

## **Tradition! (Part 2)**

**Mark 7:1-13**

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In 2008, in the summer, about 40 of us from Countryside were able to go over to Israel, and take a wonderful tour of that land, understand the topography, the geography, the archeology, as well as the biblical history of that land, and it was a great trip. It's now one of several trips I've been able to take there, and each time that I've gone to the land of Israel I've enjoyed the trips, but each time I've gone I have been further reminded of, and impressed by, the pervasive, destructive power and influence of religious legalism. Although most Israelis are secular, the influence of the Hassidim and the orthodox is everywhere. And so there's this pervasive legalism that touches almost every aspect of Jewish life.

A few examples if you've not been there may help you to sort of understand, one of them would be the phylacteries; you've heard about them, you've read about them in the New Testament, they take that command to bind the Word of God to your heart and to your forehead between your eyes, and they take it very literally, on these straps or boxes, and inside those boxes are scrolls, parchments, that contain the Scripture. But it goes on beyond that, particularly the Sabbath Laws is one of the places where I've noticed it most of all. For example, if you stay in a large hotel in Jerusalem as we did, then you'll see that on the Sabbath there is a rule, there is a law, against changing money. Well obviously business has to go on, people have to check in and out of the hotel on Shabbat, and so instead of working it out some other way, they simply put up screens, so that what goes on every day continues to go on, you just can't see it, and that makes it all right.

There are Shabbat elevators that stop every other floor, because to push an electrical button on the Sabbath would be to start a fire, according to the Rabbis, and so you don't want to do that, that would be work, and so if you're in a hotel that has many floors, you simply wait until the elevator comes to your floor, you get onto that elevator, you don't have to push any buttons because it'll automatically stop at every other floor, and then you just get off at the floor that is closest to the one you're trying to get to and walk from there, and you never have to touch any of the buttons.

Based on the command not to cook an animal in its mother's milk, it's forbidden in Israel to serve meat and dairy together in the same meal. So I hate to tell some of you, some of you would die because there are no cheeseburgers in Israel. On my first trip there I lead a group of about 400 Grace To You listeners, and one of those 400 guests almost created an international incident one night at the hotel there in Jerusalem, because we'd been served beef, and most Americans with dessert, you want coffee, and they did serve coffee; along with coffee on each table there was the normal sugar and the sweetener, and then there was these little packages of

creamer to put in your coffee, the little powdered creamer; that's acceptable, because it's a non-dairy product.

Well, not understanding how all of this worked, one of the men that was with us at one of the other tables, unbeknownst to us, went on a crusade to find him some milk or half and half for his coffee, he wasn't going to settle for the powdered stuff, and he went toward the kitchen and found at the serving station a little thing of milk, and he was bringing it back to his table when one of the waiters fortunately realized what was going on, stopped him and said, "You can't do that!" and so tragedy was averted; because if he had put that cream in his coffee, I'm not teasing about this, if he'd put that cream in his coffee, because we'd had beef at that meal, that entire huge hotel there in Jerusalem would have been rendered unclean or non-Kosher and every single dish and every single cup and every pot and every serving utensil, would have had to undergo a ritual cleansing before any practicing Jew could have eaten there.

It still permeates the life of the family. A typical Jewish family, still, on Shabbat, goes to the kitchen sink before their meals each week, and there they complete the ritual washing of the hands. They fill a large cup with water and then they pour the water onto both of their hands three times, and then they recite the appropriate blessing. You have to do that before you eat the Shabbat meals, the Sabbath meals.

Those are just a few examples of the sort of all-pervasive character of religious legalism. In some cases, the rules and regulations not only obscure the original intention of Scripture, but they actually undermine it. And that was the very issue which put the religious leaders of Jesus' time and our Lord on a collision course, and the collision comes in Mark 7. Now, as Mark unfolds his account, we see really two parts of this account unfold; the first is the external nature of legalism in verses 1-5 and then Jesus' personal diagnosis of really the heart and soul of legalism in verses 6-13. Last time we looked at the first five verses and the external nature of legalism. Let me just read for you those first five verses again. Mark 7:1:

