



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Mark 7: 1-23

Mark

"God's Word and Men's Traditions"

TRANSCRIPT

Well, our text this morning is Mark chapter 7, and we'll look at verses 1 through 23.

The Pharisees and some of the scribes gathered around Him when they had come from Jerusalem, and had seen that some of His disciples were eating their bread with impure hands, that is, unwashed. (For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they carefully wash their hands, thus observing the traditions of the elders; and when they come from the market place, they do not eat unless they cleanse themselves; and there are many other things which they have received in order to observe, such as the washing of cups and pitchers and copper pots.) The Pharisees and the scribes asked Him, "Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat their bread with impure hands?"

And He said to them, "Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written:

'This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far away from Me. But in vain do they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.'

"Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men."

He was also saying to them, "You are experts at setting aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition. "For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother; and, 'He who speaks evil of father or mother, let him be put to death'; but you say, 'If a man says to his father or his mother, whatever I have that would help you is Corban (that is to say, given to God),' you no longer permit him to

do anything for his father or his mother; thus invalidating the word of God by your tradition which you have handed down; and you do many things such as that."

And summoning the multitude again, He began saying to them, "Listen to Me, all of you, and understand: there is nothing outside the man which can defile him if it goes into him; but the things which proceed out of the man are what defile the man.

When leaving the multitude, He entered the house, His disciples questioned Him about the parable. And He said to them, "Are you so lacking in understanding also? Do you not understand that whatever goes into the man from outside cannot defile him, because it does not go into his heart, but into his stomach, and is eliminated?" (Thus He declared all foods clean.) And He was saying, "That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man. "For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. "All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man."

May the Lord bless this reading of His word and bless our time of study together. Let's bow now in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Gracious heavenly Father, we do thank You for the time that we have to come together and study, and we do count it a great privilege. We can gather as a people who have been purchased by the blood of Christ from the foundation of the world, and we can learn of You through the study of Your word. Bless us in that way, and remind us as we do study of the importance of Scripture, the value of it in our life, and the importance of not departing from it, but remain true to it, living in obedience to it. We thank You for the gift of the Word of God and the opportunity to study, and for the privilege we have as Your people to intercede from one another. And we remember those whose names are listed on the list of prayer requests. We pray Your blessing upon them. We pray for Jim Dean and ask that You would bless the treatment that he is to receive tomorrow and give it good effect. We pray for others. We pray for Bob Messic and pray that You might give healing to him. So many others whose names are listed, Lord, You know their needs and we pray You'd bless them. Not only those whose names are on our list, but those with unspoken needs. We pray that You'd give healing, that You'd give mercy. We pray that You'd give encouragement to those who are suffering, not necessarily with physical difficulties,

but who are watching family members go through such trials, or those who are in financial need. Bless them. Provide for them. We pray that You'd give them employment. We pray, Father, for ourselves in a spiritual way. We pray that You'd bless this assembly with devotion to You, devotion of the heart, that we might be a people that serve You with a desire to be pleasing to You and not men. May this assembly be one that has a good witness throughout the community. So to that end, we ask Your blessings upon the elders and the deacons. Give them wisdom and diligence in their task. Bless those who teach the Sunday schools and the other classes that meet during the week. Encourage them and bless them and give them diligence, and may they see the fruit of their labor. Open hearts to receive the truth that is given. May we see men and women and children come to faith through that ministry. Grow and grace the knowledge of our Lord and Savior.

We bless our nation, Father. We ask that You give wisdom to our leaders, that they might serve You, and that good might come from their leadership. We pray that You might open the hearts of many and prepare our hearts for that, and bless us as we consider the Scriptures together. May all that we do be done to Your honor and glory. May the name of Your Son be magnified. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

[Message] Our subject this morning is the Word of God and the traditions of men. Traditions, it seems, are a part of every culture. Each nation has its customs, beliefs, and practices that grow and accumulate over time, and eventually take on an authority of their own.

