this, check out Matthew 5:19, "Whosoever, therefore, shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven."

So no. It is never permissible to disobey God's commands. That's true for disciples of Jesus, then and now. Adultery is always wrong. So is drunkenness, homosexuality, gossip, stealing, and every other sin the Scriptures forbid. We must forsake them.

But that wasn't the case with Jesus' disciples. Jesus taught them to obey God's Law. But He didn't require them to keep man-made, Jewish laws, no matter how noble the intent was in the heart of the person who created these laws. And that's why the Jewish leaders were suspicious of Him.

So how should we Christians view tradition? We need to keep two realities in mind.

1. *Tradition isn't necessarily wrong.* Everyone has traditions. Even the most progressive-minded churches have traditions. Several years ago *Leadership Journal* had a rather insightful cartoon showing a group of people sitting around a boardroom table. The headline read, "Week 2 of a church plant." One person said to the rest of the group, "That's not the way we did it last week."

We are creatures of habit. Traditions are inevitable in all walks of life, even church life. And that's not necessarily bad. Why not learn from the past? One of my favorite lines (I think it comes from Wiersbe) says, "Before you start moving fences, find out why they were put there in the first place." Just because something's a tradition doesn't mean it's wrong. However...

2. *Tradition can become a dangerous distraction.* No matter how noble the original intent, man-crafted traditions can cause us to lose sight of reality. Ritual becomes a hazardous enemy to true Christianity. We become enamored with externals and they begin to rule our hearts.

May I say it again? We'll never love Jesus as we ought, if we love something else more.

Look at the church landscape in America. Go to practically any city and you'll find one if not dozens of dying churches. Enter their doors on a Sunday and you'll find ritual. Yes, the machinery is still operating. But something's terribly wrong. And what is it? In so many cases, the love for Jesus has been surpassed by a love for something else called tradition.

This brings us to point two. The first? People who love tradition have a problem with Jesus. Here's the second.

## II. Jesus has a problem with people who love tradition (6-13).

Jesus has two things to say to such folks.

**A. He calls them hypocrites (6-8).** Notice verse 6, "And he said to them, "Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, " 'This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; <sup>7</sup> in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.'"

Notice how Jesus addresses the problems He confronts in life. What does He do? It's what we must do. He goes to the Scriptures. He's constantly quoting His Hebrew Bible, in this case, Isaiah.

Isaiah lived over seven hundred years before the Pharisees, but Jesus says that Isaiah had people just like *you* in mind. Traditionalism is not a new problem, my friends.

Jesus called his critics *hypocrites*. What is a hypocrite? By definition, it is a person who play-acts in life. How can you tell if you are a hypocrite? It's not easy, for we're so prone to justify our actions, but Jesus' words warn us to look out for four red flags.

1. *Their talk sounds good.* Verse 6 again (NIV), "As it is written: 'These people honor me with their lips.'" Notice, their *lips*. With their lips they *say* they love God. With their lips they *say* they want to please God. What they say sounds right, even honorable, but something's missing. This is the second red flag.

2. *Their hearts are far from God.* Isaiah was speaking for God when He confronted the fundamental problem. "But their heart is far from me." The religious person is impressive to watch, and to hear. But it's hollow. It's an external *show*. His religious machinery keeps churning away, but his heart isn't vertical. He's not enthralled with God, but with himself.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the noted German pastor that Hitler killed, describes this inconsistency, "At this moment God...loses all reality...Satan does not fill us with hatred of God, but with forgetfulness of God."<sup>7</sup>

This is an ever-present, tragic danger we all face. A hypocrite forgets God.

Would you say this morning that you have forgotten God? That's a tough question to answer. A hypocrite always insists the answer is *no!* With lots of convincing talk to support their answer.

But Jesus loves hypocrites too much to let them continue in their self-deception. So He identifies the hypocrite's core problem. It's not that he isn't saying the right things, and doing the right things. The problem is much deeper. The problem is *worship*.

3. *Their worship is meaningless.* In verse 7 Jesus says, "They worship me in vain." Oh, hypocrites may work hard in their expression of worship, and they may be quite sincere, but the Lord's assessment is that their worship is empty, a big zero. Why? They're not worshipping God because they love something else more. Thus, from God's perspective, they worship Me *in vain*.

One of the prime reasons for this is seen in the next part of verse 7. As the NIV puts it, "Their teachings are but rules taught by men." Here's the fourth red flag.

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<sup>7</sup> in Kent Hughes, p. 25.

4. *Their teachings are man-made rules.* After finishing the Isaiah quotation, Jesus makes it quite personal in verse 8. He says (ESV), “*You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men.*”

This is a serious charge, isn't it? Jesus says that these very reputable religious leaders had left the Word of God, specifically the *commandment* of God. And they had turned to instructions created by men. Thus, they were putting human authority over God's authority. A strong accusation, yes. But Jesus said it for this reason.