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 point of the conflict here between Christ and this group of inquisitors was the ceremony that had become required before eating, not to render yourself hygienically clean, but to render yourself clean in the sight of God, ceremonially. Just a couple hundred years before Christ, this tradition had begun for every Jewish male. It is taught not in the Bible, but instead it was taught by the old, venerated rabbis. Verses 3 and 4 explain where this group of Pharisees and scribes

from Jerusalem was coming from; they'd been sent, probably, on a mission to catch Jesus. Early in Mark they're after Him, they want to kill Him, they want to trap Him, and so they come on a fresh mission to find something against Him. And the point of conflict comes with this issue of hand washing. Some of the disciples, not all of them, they witness not ceremonially cleansing themselves, probably not even before a meal, but before a sort of snack, in the busyness of this day, and they confront Jesus. What they did didn't stop with hand washing before eating though, as you saw there in verses 3 and 4, it had grown to include much more.

This was the system of the Pharisees; and in light of that, these men want to know why Jesus' disciples haven't taken that oral tradition seriously. Verse 5, "The Pharisees and the scribes asked Him [Jesus], 'Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat their bread with impure hands?'" That reveals to us the external nature of legalism; it's all about ceremony, it's all about the external cleansing, and so Jesus, now, is going to take us to the heart of what's really going on. Jesus' personal diagnosis of legalism comes in verses 6-13.

In Jesus' response to them, He doesn't answer their question directly. Have you ever noticed Jesus does that? He doesn't answer directly their question; instead, He goes to the real heart of the issue. Let's walk through His sort of spiritual diagnosis of religious legalism together; begins in verse 6:

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.'"

Now I wish, in many ways, you'd never heard this interchange; you'd never read this story, because I think sometimes we lose the impact. Remember, now, these men were the spiritual elite; they were the leaders of the nation religiously, which meant in many respects apart from Romans, they were the leaders. They show up as representatives from the Jerusalem crowd, to catch Jesus, and they confront Him right away from a point of sort of moral and Biblical superiority. "You call Yourself a rabbi, why don't Your disciples do this? Anybody knows, any rabbi worth his salt knows that this has been the tradition that's been passed on." To that Jesus responds, and says, "You are hypocrites."

The word "hypocrite" is a word that has passed into English from Greek. It's a word taken from the Greek theater. Greek theater was a relatively small budget operation, and so, at times, a Greek actor may play several parts in the same play; he would simply go back stage, perhaps change costumes, perhaps not, but what he would change is a mask, that would he would use to cover his face, sometimes they were secured, other times they were simply held in front of the actor's face. Once they came back on stage with that mask, they were to assume the role, whatever it was, of that particular person; so the word came to mean "play actor" or "pretender"; it originally meant one who acts. But it came to mean a play actor or a pretender; it describes

someone who plays a role, who pretends to be what they're not, a person pretending to be, who in fact, he's not; that's a hypocrite.

Eighteen times Jesus calls someone a hypocrite in the gospels; sixteen of those times it's the religious leaders of Israel. This doesn't mean by the way that the Pharisees were only superficially committed to their religion, that isn't what He's saying; they were all too dedicated, all too committed to their external religion; in that sense they were sincere. Nor does it mean that they were consciously play acting. What Jesus is saying when He calls them hypocrites, is that they are trying to pass themselves off as righteous, externally, when, in fact, they've done nothing to clean up on the inside, they're not truly righteous and close to God, they are wicked and ungodly and their hearts are far away from Him. They were playing a role, acting, wearing a mask, pretending to be what in fact, they were not.

This is a powerful reminder to us isn't it, that Jesus' piercing, penetrating omniscience sees into each of our hearts? He knows whether we have a mask on or not, He knows whether we're trying to present ourselves as something that, in fact, we're not. And He sees right through these men. He says, "You're hypocrites." There was a radical inconsistency, Hiebert writes, between what they claimed to be, and what they really were.

Now, in response to them, Jesus quotes from the Septuagint, that is the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament, from Isaiah 29:13. Isaiah had written this to his contemporaries, 700 years before Christ. But through the Holy Spirit, Jesus says he was actually also describing the scribes and Pharisees; whether He means the Holy Spirit intended to describe the scribes and Pharisees, or whether it's simply an appropriate description of them we can't be absolutely sure. But regardless Jesus says, "This is you; it fits very well."