For example, it's an American tradition to celebrate Thanksgiving every fourth Thursday of November, and we do that with turkey and a football game. Fourth of July is celebrated with hot dogs and fireworks. And we'd never think of switching the two. Can you imagine serving hot dogs for Thanksgiving dinner? We could stuff them with dressing and put some cranberries on the side, but it just wouldn't be the same. It wouldn't taste very good, either, but it wouldn't fit the tradition. And so we don't do it.

Something like going without singing the "Star Spangled Banner" before a World Series game. We always do that. But it's not that the anthem itself adds anything to the game, makes the players play any more effectively. It's just that that is

a tradition. That's the way it's done. It's always been done that way, and it wouldn't feel right to change it.

Once a practice becomes a tradition, it's almost sacred, inviolable, unbreakable. Over time, its original purpose may be forgotten. The tradition, however, takes on a life of its own, an authority of its own, and so it goes beyond the pale of criticism, beyond the realm of scrutiny. And while that may be innocuous, innocent enough with national traditions, it's deadly with religious ones. Because often, they are not taken from the Scripture; but rather, they are additions to the Scripture.

Where did the idea of robes and clerical collars originate? Or the theology of the mass? Or incense and lighting candles for the dead? What about passing the offering plate on Sunday morning, or having altar calls? There seems to be a tendency in man to want to add to God's word, to improve upon it. And that's where the danger lies.

I think we see this from the very beginning of human history. We see it in Genesis chapter 3 when Eve was tempted by the serpent. God had laid down one prohibition. "From the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it, you shall surely die." But when Eve was asked about that command, she stated, "God said, 'You shall not eat from it or touch it, lest you die.'" Now, God didn't say, "Don't touch it." Eve added that to the commandment. And had things gone on for a period of time, you can be sure that that would've become a tradition, just as important as the command not to eat of it.

And you might argue that that's a good tradition. After all, if you don't touch it, you won't eat it. But, it was no improvement on God's word. We can never improve on God's word. And in fact, following this addition, she weakens the penalty. From "you shall surely die," which is a very forceful statement. Dying, you shall die, is the way the text literally reads. But what that means is: you shall surely die. She weakens that to "lest you die." Eve evidently did not know the Word of God very well. She puts it in her own words. She added to it, and then she weakened its penalty. And the result was she became more susceptible to sin. And as we know, she fell into sin. Her addition did nothing to protect the commandment, ensure obedience.

And in principle, we see that in the traditions that men develop in spiritual matters. They are additions to the Word of God. Over time, they take on a life and authority all their own, eventually with authority that's equal to Scripture. And ultimately, they become a rival to the authority of Scripture, diminishing the authority of Scripture, and as a result, destroying the spiritual life of those who give attention to them.

That's exactly what happened in Israel. The Jews of our Lord's day had the complete canon of the Old Testament. They had Genesis through Malachi. They'd had it for centuries, as a matter of fact. And yet, by our Lord's day, they were governed not by Scripture, but by tradition. These traditions are, in our text, called the "traditions of the elders." They were a great body of teaching by earlier rabbis, which had been added to the law of Moses, giving detailed rules of conduct. Where the law was silent on a particular issue, a rule was formulated and established that attempted to be consistent with the Bible.

And, the rules increased as Israel's social condition changed. As Jews became increasingly in contact with Gentiles, rules were formulated as the Jews became increasingly in contact with the Greeks and the Romans during the times of those occupations. And as Jews, who had been scattered throughout the known world came in contact with them, rabbis formulated rules that would apply to situations that the Scriptures did not specifically address. They'd formulate these rules to deal with those situations.

Now, these were then passed on by word of mouth from one generation to the next. And finally, in the 2nd century AD, they were written down in a book called the Mishnah. Later, a book was written called the Gemara, which interpreted the Mishnah. And these two books then later developed into the Talmud.

By our Lord's day, many of these traditions had accumulated, and they came to hold the same authority that the Scriptures held. Actually, they became a rival to the Bible. The Lord, however, did not hold them with great respect, nor observe them. And, as a result, He became the enemy of the rabbis. They could not tolerate His indifference toward their traditions, and so they were determined to destroy Him.

