

## Handout 5: Gospel of Mark Notes (Talk 16)

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### Summary: Mark 7: 1-23

Mark records Jesus engaged in a dispute with the Pharisees about purity/cleanness that will end in a shocking private declaration to his disciples.

### Outline:

#### 1. Review from last week:

- a. Overview of Ch. 5-8
  - i. Mark's focus on theme: Who is this Man?
  - ii. Parables of the Kingdom AND Parables of Deed

#### 2. Mark 7:1-23 Overview

- a. Extended dispute followed by a parabolic saying followed by private interpretation for disciples
- b. Context of this dispute within Mark's narrative
  - i. This event comes right in the midst of Mark's thematic thread of events that are helping to push the question of Jesus' identity.
  - ii. Ch. 2/3 included disputes based upon Jesus taking actions/prerogatives that were reserved in Judaism for God, Himself.
    1. Forgiving sins
    2. Calling sinners as the Physician
    3. The Bridegroom of Israel
    4. Lord of the Sabbath
    5. Healing a man on the Sabbath
  - iii. Disputes initiated by the Pharisees or Scribes:
    1. Fasting (ch. 2)
    2. Picking grain and eating on the Sabbath (ch. 2)
    3. Jesus possessed (ch. 3)
  - iv. Scribes and Pharisees already have it out for Jesus:

1. Jesus is a blasphemer (2:7)
2. Jesus is a Sabbath breaker (2:23-24; 3:1-5)
3. Pharisees want to “destroy Him” (3:6)
4. Scribes from Jerusalem level charge of demonic forces at work in him (a capital offense in Israel)
- v. Immediately surrounding context:
  1. (Just prior): Jesus being touched by the sick
  2. (Just after) Jesus being touched by a Gentile woman
  3. Keep these two things in mind...

### 3. The Dispute: Why do your disciples eat with impure hands? (7:1-5)

- a. Context for dispute?
  - i. Are the Pharisees Brazen Legalists OR Obedient Covenant Keepers?
  - ii. Purity codes: something inherent to many ancient societies
    1. *“Purity codes concerned the proper ordering of society, about who and what belong where and when, and in what condition. They enabled people in the society to know when order was being maintained or when something was out of place and required attention. This was especially important in regard to a society’s relations with the gods/God” —(Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels, entry on “Clean and Unclean”)*
    2. Ancient Israel, and even more so Second Temple Judaism, was committed to it’s own version of purity codes within the Ancient Near East.
  - iii. Purity and Holiness in Ancient Israel: “For you are a holy people to Yahweh, and Yahweh has chosen you to be a people for his own possession”—Deut. 14:2
    1. Raison d’etre of the Mosaic Covenant: A Holy God Living Among a Holy People
      - a. Law of Moses: Instructions for how to live as a holy nation in the presence of a holy God.
      - b. Mapping Purity/Holiness in Israel: A hierarchy beginning with the Presence of God in the Tabernacle/Temple in the center, moving outward

- c. God commanded Aaron distinguish between the holy and the common, between the clean and unclean AND to teach the people likewise (Lev. 10:11-11)
- 2. Boundary Markers that communicate: “we/Israel are a chosen people set apart by a Holy God to reflect his holiness”
  - a. Under this definition of “holiness” (set apart-ness), Israel had a line of demarcation/boundary around it, circumscribing it from association with practitioners of uncleanness and abomination.
    - i. i.e. Gentile nations (by definition were unclean/profane)
    - ii. Individuals from those nations were welcome in Israel as long as they embraced the required purity codes.
  - b. Observable Boundary Markers of holiness: “You shall be a peculiar/special people” set apart from other nations:
    - i. In your bodies: Circumcision
    - ii. In rhythm of your lives: the calendar you observe: Sabbath, New Moons, Festivals, et al.
    - iii. In the food you eat: Keeping kosher
  - c. On the level of required expiation/cleaning after an offense, Torah made no distinctions between the moral/ethical failings and the purposeful/accidental failing of purity
    - i. Both required a guilt offering:
      - 1. Lev. 5:2-7—guilt offering for contacting uncleanness
      - 2. Lev. 6:2-7—guilt offering for moral failing
- iv. Purity and Holiness during the Second Temple Period (515 BC up through AD 70 )

1. Retrospective: The Exile and it's meaning—a failure of maintaining holiness and covenant keeping
2. The Return from Exile: re-establishing Israel's identity as the holy people of God...
  - a. In the face of the past:
    - i. High need to rebuild the Temple—the symbol of Israel's holy status: God still dwells among us.
    - ii. Covenant Keeping and Purity a MUST: See the concluding sections of Nehemiah and Ezra: Clean and Unclean a clear focus
      1. Ensuring foreign wives were not being married
      2. Keeping Sabbath
      3. Attempts to exclude all foreigners from Israel
  - b. In the face of Hellenism
    - i. Jews enticed to integrate with alien culture
    - ii. Book of Jubilees (likely written 160 BC) stresses importance of Israel maintaining their identity through separation from Gentiles: “Separate yourselves from the nations, and eat not with them, and do not do according to their works, and become not their associates. For all their works and ways are unclean” (Jub. 22:16)
  - c. In the face of Empires
    - i. Antiochus Epiphanes and the desecration of the Temple, etc...
3. The Traditions of the Elders—Oral Law and tradition
  - a. According to Josephus:
    - i. In a passage about the time period between 78-69 BC, Josephus explains that the Pharisees introduced regulations, “in accordance to the traditions of their

fathers”, NOT recorded in the Law of Moses.