Now the indictment in Isaiah is two-fold. First of all, that their worship was merely external, because it never really affects their hearts. Notice what Jesus says in verse 6, "This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far away from Me." It's interesting as you go through the Old Testament, this contrast between what comes out of the mouth and what's really in the heart, is a frequent theme. You find it in a number of the Old Testament prophets; in Isaiah 1, in Hosea 6, Amos 5 and Micah 6; other places as well. People were more concerned about outward show than inward reality. There was a great gulf between their verbal profession and their true inner condition.

In fact Jesus goes to this very point in Matthew 23; turn over there. Matthew 23, His indictment of the Pharisees, it is a blistering tirade against the Pharisees. We'll look at it more two weeks from tonight. But I want you to notice how He describes them as far as this external "everything looks great," internally "not so good." Look at verse 23:

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin [small spices], and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law...  
(So you're all worried about tithing your spices, but you've forgotten the really

important stuff) ...justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others. You blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!

That is a powerful picture. In your effort to avoid uncleanness, you'll strain your water so you don't get a gnat in your water, which would render you unclean, but it's like you're willing at the same time to swallow a camel.

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For... (here's the point I was going to, notice verse 25) For you clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of robbery and self-indulgence. You blind Pharisee, first clean the inside of the cup and of the dish, so that the outside of it may become clean also. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like white-washed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. So you, too... (here's the punchline) ...you, too, outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

That's why they were hypocrites. They did everything they could to appear outwardly righteous, when inside they were putting on a show and they were filled with all kinds of disobedience to God. It was all external.

The second part of Isaiah's indictment that Jesus brings against them back in Mark 7, is that their worship was worthless because it was all built on human rules. Look at verse 7: "But in vain do they worship Me... [that is it's worthless, it doesn't accomplish anything] ...teaching as doctrines the precepts of men." Now, very important distinction here; notice verse 7, the indictment is not of those who follow these man made doctrines, but those who teach them; their guilt and culpability is much greater. Jesus finishes the quote and then in verse 8, He applies it directly to the Pharisees. Look at verse 8, "Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men."

Now look at that verse with the contrast: Neglecting, or holding to; the commandment, or the tradition; and the source either being God or men. See those contrasts? You've neglected God's commandment, you're holding on to man-made tradition. They have a terribly misplaced sense of values, they neglected God's commandment. Verse 9, He goes on to say, "He was also saying to them, 'You are experts at setting aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition.'" Now, here, Jesus ratchets up the attack on these guys.

Now, it's not just that they neglect God's commandment as it says in verse 8, they are intentionally setting it aside. Let me translate this for you literally from the Greek text; listen to what Jesus says: Well, or beautifully, you are rejecting the commandment of God in order to cause your tradition to stand. Beautifully you are rejecting the commandment of God in order to cause your tradition to stand. Now it's intentional. They have deliberately, willfully, substituted

man made rules for the Word of God. The word to “reject” is to regard no longer as authoritative. They have turned against God’s law for their own rules.

Jesus decides to give them an example, exactly what He’s talking about; how their oral tradition actually ends up annulling God’s commandments. And He uses an example that has to do with parents; look at verse 10: “For...(here, let me tell you what I’m talking about Jesus says; here’s how it works) ...Moses said, ‘Honor your father and your mother.’”

Now let me just give you a little aside, before we look at what that means. Couple of interesting notes here with what is in the first of verse 10. Number one, here Jesus affirms the Mosaic authorship of Exodus. You know there are a lot of liberals and even some people who call themselves Evangelical conservatives who reject the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch. Jesus here affirms that Moses wrote, and He quotes from Exodus 20 and 21, and Jesus said it was written by Moses. Also, Jesus affirms the doctrine of inspiration, because notice here in verse 10 He says, “Moses said...” and in verse 13, He calls it the “word of God.” So just a couple of little notes.