In chapter 7 of Mark's gospel, an important committee from Jerusalem came up to Galilee to investigate Him. And in the process of observing the Lord, they discovered something scandalous about His disciples. The disciples didn't wash their

hands before eating. Some of you moms may agree that that's pretty serious. How many of you have asked your kids: go wash your hands. After all, it's unsanitary to eat with soiled hands. But this has nothing to do with hygiene. This was purely a ceremonial issue. The purity that they were concerned about was ceremonial purity, a kind of spiritual purity. And, for the sake of his Roman and Gentile audience, Mark explains this in verses 3 and 4. Following the traditions of the elders, he writes, Jews carefully wash their hands whenever they would return from the marketplace. They would wash themselves before eating because they may have brushed against some Gentile or accidentally touched a Roman soldier, and that would make them ceremonially unclean. And so, before they'd ever break bread, before they'd ever eat, they'd wash themselves in order to be ceremonially cleaned.

And, they washed other things. This was a vast system that they had developed. They washed their cups and pitchers, as Mark writes, and copper pots, and many other things were involved in these traditions. There's an entire tractate or chapter in the Mishnah on this very subject entitled "*yadayim*," which means "hands," and it deals with washings in the most minute ways. It gives instruction on the amount of water that's to be used, the position of the hands when they are washed, the way in which the hands are to be rubbed together. All kinds of precise detail on how the hands are to be washed in order to be ceremonially cleaned.

But none of this is instruction that comes out of the Bible. It's true that as you read through the Book of Exodus, for example, there is instruction there on how the priests are to wash themselves before they enter into their service. Before they go into the tabernacle and perform their priestly duties, they were to wash their hands and wash their feet. And on special occasions, the people, the non-priestly Israelites, were also to wash.

But, there's nowhere in the Scripture that they are commanded to wash their hands before they eat. Nevertheless, by the first century, a whole ritual of washing had developed out of these priestly laws, and it was required of all the people. A story is told of a rabbi that had been imprisoned by the Romans. They would bring him his food, and they'd bring him his water. But instead of using the water for drinking, he would use it for hand washing, and almost died of thirst because he was determined to observe the traditions of cleanness.

That gives us some sense of the mindset of the people in our Lord's day about these ceremonies and these traditions that had grown up. And so, when the committee from Jerusalem saw that the disciples didn't wash their hands, they were upset. They began to question the Lord on this while He was teaching, a large crowd of people.

Now, the Pharisees weren't at all interested in the fact that, shortly before this, the Lord had fed a multitude of people with a few loaves of bread. But they were very concerned that His disciples ate the bread with unwashed hands. That gives us some perspective on the way they thought, and really, what legalism does. It directs a person's attention from the Word of God to unimportant matters. It produces a colossal diversion from the truth. It did that with the scribes; it did that with the Pharisees.

And the Lord makes a point of that later on in the gospel of Matthew in Matthew 23, where He says of them, that they strained out a gnat and choked on a camel. Meaning, they were so consumed with insignificant minutiae and not even details of Scripture, but that of their traditions, that they missed the obvious and the important.

And so, to their question: why His disciples eat their bread with unwashed hands? The Lord responds less with an answer, and more with an attack. He calls them hypocrites. They're very bold with these men. Speaks directly to them, calls them exactly what they are. He unmasks them before the crowd, calls them hypocrites in verse 6, and then He says that Isaiah was writing of them when he wrote, "This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far away from Me. But in vain do they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men."

For all of their attention to details and to washings, for all of their external show of piety, the scribes and the Pharisees embodied the spirit of the men whom Isaiah criticized. They are no different than the men that are clearly the enemies of the Lord back in Isaiah's day. Now, I'm sure these men would've thought themselves just the opposite. It didn't make idols. They weren't doing the things that Isaiah's generation was doing in their mind, and that they'd made an idol of the traditions. They were just as far away, perhaps even farther away from the Lord than those men were.

