

Henry Ow
 HCC: Following the Rules vs Following the One
 Mark 7:1-23

INTRODUCTION

1. Image: The popular NPR radio show: "This American Life" did an episode titled: "The Devil Inside of Me."
2. Need: We have a voice that hones in on the unclean parts within us.
3. Subject: How do we address the uncleanness? How do we attain true cleanliness?
4. Text: Mark 7:1-23
5. Preview: What is the wrong way to attain true cleanliness? Why is that the wrong way? What should we do to attain true cleanliness?

BODY

- I. [You believe that] **following rules makes you clean** (7:1-5). [Error]
 - A. The religious leaders believed that following rules would make them morally clean.
 1. The religious leaders would wash their hands before eating to be ritually and morally clean before God (7:3-4).
 - a. They needed to wash their hands after going to the market (7:4)
 - b. There is a particular way in which you wash your hands (7:3).
 - c. They followed traditions not the Mosaic law (7:3)
 - d. Think of traditions as guard rails.
 - e. While the traditions were well intentioned, they were abused.
 2. The religious leaders expected Jesus's disciples wash their hands to be ritually and morally clean before God (7:1-2, 5).
 - a. The Pharisees throw a flag or blow a whistle because the disciples had broken a rule (7:1-2).
 - b. They bring it up to Jesus (7:5)
 - c. The word defiled carries the idea of common.
 - B. We believe that following rules makes us morally clean before God.
 1. Do you look down upon those who read or don't read certain books?
 2. Do you believe that wearing certain clothes makes you more acceptable before God?
 3. Do we look down upon those who read a different Bible translation?
- II. [We learn that] **Following rules fails to make you clean** (7:6-13) [Reality]
 (Following rules fails to make you clean for two reasons.)
 - A. Following rules fails to make you clean because rules cannot change your heart (7:6-7)
 1. Jesus rebukes the religious leaders for following the rules but lacking affection toward God (7:6-7)
 2. [Example]: Making it a rule to wear suit and tie to church service will not make you love God more.
 3. Following rules makes us fail to appreciate grace. [Consider cutting.]

- B. Following rules fails to make you clean because we might follow rules to bypass God's word (7:8-13)
 - 1. Jesus rebukes the religious leaders for following rules rather than God's word.
 - 2. Jesus accuses them of setting aside God's word in an escalating fashion.
 - a. Leaving the commandment of God (7:8)
 - b. Rejecting the commandment of God (7:9)
 - c. Make void the word of God (7:13)
 - 3. Jesus uses the example of the religious leaders bypassing the fifth commandment.
 - a. The religious leaders have a practice called Corban.
 - b. Corban allows a person to go around the fifth commandment.
 - c. Jesus condemns the practice of corban.
 - 4. Let me give you some examples of how we might bypass God's law today.
 - a. Measure of spiritual maturity is equated to knowing the Bible well.
 - b. Measuring of sexual purity is avoiding pornography.
- III. Follow the one who makes you clean (2 Cor 5:17; John 14:16, 26) [Response]
 - A. Follow him because he changes your heart (2 Cor 5:17)
 - B. Follow him because empowers to obey his word (John 14:16, 16:13)
 - a. He sends you help in the form of the Spirit (John 14:16)
 - b. The Spirit helps us obey (John 16:13)
 - i. Think of the Spirit like a parent helping a child to write
 - ii. The Spirit leads to obey the instruction of loving our neighbor.

CONCLUSION

- 1. Summary: Following the rules removes uncleanness. Following rules fail to remove uncleanness. Follow the one who makes the unclean clean.
- 2. Closing Image: It reminds me of the old hymn: "There is a Fountain."

MANUSCRIPT

The popular NPR radio show: “This American Life” did an episode titled: “The Devil Inside of Me.” The show asked various people if they struggled with an inside voice that held them bondage to unwanted thoughts.

Let me read you some of their responses:

A woman says, “Totally out of control. It’s got a life of its own, and I can’t tame it anymore.

Another woman says: “I actually have a name for the voice. I call it Stan. Stan is the guy who tells me to have the extra glass of wine. Stan is the guy that tells me to smoke.”

A man says, “I remember somehow realizing how finely calibrated the voice was to every nuance, every part of my feelings, including the feeling that I didn’t want to smoke cigarettes. And it’s like, ‘[You] might as well have another cigarette, because this is it.’”

A woman who just got engaged hears her voice say: “You better try your hardest to make sure he doesn’t take [the ring] away, because he’s going to find out the truth about you and how much you suck. So you better distract him with a really thin body.”

At the end of the episode, the host asks someone, “Do you feel like the voice is winning?” A woman replies, “Right now, yeah. I think I’m in some serious trouble, to be honest.”