Now the example Jesus chooses here is their undermining specifically of the fifth commandment. The fifth commandment deals with the issue of submitting ourselves and honoring duly constituted authority. God has, in His world, set up a system of authority, and submission to that authority. The fifth commandment reminds us of that reality in all of those relationships where God has set up duly constituted authority, whether it be government or parents or elders in a church or a husband over a wife; in every one of those cases, those are duly constituted positions of authority. This fifth commandment reminds us of that, but it chooses one of those relationships of authority and submission and it’s the one that has to do with parents. We must honor and respect, children must, their parents. To honor simply means to hold in respect; it implies an attitude, an attitude of respect that issues out in obedience for children still under their parents’ authority. It’s a very important commandment; it is one of the ten words, it is one of the hooks, on which God wants us to hang a large number of His commands, in terms of submission to authority. And if you wonder whether or not this command is very important, notice how important this command to honor parents is to God. Look at the second half of verse 10. And here He quotes in the commandment, He, of course, quoted Exodus 20, verse 12, here He quotes Exodus 21, verse 17, “He who speaks evil of father or mother, is to be put to death.”

Now, in the Old Testament, the Hebrew word that’s translated “speak evil” here, doesn’t mean to curse; it can include that but it doesn’t mean primarily that. The Hebrew word means “to belittle, to make light of,” and it can mean “to curse.” You understand what God was saying? The command to honor your parents is so important, that if you violated it even with your words, simply belittling them, or making fun of them, it opens you up to the death penalty in ancient Israel.

Let me just talk to those of you who are still under the authority of your parents, living in their home, eating their food, you're under their authority. Let me tell you, if you belittle your parents in your mind and heart, or in your words to others, or frankly to them, God takes this so seriously, that if you had lived in ancient Israel when He was King, you'd be dead. So don't, for a moment, think that God thinks lightly of that reality.

So this matter was very important. And yet the Pharisees had managed to completely undermine the importance of this commandment. Notice what He says in verse 11, So Moses said, this is really important, and if you even so much as even belittle your parents with your words, you ought to be killed. "But you say..." (and in the Greek text the emphasis here is on "you") Jesus is saying, You guys have completely turned this on its head, "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)'..." Let's stop there. Honoring your parents is an attitude of heart. But, clearly, from the illustration here that Jesus chooses, it includes much, much more. In this case, He's talking about financially supporting your parents when they don't have means, the implication is especially in their old age. This is a responsibility that is given to those who honor God throughout the Scripture. Isaiah 58 verse 7, when he's talking about what is real repentance look like, what does it look like to honor God in your life? "Is it not to divide your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into the house; When you see the naked, to cover him; And not to hide yourself from your own flesh?" Not to run, because you don't want to help them?

First Timothy chapter 5 verse 8, "But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever." That includes all of your dependents; but in the context of 1 Timothy 5, you know who it's talking about? Parents, and grandparents. If you force the church to care for your parents and grandparents instead of caring for them yourself, Paul says, you've denied the faith, and you're worse than an unbeliever.

So this is a responsibility. But notice in verse 11 of Mark 7 what the Pharisees had done. "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).'" Corban is from the Hebrew word for "offering." Mark explains the word for his Roman readers there, notice in parenthesis in verse 11, "that is to say, a gift, or given to God." This practice, what he's describing here, grew out of a rabbinic interpretation of devoting certain items of value to the Lord. One of the passages used was Leviticus 27, verse 28, where it says, "...anything which a man sets apart to the LORD out of all that he has, of man or animal or of the fields of his own property, shall not be sold or redeemed. Anything devoted to destruction is most holy to the LORD." The other passage was Numbers 18:14, "Every devoted thing in Israel shall be yours," talking to God. So out of these two verses they built this complex system, scheme. James Edwards, I like his analogy, he compares it, this practice of Corban, to deferred giving today. Some of you are familiar with this. Today, if you have a charity or some other institution that you want to help, you want to remember them on your death, you can will some of your property or estate to be given to that institution at your

death, but until your death, you retain possession of the property, it's yours, you can get any proceeds from that property, any interest that accrues, until your death, and it passes to the other person. That's how it worked with Corban.