Isaiah was writing of his generation. But in writing of his generation, he was writing of our Lord's generation, because the spirit in both was the same. They were, as he says, hypocrites. And it's a very strong word. We know it as a strong word, but it's also a very interesting word, because in classical Greek, it was used of actors, men of the stage who played a part.

And here, the Lord was saying that the scribes and the Pharisees were putting on a show. They were playing at being pious, but there was no reality to it. And, that's not just Judaism. That's human religion. That's works religion.

William Barclay tells the story of a Muslim who was chasing a man with a knife raised up in an attempt to murder him when he heard a call to prayer. And, since every devout Muslim must pray a number of times every day facing toward Mecca, this man, being a devout Muslim, when he heard the call to prayer, fell to his knees and he hurriedly prayed through his prayer, jumped up, and continued his murderous chase.

Well, the men of our Lord's day were no different from that. They had an outward show. They were outwardly religious, but inwardly, they were murderers. They were seeking to kill Jesus. Their outward service lacked service of the heart. That's what's characteristic of a legalistic, a works-oriented approach to one's relationship with God. They fail to get at the heart of God's commands. They may have approached giving some formal outward obedience, but there was nothing of the heart involved in it. They missed the whole spirit of it.

As He says, as our Lord says in verse 8, by observing the tradition of men, they neglected the commandment of God. And we can do the same thing. We know we should come to church. Perhaps we're even convicted by the admonition in the Book of Hebrews of not forsaking our own assembling together. But after a while, we fall into a kind of formalism, ritualism in which we bring our bodies to church, but we leave our hearts at home.

Now, let me ask you: how many times since this service has begun have you thought about the Eagles and the Cowboys? I won't tell you how many times I've thought about it. But we do that. We get in a routine in which our obedience becomes really nothing but an empty activity without being a service of the heart. And there's no value in that. And the danger is: we begin to think that because we're doing something, God is pleased with us, that our actions have merit with Him.

But, that's not true obedience. Obedience from the heart. That is what pleases God. That's what He looks for in us. He searches the hearts. Deeds are important. I don't mean to suggest that they're not. But a deed that is not done with love for the Lord, seeking to fulfill not only the letter of the law but the spirit of the law is not obedience. That's actually neglecting the Word of God as the Lord says in verse 8. That's what Israel did.

And He reaffirms that in verse 9, but with biting irony. "You nicely set aside the commandment of God." Or, we can more literally translate that: "You have a beautiful way of setting aside the commandments in order to keep your traditions." A tradition that he refers to here, grew up as a precaution to ensure obedience to the law. I would imagine that if we could go back and search the reasons, find out the reasons and search the motives for why these traditions grew up, we might find some very good reasons for them, and we might even think, well, there's a logic in that that makes sense, and perhaps even originally they realized: this is not the Word of God.

The problem is, it became to them as equal authority to the Word of God. And while it grew up most likely as an attempt to ensure obedience to the law, they themselves spoke of it as a fence that was built around the law. The tradition was a fence. Nevertheless, it didn't protect the law; it was not an effective fence. It didn't ensure obedience. In fact, just the opposite was true. As the Lord said, it set aside the commandment. It didn't fulfill it; it set it aside.

And to illustrate the point, in verses 10 through 13, the Lord gives a specific example where their tradition contradicted the law and actually became a means of circumventing the law or getting around the fifth commandment of the law of Moses. The fifth commandment was very clear. Honor you father and mother. Now, that involved more than simply being an obedient son or daughter. It meant giving help when help was needed. And it was such a serious commandment that it was to be obeyed on pain of death.

However, by means of the tradition of Corban, which we see in verse 11, a word that's found in Leviticus chapter 1 and verse 2 which means offering to the Lord or a gift to the Lord. The children got around their responsibilities to the parents. Now, that's not a tradition that's found in the Scriptures. That word is found in Leviticus, but the tradition was developed out of it, so that if, for example, parents were in need of financial help in their old age, and a son had the means of helping

them, but didn't want to provide that help, all he had to do was declare any money that might have gone to them, and relieve their difficulty, declare it Corban, declare it as a gift devoted to God, and then it could be no longer used or given to the parents.