The facts don't lie. The Jewish leaders had elevated their man-made traditions to a place of higher authority than God's Word. It's why they were so upset with Jesus. He dares to touch their beloved traditions.

Here's an example. Rabbi Eleazar said, “He who expounds the Scriptures in opposition to the tradition has no share in the world to come.” The *Mishna*, a collection of Jewish traditions in the *Talmud*, records, “It is a greater offense to teach anything contrary to the voice of the Rabbis than to contradict Scripture itself.”<sup>8</sup>

Now, if we at this moment find ourselves starting to look down upon these Jewish men, we may need to take a good look in the mirror. We may be doing the same thing. It's so easy to put something else in a place of higher authority over God's Word.

Some do it with church tradition. For others, it's what mamma says. For others, it's Freud or Darwin or some other “expert” that keeps us from believing and obeying God's Word. For still others, it's simply *us*. We have become the ultimate authority, the one that really matters. We do what *we* want and we believe what *we* want to believe.

But Jesus has a problem with people who love anything, including religion, more than God. And He loves them enough to tell them. First, He calls them hypocrites. Then He demonstrates His love by exposing their basic error. And what is it?

**B. He says they elevate man's ideas over God's Word (9-13).** So, if you're going to call someone a hypocrite, you'd better have some solid evidence ready to prove the point. And Jesus did, and at this point, proceeded to present it.

1. *The Lord exposed one example (9-13a).* And the example was the practice of “Corban.” Listen to Jesus in verses 9-13.

“And he said to them, ‘You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to establish your tradition!’<sup>10</sup> For Moses said, ‘Honor your father and your mother’; and, ‘Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.’<sup>11</sup> But you say, ‘If a man tells his father or his mother, “Whatever you would have gained from me is Corban”’ (that is, given to God)—<sup>12</sup> then you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or mother,<sup>13</sup> thus making void the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down.”

Corban comes from the Hebrew word meaning “a gift.” As Warren Wiersbe explains, “If a Jew wanted to escape some financial responsibilities, he would declare his good to be ‘Corban--a gift to God.’ This meant he was free from other obligations, such as caring for his parents.”<sup>9</sup>

Sort of reminds me of something we did when I was a little boy with my friends. One of us would make a bold claim, like, “Hey, I'll do such and such if you give me a dollar. I promise.” “You're on. Here's the dollar. Now do it!” Then out from behind his back would come the canceler. Two crossed fingers. “Got you! I don't have to. I had my

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<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Wiersbe, p. 134.

<sup>9</sup> Wiersbe, p. 53.

fingers crossed.” And we would respond, “Well, okay. He got us. Everybody knows that two crossed fingers cancels out a promise.”

That’s kind of how Corban worked. In the Bible, God clearly said that children are responsible to care for their elderly parents. Right? No, not if your fingers are crossed. The Jews developed a tradition that made it possible for a son to shirk his responsibility. All the son had to do was declare that what he intended to give his father and mother was “Corban,” a gift devoted to God, and that gift could no longer go to his parents. Ironically, it could still be used by the son.

Just think of it. People who prided themselves in God’s Word actually twisted God’s Word a full 180 degrees. They turned white into black. They circumvented God’s requirements. They rationalized their way right out of obeying the commands of God.

And Jesus loved the guilty parties enough to show them the folly of it all.

But Corban is just one example of how people have used man-made notions to nullify God’s Word. I wish we could say it was the only example. We can’t.

Several years ago, some from our church family went to the jail to share the hope of Christ with the inmates. They met a man who opened up about some real problems in his life. They listened and assured him there was hope for him in God’s Word. They asked if he would like a Bible. He said he would, so they gave him one. He looked at it and returned it. “I don’t want that. It’s not the KJV.”

Interesting, isn’t it? Here was a man who desperately needed to be reading God’s Word, like God commands us to do. This man was in jail! But he refused to receive a Bible because he once heard someone tell him that only the KJV is legitimate.

Such is the power of human tradition. It elevates man’s ideas over God’s Word. Again, according to Jesus, Corban is just exhibit A. Sadly, Corban isn’t alone.

2. *The Lord indicated there are many others (13b)*. Note carefully Jesus’ final words in verse 13, “And *many* such things you do.”

Those are sad words, *many such things*. This is a powerful tendency, and it’s rooted in our pride. To create man-made standards, and give them higher status than God’s Word. The Jews did it, again and again. And so do many who name the name of Christ.

I don’t know how many times I’ve heard this one. After talking with someone who desperately needs to hear God’s Word, I invite them to church, only to hear this response, “Oh, I can’t come to church. I don’t have the right clothes.”

Just analyze those words. Where did they get the notion that you need a certain kind of clothes to go to church? Not from the Bible. It’s a tradition of men. And realize what they’re saying. In essence, “I would rather disobey God and stay away from church than disobey the tradition of men I hold that says you must wear certain clothes in church.