- b. Mishna—Oral Law passed on from Rabbis
  - 1. Tractate: Abot
    - a. “Be deliberate in judgment, raise up many disciples, and make a fence around the Law.”
    - ii. Oral Tradition held to be “as binding as the law itself”
  - c. Purity laws and oral tradition intended to help maintain Israel’s identity and unity in the face of heightened threats from without became an occasion for degrees of segregation and sectarianism—not everyone agreed on what and how much was required.
    - i. Pharisees were among the groups that intensified the call for purity
      - 1. Concerned with “secondary pollution”

v. Summary:

- 1. Especially in light of the Exile and its failures, Israel’s continued existence and identity as the holy people with a holy God living among them depended upon maintaining their status as a holy people in the face of so much abomination and uncleanness encroaching from the nations/Empires that invaded and ruled over them.
- 2. The self-appointed guardians of Israel’s holiness had every reason (religious, psychological, political, etc..) to want to safeguard keeping covenant and maintaining holiness.
- 3. In the process, intensification of standards of purity were adopted by certain groups, not only in light of past failures as a nation, but especially in the face of “outward” contamination brought in through

occupation, laxity/cultural adaptation on the part of less strictly religious, Samaritans, etc...

4. Israel's boundary markers of eating Kosher, keeping Sabbath, being circumcised were as important as ever but ALSO the "fence around Torah" helping to protect impurity from foreigners, from Hellenistic culture in Judea, etc...
5. Somewhere along the line, the intensity and focus that groups like the Pharisees brought to bear on issues of purity and holiness—important issues originally laid down by God and for which provisions were required in the covenant—began to take on a life of their own apart from the original command of God.
6. Given these things, it's no wonder that a man preaching the Kingdom of God WHILE playing fast and loose with certain boundaries of purity made the Pharisees nervous/angry:
  - a. Healing the Lepers (Mk. 1:40)
  - b. Eating with sinners (Mk. 2:15)
  - c. Healing demon possessed man in swine country (Mk. 5:1-20)
  - d. Healing/being touched by unclean woman (Mk. 5:25-34)
  - e. Touching a dead girl (Mk. 5:35-43)
- vi. Eating without washing hands was not, in of itself, a dereliction of a direct command of God/the Covenant of Moses.
  1. Hand washing practice may have been taken from Levitical commands concerning priests ceremonially washing hands prior to offering sacrifices, a practice extended to the home by Pharisees and the Essenes.
  2. Hand washing practice was in place in order to ensure that no "uncleanness" entered the body (as was also the case with the cleaning of the vessels mentioned in v. 4)

#### **4. The Dispute: Jesus reframes the issue (7:6-13)**

- a. Focusing so tightly on the “traditions of the elders” (intensification of Torah) puts Pharisees into conflict with the actual commands of God.
  - i. Jesus quotes Isaiah: “Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites” (Is. 29:13)
    - 1. Interestingly, the citation is found in the context of the judgment that is coming upon the city of Jerusalem and the land due to this hypocrisy of “lip service and vain worship” of their God.
    - 2. This hypocrisy is working on two levels:
      - a. The Pharisees were blind to their own slide into rebellion against God while attempting, in their own minds, to do the will of God.
      - b. By rejecting the Man who embodied their God, they show themselves to truly be “far away in their hearts” to God Himself.
  - ii. Jesus’s example of hypocrisy: claiming to do the will of God you negate the will of God when...
    - 1. God calls you to love your father and mother but in the name of the tradition of the elders, you give away the support that your father and mother would have been helped by.

**5. The Dispute: Jesus addresses the issue of impurity with the crowd through a “parable” (7:14-16)**

- a. Context for statement:
  - i. Jesus is no longer (just?) addressing his accusers
    - 1. Does 7:14 represent a new locale/time?
    - 2. Are the Pharisees and Scribes even still around?
  - ii. The multitude gets a cryptic saying/“parable” (7:17)
    - 1. Jesus’ warning to the crowd: “Listen to Me and understand...”—just like he did with the parables in ch. 4
    - 2. Why cryptic?
      - a. Remember the culture of purity and holiness that exists in Israel at this time. Anything Jesus is going to say about clean/unclean may have the power to backfire on Him quickly.

3. Cryptic saying (part 1) “There is nothing outside the man, which going into him, can defile a man”
4. Cryptic saying (part 2)— “but the things which proceed out of the man are what defile the man”
  - a. What does this mean??? The disciples want to know and ask in private (see the pattern from 4:33-34?)
    - i. Accidental contact with impurity through what one’s hands touch, or contracted through what the food had touched hand washing seeks to cleanse does not defile.
    - ii. What defiles is something happening on the inside of a person.
5. What does this mean???

**6. Private Instruction: Jesus’ authority to do what?? (7:17-23)**

1. The disciples want to know and ask in private (see the pattern from 4:33-34?)
2. Turning purity culture of Israelites on it’s head:
  - a. It’s not what goes into a person that defiles, it’s what comes out.
    - i. Defilement does not come from the outside but is generated in the heart
  - b. “Thus he declared all foods clean”—wait, what?!
    - i. Is Jesus authorizing the cessation of actual commands of God with respect to kosher laws (Lev. 11)?
      1. Translation/interpretation issues
      2. Theological issues
      3. Irony issues
    - ii. Defilement is now exclusively with respect to moral issues, not cultic/ritualistic issues.
      1. How my desires end up defiling my relationship with myself and others

## **7. Implications:**

- a. It's no random accident that Jesus' very next act as retold by Mark is to cross the boundaries of clean/unclean into Gentile territory
- b. When purity is seen as an issue of defending oneself against outside "forces", what are the implications?
- c. When purity is seen as an issue stemming from a problem inside myself, what are the implications?
- d. Do choices about how we live matter?
  - i. Yes, but not in the way the Pharisees believed.