Couldn't, because it was dedicated to the Lord. It went to Him.

And I didn't mean that the son had to give all the money to the temple. It didn't mean that he couldn't use the money for himself. He might give a small portion of it to the temple, and then use the rest of it for himself. All it meant was that he was legally exempt from giving it to his parents. He had a tradition that supported that conduct and was validated by the rabbis, the religious authorities.

Now, that was clearly a violation of the fifth commandment and a tradition couldn't violate Scripture and be true. So, these rabbis should've prohibited that practice. Instead, they enforced it, even if a son repented of this vow that may have been made impetuously, regretted it and wanted to relieve his parents of their distress. The Lord states it verse 12 that the Pharisees wouldn't permit it. He'd made a vow in regard to this tradition, and their traditions took precedence over the law of God. And as a result, the Lord says they invalidated the Word of God. They set aside the law of love. They set aside concern for human need for the sake of their traditions. By trying to protect God's instruction, they invalidated it, and the Lord adds they did many things such as that.

That's just one example of many ways in which their traditions enabled people to get around actual obedience to the Word of God. It was all formalism, ritualism, outward expressions of piety that can't produce spiritual purity, genuine religion. Washing the hands may remove physical impurities, but it doesn't touch the heart, which is the source of sin. And the Lord now explains that to the crowd, which evidently had backed away as He was speaking directly to the Pharisees. But He calls the crowd around Him, and declares: "Listen to Me, all of you, and understand." Now, that word "listen" was a characteristic expression of the Old Testament prophets, and it indicated to the crowd that our Lord was speaking to them as a prophet, speaking to them with that authority, speaking to them content which was prophetic in nature.

He was giving them revelation. And because of that, they were to listen. They were to pay careful attention and give great thought to that which He was about to

say. Read in verse 15: "there is nothing outside the man which can defile him if it goes into him; but the things which proceed out of the man are what defile the man."

One writer calls that statement, most of them really didn't comprehend what He was saying, and that's somewhat understandable. After all, the Book of Leviticus taught a distinction among foods between that which is clean and that which is unclean. And, every pious Jew was very conscientious about keeping their diet properly. Every one of them had an abhorrence of pork. Less than two centuries earlier, the Jews had fought the Maccabean War against the Syrians because Antiochus Epiphanes, who was determined to Hellenize Judea forced Greek culture on it by destroying Judaism, demanded that the Jews eat pork. And by doing that, he would destroy their religion. And many Jews died, rather than comply with that.

There's a passage in 4 Maccabees that tells a story of a widow and her seven sons who suffered over this issue. They refused to eat, so the first was severely tortured. His tongue was cut out, he was dismembered, and then he was burned alive. The next son was scalped and went through tortures before being killed, and so on it went. All the while, their mother looked on and encouraged her sons to die for their faith. They chose to die, rather than to eat what was unclean. And so, with the dietary laws, a major part of their daily life and with heroic stories like that a part of their culture, you can imagine that the idea that pork could not make a person spiritually impure was hard for them to swallow. No pun intended.

But even after Pentecost, you see the same problem. You remember that scene in Acts chapter 10 where Peter is on the rooftop in Joppa and he's hungry? And so, they begin to fix him his lunch. And while he's sitting there, he goes into a trance and he sees a sheet come down out of heaven, and it opens up, and is full of four-footed creatures, creatures that crawl on the earth. Unclean animals. And then he hears this command from God: kill and eat. Peter's repulsed by the idea. He says no, he's never eaten anything unclean. And God gives him the command again. And what He was saying was: food is not unclean. It doesn't affect the spiritual life.

Later in Antioch, he had the same problem. He went up there and was associating with the Gentiles until the men from Jerusalem came up. And then he withdrew, and he wouldn't eat with them. He wouldn't eat with the Gentiles, and he wouldn't eat their food because this division, this separation within their diet was so engrained in their thinking. It was very difficult for them to move away from it.

