

RTS Women's Study: The Gospel of Mark

#14: Mark 7:1-23: How Not to Become a Pharisee

Intro: You Would Have Cheered for the Pharisees

I. The Marks of a Pharisee

A. Pharisees Create Man-Made Rules

- The OT had a Number of Laws Pertaining to "Ritual Purity"
 - These were legitimate God-given laws designed to symbolically remind us of our uncleanness and need for spiritual washing
 - A person could become ritually impure by: touching a corpse, going into the house of a Gentile, eating wrong food, having a skin disease, etc.
 - Such impurities were cleansed by "washing" in a special pool (called a *miqveh*)
 - **Key point: following OT purity laws doesn't make one actually clean on the inside; rather it is designed to deliver a bigger symbolic message about need for spiritual cleansing
- The problem with the Pharisees is that they *added to* and *expanded* these rules
 - Pharisees figured they would be extra careful by adding additional washing and regulations, just to be sure they were "clean"
 - In particular, Pharisees were known for caring about purity at meals:
 - Washed their hands before meals (v.3)
 - After a marketplace visit, they wash just to be sure (v.4)
 - They even washed utensils and furniture! (v.4)
- Some key observations:
 - As fallen humans we all have a tendency to create our own rules
 - Even if extra rules are created out of a good intent/motivation, they are still the "traditions of the elders" (v.3) and not the word of God
 - Sometimes people equate their *interpretation* with God's Word, when it may just be their own personal view

B. Pharisees Enforce Their Man-Made Rules on Others

- The Pharisees were *watching* the disciples to see if they followed their traditions (v.2)
 - One mark of a Pharisee is thinking more about other people's behavior than their own
 - Thus, they are always on the look out for people "breaking the rules"
- The Pharisees tried to enforce their traditions on others (v.5)
 - It's not enough for them to have extra rules themselves, they insist on enforcing them on others
 - Why do you think Pharisees are so insistent that *other* people follow their rules?
- Key Clarification: Enforcing God's actual rules does not make one a Pharisee!

C. Pharisees Like to Display How Holy They Are

- Pharisees always look more holy than other people because they have mastered the *external* part of religion
 - A key sign of a Pharisee is they like to *display* their holiness!
 - Beware of people who always seem to do things before others for show
- But, Jesus regards the Pharisees as some of the LEAST Holy people
 - First, they are frauds and fakes
 - They honor God “with their lips” but “their heart is far from me” (v.6, Is 29:13)
 - “in vain do they worship me” (v.7)
 - Jesus therefore calls them “hypocrites” (v.6)
 - Second, they are actual law breakers!
 - They claim to follow God’s law, but they actually break God’s law in order to uphold their man-made laws (v.9-12)
 - Example: they don’t provide for their parents because of man-made rituals where they devote their money to God (“Corban”)

II. The Cure of a Pharisee

A. Following External Rules Is Not True Holiness (v.14-19)

- Jesus uses Jewish food laws as an example, reminding his listeners that food laws are merely symbolic: “There is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him” (v.15)
- Jesus is anticipating the time of the New Covenant when food laws will be abrogated (v.19)
 - Why do we not follow kosher food laws now? Because food purity laws were merely pointing toward the real cleansing we need in Jesus. Now that Jesus has provided that cleansing, we no longer need the food laws.
 - In other words, the OT food laws were *provisional* and *forward-looking*

B. True Holiness Must Come from the Inside (v.20-21)

- Our real problem, says Jesus, is not what we put in our mouth, but what comes out of our mouth (v.20)
 - Our words reflect what’s really in our hearts
 - We can’t blame behavior on outside things, but inside things. The problem is us!
- The solution to being a Pharisee is focusing on the heart
 - You need a new heart only Jesus can give
 - We need to love and obey God from the heart, not just externally

C. Key Application: Externally religious people are hardest to reach with the Gospel

Discussion Groups

1. After studying today’s passage, do you think that you might have some man-made rules in your life that function like God’s rules? Share some examples with the group if you are willing.
2. Do you think most Christians spend a lot of time making sure they look the part, and come across as religious? In what ways? How can we live the Christian life without trying to manage our external image and be more authentic?
3. What would life look like this week if we really focused on our hearts and not just external conformity? Can you think of some concrete steps to take to help you do that?