Another example. “I can’t become a Christian. I’m not the ‘religious’ type.” Who says you can’t? Does God’s Word say that? No. To say only certain types of people are candidates for the Christian life is a lie from the pit that’s promoted through the traditions of men.

Lest there be any doubt, listen to what God’s Word actually says. In Matthew 11:28, “Come to me *all* you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” In Romans 10:13, “For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

Know this, my friend. Jesus has a problem with people who love religious tradition, no matter how sincere they may be. He loves them enough to call them hypocrites, and give them solid evidence of their hypocrisy.



So how these tradition-lovers respond to Jesus? Mark doesn't tell us. But Matthew does. According to Matthew 15:12, here's what happened next. "Then [right after Jesus finished talking] the disciples came to him and asked, 'Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this?' (NIV)"

There's the outcome. Jesus *offended* the Pharisees.

You say, "It's not very Christlike to offend people." Actually, at times, and this is one of those times, it's very Christlike. Jesus loved His critics enough to offend them by sharing the only truth that could save their souls.

It's worth noting that the very next thing Jesus did was to give His disciples a very practical instruction concerning the Pharisees. Listen to Matthew 15:14 (NIV), "Leave them; they are blind guides. If a blind man leads a blind man, both will fall into a pit."

So yes, love the traditionalist if you can. Try to help him. But realize his condition. He is blind. And if he happens to be a teacher, he is a blind guide of others who are blind. Don't try to argue with him. Speak the truth clearly. Then leave him alone.

Keep in mind that Jesus didn't initiate this confrontation. The Pharisees and scribes did. But He didn't back away from it either. He took the risk to help them and others who were being duped by their traditions. Ultimately, of course, He went to the cross so that they, too, could be set free from their sins, if only they would repent and believe in Him.

*And many such things you do.* They needed to hear those words. Perhaps we do, too, more than we might realize.

People who love tradition have a problem with Jesus, but Jesus has a problem with people who love tradition. It goes both ways.

Barclay tells the story of a Muslim man who was pursuing another man with upraised knife to murder him. Just then the call to prayer rang out. Immediately he stopped, spread out his prayer mat, knelt, said his prayer as fast as he could. Then he got up and took off as fast as he could so he could catch and murder the other man. What was prayer to him? Just a formality, a ritual that made no difference in how he lived his life.

Is your religion any different, my friend? There are many so-called "Christian" businessmen who run their businesses with the same passion this Muslim man exerted in trying to kill another. They violate the clear teaching of God's Word, by cutting ethical corners at work, as well as neglecting their families, all because of their love for the dollar. Then Sunday comes, so they stop their greedy pursuit, and go to church. They sing some songs about loving God, hear a message about loving other people, bow their heads in prayer, say 'Amen' at the close of the service, and leave. With the intent on changing? No, with the intent to do business as usual in the week to come.

Is there any difference? Or how about the young person who lives like the world all week long, but then dutifully shows up in church on Sunday morning, again to sing about loving God, to give money, to read Scripture, and to do other "religious" activities.

The problem isn't with the activities. They are good, indeed, God-given. *We should* go to church, sing, pray, read the Scriptures, and give. The problem is thinking that God is pleased with our good works when our hearts are not right with Him.

Allow me to say it again. We'll never love Jesus as we ought, if we love something else more.

Take Inventory: Ask yourself these important questions...

1. *What do I love most about being a Christian?* There are many benefits, of course. Peace of mind. Joy. Knowing you will live forever. Many benefits. But hold on to that thought while considering the second question.

2. *What do I love most about my church?* Again, there are many benefits. Like good fellowship with believers, practical teaching and programs to help your family, encouraging music, etc.

All fine. But here's my concern. Consider again that word *most*. What do I love *most*? My friend, the answer to those two questions needs to be the same answer. And if it isn't the same, I'm in trouble. What do I love *most*, about being a Christian, and about my church? The right answer, of course, must be *Jesus*.

So if there's anything I love more than Him—whether church tradition, country, family, work, *anything*—I have turned those good things into god-things, idols, which have replaced the best thing, the most needed thing, the only thing that can satisfy my longing soul.

**Closing Song:** #405 “*My Faith Has Found a Resting Place*” (all four verses)

Community Group Discussion:

1. In this morning's message from Mark 7:1-13, we saw what happens when Jesus confronts tradition. Take time as a group to re-read the passage, and then answer these questions. What is tradition? When is tradition appropriate? What are some examples of good traditions (in your family, in our country, in our church)?
2. What is it about tradition that makes it so appealing? According to today's passage, when does tradition become inappropriate?
3. According to verses 1-5, why do people who love tradition often have a problem with Jesus? What does our love of tradition reveal about the condition of our heart?
4. According to verses 6-13, what is Jesus' assessment of those who love tradition? What counsel does He give such a person?
5. What do you love most about your church? What does that answer reveal about you?