But our Lord's point is very plain. What makes a person clean and unclean is not food or unwashed hands. It's not material things. It's the heart and what proceeds out of it. True, it was sin to eat pork or other proscribed foods at that time, and would be until the cross and the day of Pentecost. But, it wasn't a sin because those foods were inherently evil. The whole point of the dietary laws was instructive. It was illustrative. It was to communicate a very important fundamental truth to the people of Israel. It was to teach Israel to be holy, to be separate, to be a distinct, a peculiar people. The basic meaning of the word "holy" is to be separate. And from that, it came to have a moral significance, and that's a secondary meaning, but it came to have that moral significance of being separated from the world, separated from evil, and separated to God.

And so, in all aspects of Israel's life, this point was made. From the Sabbath, in which one day was separated from the other six, and dedicated to god; to the clothing that the Israelites wore, which couldn't be mixed with other materials. It was unmixed. It was pure. It was holy.

Many people today, in my opinion, err on the point when they try to find a rationale for the dietary laws in health and hygiene and argue trichinosis. That's really not the point of those laws. That may be a true effect, and it may have been good that they didn't eat those animals for that reason, but that wasn't the purpose of those laws. It wasn't the reason for those laws. After all, they could take a pig and keep it in a sterile environment, make sure that it had no impurities at all, that it was perfectly healthy, and would still be impure, unclean according to the law.

On the other hand, chickens and eggs, they were clean food, and let they can carry diseases, too. They can carry salmonella. The point isn't hygiene; the point was ceremonial purity. And the point of the purity, of the ceremonial purity was that Israel was to be separate. Israel was to be holy in heart and conduct. And every aspect of Israel's life was designed to remind them of that. From the food that they ate, to the clothing that they wore, to their weekly schedule. There was a division. There was to be separation. They were continually reminded of separation, separation. Be holy. Be pure. It taught them about God's holy character. It continually reminded them of the standard of perfection to which they were held. And it reminded them of how far short they fell from it.

But the traditions confused the issue. And when they surpassed the Scriptures in authority, men failed to see the law as reflecting God's purity and man's impurity, and made it, made the law and the traditions, a means of obtaining purity.

The law was never intended as a way to life. It cannot remove sin. As Paul says in Galatians 3:21, it cannot impart life. As he says in Romans 3:20, by the works of the law, no flesh will be justified in His sight. The law does not cleanse. The law does not give life. The law does not save. And so, the Lord's instruction here was intended to correct the error that ritual and formalism had merit with God, that it makes a person pure and acceptable to God. The notion that grew out of the traditions, the notion that's not found in the Scriptures. So, he puts the two in contrast to one another. The traditions of men against the commands of God.

The disciples, however, were slow to grasp this, and so when the Lord retired to a house and was alone with them, they asked Him the meaning of His teaching. That surprised the Lord, and He responded in verses 18 and 19 with that sense of surprise. And He said to them, "Are you too so uncomprehending? Do You not see that whatever goes into the man from outside cannot defile him, because it goes not into his heart but into his stomach, and is eliminated? (Thus He declared all foods clean.)"

Food doesn't go into the heart. And it's in the heart that the true issues of life are located. The heart is the source of our thoughts. It's the source of our emotions, our will. It determines our actions. And food doesn't nourish or poison that. Now, I suppose it's true that if you eat too much pizza, you wake up in the middle of the night with indigestion, and that can give an attitude, a bad disposition. But that's, of course, not the point here.

Evil is in the heart, not in the food that we eat, not in the dust that might accumulate on our hands or under our fingernails. Jeremiah said it very plainly: the heart is more deceitful than all else and desperately sick. Who can understand it? And the dietary laws were designed to show that. They were designed to expose the impurity of man's heart by reminding him of the need to be pure, to be holy in everything that's done. All aspects of life are to be governed by holiness and purity. The issue is the heart; it's not food.