Edwards goes on to say, "In the example of verse 11, a son declares his property 'Corban,' which, at his death, would pass into the possession of the Temple." In the meantime however, the son retains control over the property. So I have now said, in sort of a deferred giving, I have dedicated "this," whatever "this" is, to the Lord. I keep it, it's with me, if it's a piece of property that accrues in value, I get the value, if it's money in the bank I get the interest, but when I die that item that I have now said is Corban will go to the Temple treasury, to support the religious system of Israel.

So you have, then, this system that had been created. Even if this man's parents needed his support and the only means he had was this that he declared Corban, he could not get out of his commitment to God. That's what the rabbis said. They justified this whole deal based on the Scripture principle of not breaking an oath. So the Pharisees, Jesus said, by their tradition, were circumventing the command for people to honor their parents. Notice what Jesus says; look at verse 12, "You no longer permit him to do anything for his father or his mother." Underline those words, "you no longer permit him." Notice, here, it's not the person who declared his belongings Corban who is circumventing his responsibility necessarily. Jesus specifically says, the religious leaders are not permitting him to honor his parents.

Now this could happen in one of two ways. One of them could be that you had this really good-hearted Jewish person who loved his God, he wanted to honor God, and he wanted to devote something from his household to God. And so he does. He declares by this whole system the rabbis had created, he declares, maybe a piece of property, Corban. When I die I want the Temple treasury to get it, I want God to have it, I want to honor God with my property. But then, time goes on, and his parents' circumstances change. Maybe they were in a bad investment and they've lost all of their resources, and now he needs to support them and that piece of property is really the only way he has to do that. And the leadership won't let him have control of those resources again so that he can provide help to his parents. They held a tight rein on whatever they had been told, belonged to God, had been devoted to God, through this system of Corban.

According to Josephus, the Jewish historian writing for the Romans, he said that the priests demanded 50 shekels from a man, and 30 shekels from a woman, in order to cancel Corban. That's almost a year's pay. If you want to get out of this deal, okay, but you owe us a year's worth of pay. It was a racket. That was one way that they could work this where they wouldn't allow a man to help his mother and father. He may want to, but be constrained because he'd devoted this property to the Lord under different circumstances and he couldn't get it back, he couldn't get control of it again, to be able to help his parents.

The other way this could happen, is a hateful child, who was greedy and selfish, could find shelter under these laws of Corban to protect all of his estate from having to support his parents. He could simply find out that his parents need his help, and he could declare everything he owned Corban. Guess what? He gets to use it the rest of his life, he retains sole possession of it, he gets the interest off of it; it's all his, and when he dies the Temple gets it, but he doesn't lose any of it during his lifetime. He could retain that possession, any interest it earned, he could follow his greediness, supposedly, in devoting it to the Lord.

Now I don't know about you, but the first question that comes to my mind when I study this passage is why? Why would the Pharisees do this? What possible reason could they have for keeping a son who desired to help his parents from doing so? Or in helping a worthless son avoid his obligation to his parents? Well, as they say, follow the money. In either case, guess where the portion of the estate that had been identified as Corban went after the person died? To the Temple treasury, out of which all of these people received their life support and income. In fact, Matthew uses the Greek word – you've heard me use the word "Corban," he uses the Greek word "Corbanis" to describe the Temple treasury where these offerings were stored in many cases. Here's the bottom line: Judaism had become a false religious system, and like all false religious systems, its leaders were greedy and hungry for money. They had a love for money.

Listen to Jesus on several occasions: Matthew 23:25, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside..." watch this, "...they are full of robbery..." You're stealing from people, and then you're turning around and using what you steal from people for your own self-indulgence. Listen, they were just like every other false teacher. They're just like every faith healer you see on television. Like every "word of faith" guy, it's about the money; follow the money. It was the same with them.

Listen to what Jesus said in Mark 12 verse 40: You, "devour widows' houses..." You take advantage of the most vulnerable. You get them to commit their money, you basically are robbing them; you're taking advantage of them in their time of desperation and their time of trouble, and you're taking advantage of their trust of you as a religious leader.

In Luke 16 verse 14, "Now the Pharisees," Jesus says, "...were lovers of money." They were lovers of money.

