

## Introduction to Mark 7:1-13

Sunday, May 29, 2016  
Pastor Doug Phillips

Most of us at some point or another have found ourselves “going through the motions.” Maybe it’s at work in the middle of the afternoon and you’re counting down the hours and minutes until quitting time. Perhaps it’s with your family, when you just don’t have the energy to meaningfully engage with your spouse or your kids or your siblings. But what about your relationship with God?

Jesus knows our weaknesses and limitations, but one thing He cannot stand is when we simply “go through the motions”—pretending to be His followers when, in fact, we are not. Often times this happens because we have made up our own ideas of what pleases God, rather than listening to His word and seeking to please Him on His terms.

In Mark 7:1-13, Jesus confronts some religious people who were doing just that...

### Context

In the Gospel of Mark thus far, we have seen a wide variety of people who don’t “get” Jesus. Often times their misunderstanding leads to conflict and rejection (3:2-6, 22; 4:17; 6:2-3). The tension continues to build as once again leaders from Jerusalem, the religious leaders of the entire nation, come to question and chastise Jesus.

### Structure

- I. The Pharisees Confront Jesus About Washing (1-5)
- II. Jesus Confronts the Pharisees About the Role of Man-Made Tradition/Hypocritical Religion (6-13)

**Reflect** *(Use this section to write down any insights you received from the sermon. Make sure to note any questions you had about something in the passage or in the sermon as well.)*

## Discuss

1. Jesus condemned the Pharisees for being more committed to the “tradition of the elders” than they were to God’s word. What, besides the Bible, informs or dictates how we think and what we do in today’s world?
2. Pastor Doug used the phrase, “treat God as God,” several times throughout the sermon. What changes would you have to make in your life to make that statement true of you? What are the obstacles between how you live right now and actually treating God as God?
3. Have you or someone you’ve known ever been tempted to use religion for self-centered purpose? Without naming anyone, give an example of how that was evident in your/their life.
4. One of the most important remedies against following the “traditions of men” is to listen intently to the word of God (v.14). What is your habit of listening to or receiving God’s word? What is God teaching you through these times right now?
5. In light of this passage, what does it mean for someone to become a Christian? How would you explain it to someone whom you were certain was not a Christian?

**Go Deeper** *(This section is especially for leaders to consider as they prepare for the Growth Group meeting)*

Gospel Connections: Scripture says all our attempts at being right with God on our own terms, all of our religious traditions apart from God’s word, are like “filthy rags” (Is. 64:6). The truth is, then, that all of us are unclean before God. God cannot be mocked; He is not deceived by our going through the religious motions. We cannot be “good enough” for God.

The only way for us to be right with God is for Jesus to live a life perfectly obedient to the word of God, die the death we deserved in our place, and rise again. Because of Jesus’ sacrifice on our behalf, we can receive what we really need for salvation—not a new set of rules to keep, but a new heart. God doesn’t just want outward obedience; He wants obedience from the heart (Rom. 6:17).

Whole Bible Connections: The God of Israel is a God who sees and judges the heart (1 Sam 16:7; Is. 29:13; Jer. 17:9-10). While He did command the observance of ceremonial laws in the Old Testament, God has shown time and time again that He is not impressed with our religious activity, but only with sincere devotion (Micah 6:7-8).

Years later Peter would experience the heart of Jesus’ teaching on this subject when God commanded him to share the gospel with Cornelius, a Gentile. Peter tried to impress God with his obedience by refusing to do what God had just told him to do! But Peter’s heart was revealed to be fixated on man-made tradition and not the command of God (Acts 10:9-15).

Theological Connections: When we follow the traditions of men instead of God’s word we tend to think of God in our image rather than ourselves being made in His image. Karl Barth once confronted this idea saying, “one cannot speak of God simply by speaking of man in a loud voice!” What he meant is this: we can only know God in the way He has revealed Himself; we cannot know Him through our own speculation and we cannot obey Him by adhering to traditions of our own creation. We have to take God at His word and obey Him on His terms, which means loving and serving Him whole-heartedly.