And so Mark adds, following our Lord's statement, "Thus He declared all foods clean," which brings up the long-term implications of our Lord's teaching. It

was a statement that was probably intended for Mark's Gentile readers, informing them that they were free from those Old Testament laws. Certainly free from the traditions. But, which they no doubt were hearing from their Jewish brethren in the churches. And this was a problem that continued on for some time, but the writer here, Mark, is informing them that all food is clean. Those laws have come to an end. They've served their purpose.

Now, in verses 20 through 23, the Lord develops what He's been saying about the heart as the source of real defilement in man, and gives a catalog of sinful acts and dispositions that flow from the heart. We read in verse 20: And He was saying, "That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. "

That's essentially repetition of His statement in verse 15. But in developing it, He gives a significant order to the words. The first lists evil thoughts, because the thoughts give rise to actions, and they stimulate the various drives that we have. This is what the Old Testament says about the heart. In Proverbs 23, verse 7, we read, "For as he thinks within himself, so he is." Men do evil because their hearts are evil.

Shakespeare got it right when he wrote, "The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, but in ourselves." That's true. But men have always tried to find the fault in the stars, in others, in other situations, something outside of themselves. In the beginning, Adam blamed Eve. Today, geneticists are blaming our genes. Throughout most of the century, sociologists have told us that bad surroundings make bad people.

William Murchison recently wrote an article on this very point in which he says it doesn't work, referring to the claim of sociologists. It doesn't work, not when Los Angeles looters roar away from the crime scene in late model cars. It doesn't work when the Cabrini-Green Housing Project in Chicago, an effort by government to provide clean high-rise abodes for the poor, becomes dangerous, not just to residents, but to pedestrians. A seven year-old boy was recently killed by sniper fire. Drug dealers with their Rolexes and furs aren't poor. Why do they do it? He goes on to suggest that rather than try to find the fault in biology or the environment, it might be wise to look at the soul, and look at sin, for men to look into themselves. That's what

our Lord was saying here. But men don't want to see themselves as guilty and helpless, and so they blame society, or they blame economics, rather than themselves.

Donald Grey Barnhouse tells of preaching on this point, in regard to the devil, and stressing that sin comes not from the world, not from the devil, but it comes from the heart. And, there was a woman in the congregation who afterward commented to her friend, "That was a very disturbing sermon because the devil has always been such a comfort to me."

Now, it's true that the devil does tempt us, and the world has a strong influence upon us. But, men choose to sin. Men choose to go their own way. Adam chose to sin, and he did so in a perfect environment. He didn't pick the fruit because he was hungry. He had a vast garden from which to eat. He didn't pick the fruit because his companions were evil. He was tempted by Eve in a sense, but he wasn't really tempted. He wasn't deceived in that temptation, at least. He did it because he wanted to.

Augustine has an interesting comment that he makes in his "Confessions," speaking about his youth and his sin. One of the most egregious sins he committed in his mind was when, as a child, he went over to the neighbor's yard and picked pears. Stole pears from the neighbor. Not because he was hungry. Didn't do it out of need; he did it because he wanted to, because he wanted to do something wrong. He chose to sin.

Adam chose to sin. His rebellion originated in himself, and that's true of all of us. And so ultimately, we can't blame political systems for the condition of things, and there are some very bad political systems. We can't blame the devil. What the traditions of the elders did, however, was locate the problem outside of men, outside of their heart, and located in things like food and unwashed hands, not in self. And in doing that, they found the solution to their problem in rituals and in their own ability to perform those rituals.

Just as churchmen do today when they add saving value to the significance of baptism, or to the celebration of the mass, and what is the effect of all of that? The same as it was in our Lord's day. The solution to sin is in ceremonies, in abstaining from certain things, in obeying a set of rules that they have formulated in washing our hands or in burning candles, or any long list of ceremonies and rituals that one can go through.

No, the solution to sin is not in ceremonies; it's in the Savior. Men are physically alive, but they are spiritually dead, spiritually incapable of saving themselves and giving themselves life.