We all have that voice. It may say something different. **But the voice always seems to focus on the unclean parts within us.** The voice never seems to have anything positive to say. We often try to mask it by doing things. We try to do our best at work thinking that accolades would get rid of it. Some of us try to drown out the voice of uncleanness through the voice of a boyfriend or girlfriend or spouse. Others try to quiet it by being involved in ministry. But it always is there. We can’t get rid of it. The source of uncleanness remains.

How do we deal with this uncleanness? How do you address the impurity that exists within us? How do we attain true purity? How do we become clean? **How do we deal with this uncleanness?**

To answer this question, we’ll be turning to the gospel of **Mark**. Please turn there with me. We’ll be specifically in **Mark, chapter 7**. Thank You Akhil for reading this morning’s passage. As some of you know our church has been going through a series on the gospel of Mark. Mark takes us on a literary journey to describe what does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus Christ.

It continually asks the reader: “Are you will do to do all that it takes to follow Christ? Are you all in? Are you willing to follow Jesus with all of your strength even if it might cost your life?” Our passage this morning helps us formulate a response to the question: “How do we deal with our uncleanness?”

This morning’s message divides into three sections. First, **what is the wrong way to address our uncleanness?** What is an erroneous response to the uncleanness that we find inside of us. Second, **what is the reality about this error?** What is a truth for us to consider? Third, **how should respond to our uncleanness?** What should we do? We’ll look at the error, the reality, and the response.

First question, what is the wrong way to address our uncleanness? What is an incorrect path to purity? What is the error? You believe that **following rules makes you clean.** Following certain rituals leads to true cleanliness. If I just follow this set of rules, then I’ll be morally clean. If I stay within these boundaries, then I will be morally ok. The wrong way to address our uncleanness is the belief: **following rules make you clean.**

The religious leaders believe in this error. **The religious leaders believed that following the rules would make them morally clean.**

They thought that if we followed a certain set of instructions to the letter, then we will be right in the eyes of God. Look with me at verse 3 thru 4. Mark writes: *“For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands properly, holding to the tradition of the elders, and when they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they wash. And there were many other traditions that they observe, such as the washing of cups and pots and copper vessels and dining couches.”*

The Pharisees believed in ritual purity. To be right with God, they needed to maintain ritual purity. For example, they needed to wash their hands after going to the market.

Why would they need to wash their hands after going to the market place? Well you never know what you might contact with if you're in the market. You may bump into a Gentile. Unclean. You might run into Naomi who recently gave birth to her son Haggai. You give her a hug. But now your hands are unclean because you touched a woman who just gave birth. Unclean. Maybe you flick an insect on your shoulder. You touched a creeping thing. Unclean. So, when you go home, you hear the words: “Wash your hands.”

There is a particular way in which you have to wash your hands. If you have an ESV translation, then you'll noticed that in verse three, there is number above the word: "wash". If you follow the number to the footnote, then you'll read that it could be translated: "wash a fist". This could be describing the way that the Pharisees was their hands. They would pour water over their hand and rub it with their fist.

The religious leaders followed traditions but not the Mosaic law. Notice the phrase in verse 3: "*holding to the tradition of the elders*". This referred to practices not required in the law. The only people in the Old Testament needing to ritually purify themselves are priests. Prior to giving an offering, the priests would wash their hands and feet. But the Pharisees and scribes and Jews are not priests. Only those from the line of Aaron can become priests. So why did the Pharisees and scribes and Jews need to wash their hands. A thought developed in the period before the arrival of Christ where the Jews believed that Moses received two sets of law at Mt. Sinai. The first set was the Torah, which are the first five books of the Bible – Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. But Moses also received a second set of law – the oral law. This oral law passed down from generation to generation became known as the tradition of the elders.

This set of traditions served as an extra set of rules to follow so that it would prevent a Jew from breaking the written Mosaic Law.

Think of the tradition as a set of guard rails. Guard rails exist to prevent you from reeling over the edge. While you could navigate the road without the guardrail, it provides extra protection.

While the traditions were well intentioned, they became abused. Instead of seeing it as a help to keep the law, future generations made it equal to the law. The washing of hands not only made you ritually pure but it made you morally pure before God. They also required all Jews to follow it. If you were a God-fearing Jew, then you would wash your hands especially after touching all those unclean things. This is what leads to the point of tension in our text.

The religious leaders expected Jesus's disciples to wash their hands to be ritually and morally clean before God. If the disciples of Jesus wanted to be pure, then they would follow the traditions. **The Pharisees and scribes throw down a penalty flag because the disciples had broken a rule.** First, **they observe the violation.**

Read with me in verse 1: *“Now when the Pharisees gathered to him, with some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem, they saw that some of his disciples ate with hands that were defiled, that is, unwashed.”* Second, **they inform Jesus**. Read with me in 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?”* If you read between the lines, you would hear this: “If you were really a prophet from God, then you would know to teach your disciples to wash their hands.”