So, in some cases, they wouldn't permit sons to help their parents, in other cases they helped greedy sons jilt their parents, and then they, along with others who were greedy, undoubtedly took advantage of this little loophole to protect their own resources. It was all about the money, and they took advantage of the people. The Mishnah describes the discussion of the rabbis of whether a vow could be annulled in order to help your parents; this whole issue came up in the Jewish writings of the Mishnah. All but one rabbi said it could not be set aside, the vow could not be set aside, even to help your parents. Ironically, in later writings, the rabbis modified their

stand on this very issue, possibly in response to this very conversation Jesus had with the Pharisees.

Notice the end result; look at the end of Jesus' personal diagnosis of legalism in verse 13. When you do that, with this system you've created, when you don't permit someone to honor his father or mother financially, you, "...invalidate the word of God by your tradition which you have handed down; and you do many things such as that."

I want you to notice the progression here. In verse 8, He says they "neglected" the commandment; in verse 9, they "rejected" the commandment; in verse 13, they "invalidated" the commandment. The Greek word, "invalidate" there is a formal legal term. It means to annul, or repeal a law. It's absolutely shocking. The religious leaders of Israel actually dared to repeal the Word of God; to declare the Word of God unlawful. How? By their tradition which they had handed down.

Now folks what I want you to see here is this is more than a simple chastisement; this is a verdict rendered about what first century Judaism had become. You've got to get out of your mind that first century Judaism was some wonderful faith that just had a few problems, there were a few people who were involved in the problem. Judaism as it had become in the first century, was aberrant; it was a false religion. And I want to develop this just a little bit, the true nature of first century Judaism, pulling away from what Jesus said directly. But I want to look at this in two different ways.

Jesus said first century Judaism has become completely worthless and corrupt; even worse, it had ceased to be the true faith of the true God at all, it had become a false religion – why? Two reasons, and Jesus identifies both of them in this text. One, its source of authority; and two, its way of salvation. Ironically, sola scriptura and sola gratia. They had removed both of those realities and replaced them with their own inventions.

Now what I want to do in just the brief time we have left is I want to briefly show you how this worked with the source of authority, and then, Lord willing, two weeks from tonight, we'll look at the way of salvation. I think it's very important that you understand this, because it's under attack today, in our community, in Christian schools in our community, in churches in our community, and it undermines the faith; so I want to develop this more two weeks from tonight. But let's look tonight just briefly at the source of authority of first century Judaism.

By the time of the first century the Jews had been passing down orally, the teaching and the interpretation of the rabbis, for at least a couple hundred years. And the Pharisees believed that that oral tradition that had been passed down, was every bit as important as the Torah. Torah is simply a word for the first five books of Moses, the Law of God – the Torah. They believed the oral tradition was equal weight, maybe even more important. The oral tradition explained how the Torah was to be lived out in real life.

Jesus would have none of it. For Him, the commands of God that were contained in the Scripture and Scripture alone, those were what were really important. None of the rituals, mentioned here in Mark 7, are in the Old Testament Law; they're not commanded by the Old Testament Law. Instead, they were all drawn from that growing body of oral interpretation of the Law. In Jesus' time, it was still strictly oral tradition. Two hundred years after Christ this oral tradition, this oral interpretation, would be gathered and written down in a document. That document is called the Jewish Talmud.

Now the Talmud, I just want to briefly explain this to you, the Jewish Talmud is not one book but two books. One book in the Jewish Talmud is the Mishnah. The Mishnah simply means "the review"; it's the legal decision or the interpretation of the Torah by a long line of rabbis, called teachers, over a period of about 400 years. It was passed down by oral traditions, some written documents, eventually compiled into a written document about 200AD, compiled by a wealthy Sage of Palestine, named Rabbi Judah the Prince. That's one book of the Jewish Talmud. The other book of the Jewish Talmud is the Gemara. It's the interpretation of the Mishnah. About 300 years after the Mishnah was compiled, a second group of sages called the Commentators, debated and interpreted the Mishnah.

Now if that's all confusing let me give it to you in simple math terms. The Torah is the first five books of Moses. The Mishnah is the interpretation of the Torah. The Gemara is the interpretation of the Mishnah, and the Mishnah plus the Gemara equals the Talmud. That clear? All right?