The Lord made that very clear earlier when He raised Jairus' daughter from the dead. It's very clear from that that life comes from Him. The dead don't generate life; life must be given from God. He made that clear when He healed that woman of the issue of blood. She was ceremonially unclean and she could do nothing to clean herself. She could do nothing to heal herself. But the Lord could do everything, and He cleaned her. He made her clean, and it's a reminder to us that only He can do that.

The Pharisees couldn't see that. They were blinded by their traditions, which turned them from the Word of God so that they didn't turn to Christ. Men must first come to understand that they're fallen creatures, that they are sinful creatures, and that the source of that sin, the source of that evil is within themselves. It's in their heart and recognizing that, turned to the Savior, 'cause only He can give true purity, real cleansing. Only His blood can wash away sin.

The Bible is God's means of bringing that truth to us, not traditions. The Bible penetrates into the heart of man with the warmth of God's grace. It's not some cold, textbook on religion, but it's God's word. And, as God's word, it's alive and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, as the author of Hebrews says, piercing as far as the division of the soul and the spirit of both joints and marrow, able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

It's only in light of the Scriptures that we can really know truth. Only through the Scriptures that we can really know ourselves and our needs, and find the solutions to those needs. It reaches every heart, and answers every need, and it's great central message is that of salvation for centers through Christ, through faith in Him, not in ceremonies, not by works, but through faith and faith alone.

Do you know Him as your savior? Have you come to see yourself as a sinner? If so, then turn to Christ and believe in Him who is the eternal Son of God become man, the sacrifice for sin, the giver of life to all believe in Him.

But what of us who have believed, and yet who find an echo of our fault in the formalism of the Pharisees? What can we do to get out of the rut, to get out of the routine of outward service that lacks any service of the heart? Well, I think, to be very simple, we must look to the Scriptures and study the Word of God. The

Scriptures are alive. They have life-changing influence, life-changing effect upon the reader of Scripture, because the Spirit of God attends the Word of God. And when it is read, and when it is studied, and when it is preached, the Spirit of God attends that and brings good effect. That can't be said of other works of literature. The Bible is unique in that way. It is living; it is active. And as Paul says in 2 Corinthians 3 in verse 18, "As we study the Scriptures, as we see Christ and we learn of Him, and we learn of His ways, we are being transformed." As we're reading them, as we're studying them, we are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory.

It's a progressive development, and it comes through the study of Scripture. And as we study them, we are changed into the image of Jesus Christ. And our hearts are made different; we're sanctified through that process of study. And secondly, we must pray. Perhaps we should begin with prayer, recognizing our coldness of heart, a good prayer to pray is that one that David prayed in Psalm 51, "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a steadfast spirit within me."

Study and prayer. I don't know that, maybe that doesn't sound a bit simplistic? But God has not made it complicated. He's made it very simple. But we must see the problem, and we must act upon it. And so, I suppose it's proper to pray, that God would enable us to do that. God would give us a desire to know Him, that He would open our eyes to the hardness of heart that we sometimes have. Our coldness, our coolness to spiritual things, and He might give us all the grace to be students of His word, to make men and women of prayer.

Christian faith is not one of ceremonies and works. We do have some ceremonies. The Lord's supper is a ceremony. Baptism is that. We have our works. We are to be obedient. We are to be a godly people. But fundamentally, it is not an outward kind of observance. That comes as a result of an inward life, of a relationship, and that's really what Christianity is. It is knowing God. It is having a family relationship with Him. And we grow in that through study and prayer. May God give us all the grace to do that. Shall we stand now for the benediction?

[Prayer] Gracious heavenly Father, we thank You for the grace that You have extended to us in Your Son, the life that's ours in Him. And yet, we confess that so often, we fall into that same pattern of these Pharisees, these scribes, these men of works, but not of life. We confess that we serve You with our hand but not with our

heart so often. Help us to do both. Give us hearts that desire to serve You, and help us to do that faithfully. We pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.