Note that the word defiled is repeated in each of these instances. The word defiled carries the idea of common. The disciples of Jesus had common, regular, nobody hands. But the religious leaders had sacred, holy, and distinct hands. They washed them as we’ve mentioned before. But they also hold onto or grasp with their hands the traditions of the elders. Did you notice in verse 3, how Mark uses the word: “holding”? In verse 4, the word: “observe” can also be translated: “hold”. Mark plays on the idea of hands and holding. The religious leaders have holy hands in contrast to the disciple’s common hands. This oral tradition has made these religious leaders believe themselves to be spiritually superior to others.

It's easy for us to point fingers at the Pharisees and label them: "They're such legalists." You're a legalist when you believe that by observing certain rules or principles, makes you morally clean before God for your own glory. But **we are functionally legalists too.** For instance, do you believe that those who read certain books are closer to God than others? Do you believe that reading books by Tim Keller makes you more acceptable before God? If not Tim Keller, then maybe books by C.S. Lewis, John Piper, R.C. Sproul, John MacArthur, or Kevin DeYoung? Do you believe that wearing certain clothes on Sunday mornings make you more acceptable before God? Maybe wearing collared shirt and slacks makes you more acceptable than the other guy who comes in wearing a T-shirt and shorts? Do we think that people who read the ESV translation of the Bible are closer to God than those who don't? Do you think fasting regularly makes God more pleased with you? There are so many ways we can think that by follow rules make us acceptable before God. Such thinking is error.

Why is such thinking in error? Why is it a mistake to believe that following rules make you clean? Let's turn our attention to the second part of this morning's message. The reality. What is the truth?

We learn that **following rules fails to make you clean**. Being obedient to certain man-made rituals and practices doesn't change your standing before God. Doing this and not doing that will not make you morally clean. Following man-made principles will not help you deal with the uncleanness that you sense. It will exacerbate the uncleanness. It increases the guilt and the shame that you feel. **Following rules fails to make you clean.**

We'll look at two reasons why this is true. First, **following rules fails to change your heart**. Following these man-made rules often fails to change your affection or desires. Despite doing certain things the intentions of your heart remain the same. **Following rules fails to change your heart.**

Jesus rebukes the religious leaders for following the rules but lacking affection toward God. Jesus says that you are great rule followers but you are not great God followers. Read with me in 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; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.”* Jesus quotes Isaiah and says just as the Israelites in the past didn't worship God in their hearts neither did the Pharisees. Jesus calls the Pharisees: “hypocrites”. The word was used to describe actors in the theater.

To put it in more common language, Jesus called the Pharisees: actors, thespians, or pretenders.

Think about it. Does following rules change your heart? For you parents, ask your kids. Does making it a rule to throw your dirty clothes into the laundry basket cause you to love putting away your dirty clothes? Think about work. It's a rule to fill out your expense reports. At the end of the month, do you say to yourself: Oh, to joy! I get to do my expense reports. Following rules doesn't change your affections.

What is the second reason following rules fails to make you clean?

Following rules causes us to bypass God's word. When we create the rules, we tend to go around what God's word actually says. We end up disobeying God's word. **Following rules causes us to bypass God's word.**

Jesus rebukes the religious leaders for following rules rather than God's word. By following their own laws, the religious leaders became rule breakers. Note how Jesus accuses them of setting aside God's word in an escalating fashion. First, he accuses them of **leaving the commandment of God**. Look at verse 8. *You leave the command of God and hold to the tradition of men.* Second, he accuses them of **rejecting the commandment of God**.

Look at verse 9. *And he said to them, “you have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to establish your tradition.* Jesus will turn it up one more notch. Follow with me in verse 10: *“For Moses said, ‘Honor your father and your mother’; and ‘Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.’ But you say, ‘If a man tells his father or his mother, “whatever you have gained from me is Corban:’ (that is, given to God) – then you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or mother, thus”* Wait for it.... You remember me saying that Jesus’s accusations keep turning it up. Let’s look at verse 13: *“thus making void the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And many such things you do.”* Did you catch it? Jesus says that they religious leaders **nullify or cancel out the word of God**. It goes from leaving to rejecting to nullifying.

Jesus uses one example to demonstrate how the religious leaders essentially bypass God’s law. He brings up the fifth commandment: “Honor your father and your mother that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.” This is Moses’s written law found in the book of Exodus. There should be no argument.

But **the religious leaders have this tradition known as Corban**, the things dedicated to God. Think of it as financial planning.

Let's say that you have a thousand dollars. You tell the scribes that you're going to set aside five hundred dollars for the temple. This five hundred is considered Corban. You live on the other five hundred. Now your parents are in financial need. They need five hundred dollars to help with medical payments. But you say: "Sorry, mom and dad. I've already promised five hundred to the temple. You're on your own."

Jesus condemns the practice of Corban because it prevents a person from following the command to honor your father and your mother. The Old Testament states that a failure to honor your parents meant death. The religious leaders used Corban to bypass God's law.

Let me give you some examples of how we might bypass God's law today. Imagine we create a rule. **The measure of spiritual maturity is equated to knowing the Bible well.** You go to Sunday School and Bible study and you learn lots about the Bible. You can tell me all sorts of things about the Bible like the date of the Exodus or even when the book of Obadiah was written. But God calls us not only to know the word, but be doers of the word. It's not enough to know the Bible, but we have to apply its truths.

Let me give you another example, let's say we want to strive for sexual purity. We create a rule.

The measure of sexual purity is avoiding pornography. Easy enough. You set up filters. You may even throw out your computer. You may even get rid of your smart phone. You abstain from social media. You may say to yourself: “I’m sexually pure”. But when you go to the gym and you see that cute boy or attractive gal, your mind starts to wander to where it shouldn’t go. You have according to Jesus committed adultery in your heart. Sexual purity is not just avoiding pornography but sexual wholeness in mind and heart.

What are we supposed to do then? If following rules is unable to lead to true cleanliness, then what should our response be? **Follow the one who makes you clean.** Take after the one who has redeemed you. Imitate his example. His name is Jesus, Immanuel, the Son of God. Walk in his ways. **Follow the one who makes you clean.**

Why does following Jesus make us clean? I’ll give you two reasons. First, **follow him because he changes your hearts.** Most of you know the verse in 2 Corinthians, chapter 5, verse 17 that says: *“Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away. Behold, the new has come.”* True cleanliness begins by placing your trust in Jesus as your Lord and savior. Why do you trust in Jesus as Lord and Savior? He followed every rule that God required of man.

When he died on the cross, Jesus not only paid the penalty for our sin. But he gave us his credentials. When God sees us, he sees his Son who perfectly obeyed his commands. This should create within us a heart of gratitude. We also develop a great sense of humility because we recognize that apart from his saving work, no rule following would ever enable us to have relationship with God.

Do you catch a whiff of that uncleanness within you? Do you sense that shame and guilt of trying to please others? Know that God is well pleased with you. How do you know? Jesus took that uncleanness and gave true cleanliness. If you place your faith in him, God will always be pleased with you.

What is the second reason? **Follow him because he empowers you to obey his word.** When you place your faith in Christ, you realize that you are totally unable to obey God's word on your own. That's why he sends you help in the form the Spirit. John, chapter 14, verse 16 says this: *"And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever."* Later in John 16, verse 13, Jesus says: *"When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come."*

When it comes to obeying God's word, we can't do it on our own. We need the Spirit's empowerment and help.

Think of the Spirit like a parent guiding a child to write the letter of the alphabet for the first time. Think of the Spirit like the hands that hold the handle bars as a child learns to ride her bike. The Spirit's guidance will enable you to obey God's commands in ways that you never would have before.

What might this look like? Imagine that your small group is growing. Your small group leader observes that you've been consistent in attending the small group. You take the initiative to connect with members of the small group to care for them. You spend time reading God's word and praying. It's no surprise that your small group leader asks if you would consider leading when your small group multiplies.

You begin hearing this voice. You're not good enough to lead this small group. If only your small group leader knew what about your anger issue, then he wouldn't ask you to consider this position. Besides, do you really want to spend time leading this group? It means having to care for everyone. You don't mind caring for some of these members. But everyone seems much. It's also going to take a lot of time. Do you really want to invest a lot of your time into this group?

But you sense the Holy Spirit saying to you: Trust me. Before your small group leader asked you to consider leading, you read a passage in Proverbs during your personal time with the Lord. The Proverb said: *Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways, acknowledge him and he will make your paths straight.* After praying about it and discussing it with other believers, you decide to set aside your reservations and take a step of faith to lead.

The Holy Spirit will show you how to address your uncleanness. Maybe it's replacing the voice with the word of truth. Maybe it's confessing a sin and repenting. Maybe it's reaching out to a friend to reconcile with them. He will show you how to respond when that inner voice says: "Unclean!"

Let me summarize this morning's message. First, we talked about what is the wrong way to addressing our uncleanness? **Believing that following the rules make you clean.** Second, we asked: What is the reality about following rules to become pure? **Following the rules fails to make you clean.** Lastly, how do we respond to our uncleanness? **Follow the one who makes you clean.**

It reminds me of the lyrics of a contemporary hymn: “To this I hold, my sin has been defeated. Jesus, now and ever is my plea. Oh, the chains are released, I can sing, "I am free". Yet not I, but through Christ in me.”