Now why do I bother to tell you that? It started before Christ, folks; the oral traditions started before the time of Christ; that's what He was dealing with in His lifetime. Guess what? It hasn't changed. What role does the Talmud continue to have in Judaism today? Let me recommend a book to you that I think you'll find very informative if you want to learn how modern Jewish people think. Herman Wouk wrote, "This is My God." He's a practicing Jew, and he wrote this book to explain to his non-Jewish friends what Judaism is all about. You'll get a good glimpse of how the Jewish person thinks; it's an excellent resource to understand Judaism. Listen to what Wouk says in this book, explaining Judaism. "At this point," he's talking now the late last century, "In the very long history of Judaism's legal literature, it seems clear that the center of gravity of authority..." Now stop – what do you expect to hear next? Is the Scripture. But notice what he says, "...the center of gravity of authority is fixed in the Mishnah and the Gemara, just as the final faith of the Jews is fixed in the Torah." He goes on to say, "The Talmud is, to this day, the circulating heart's blood of the Jewish religion. Whatever laws, customs, or ceremonies we observe, whether they are orthodox, conservative, reformed or merely spasmodics and mentalists, we follow the Talmud. It is our common law."

What I want you to see is that nothing has changed; from 200 years before Christ this was adopted; it's what Jesus was dealing with in the first century, it was written down 200 years after Christ, all of that oral tradition collected from the ancient rabbis, and it is today the heart and

center, the authority of Judaism. Tragically, all of that interpretation, ends up undermining the Law of God, the Torah.

Wouk, himself, gives an example, and I want to read this to you because I want you to see this; this is his own description; he's writing in favor of Judaism, but listen to what he says: "The Torah abounds in death penalties." Okay? Stop there. You look at the Old Testament Law, it was clear there was a death penalty in Israel for a number of infractions. "But..." he goes on to say, "...then we come to the common law..." that's that oral tradition now codified in the Talmud, "...and we find capital punishment in effect abolished by the obstacles to the death verdict. A Sanhedrin that condemned one man to death in 70 years was called 'The Bloody Sanhedrin,' the Talmud says. The chains of witnesses required in a capital case, the rigid rules for proving knowledge of the law and premeditation, the restrictive admissible evidence, the special voting procedures of the court, all combine to make death a theoretical punishment almost never reached."

Now I'm all for protections, so that innocent people don't die; but it's hard for me to believe that there was only one murderer in 70 years. These hedges, again, were common law, handed down from remote antiquity. What I want you to see folks, is that it's exactly the same. That is exactly the same reason Jesus and the religious leaders clashed in the first century. It had to do with the source of authority. Even by then, Judaism had already substituted human tradition for divine revelation.

What was the crux of what divided Jesus and the religious leaders of Judaism? Look at the passage again, verse 3, "the tradition of the elders." You've received things in order to keep them. Verse 5, "the tradition of the elders"; "precepts of men"; "tradition of men," verse 8; verse 9, "you want to keep your tradition"; verse 13, "your tradition which you handed down." Notice the contrast in that section. The Pharisees are into tradition, things received, precepts of men, the tradition of men, your tradition which you have handed down. Jesus is into the commandment of God and the Word of God.

What I want you to see folks, is the primary message of this record is the spiritual bankruptcy of substituting human tradition for divine revelation; and by doing so, first century Judaism had become a false religion, especially when you add the fact that they changed the whole way a man could be right with God, as we'll look at our next time. No wonder Jesus said, "You have annulled the word of God by your tradition."

Now, what about us? What are the implications for us, from this passage, from the point Jesus is making? First of all, for us who are in Christ, this is a call to adopt the commitment of the early church. Those men and women who came out of such a system of control, either Jewish, brought up in the Jewish homes, or who were proselytes in many cases, Gentiles who embraced the Jewish system, lived under all of this – how did they change?

Look at 1 Corinthians chapter 4; I love this, this is one of my favorite verses in all of Scripture. First Corinthians chapter 4, as Paul discusses what's going on there in Corinth, he says this, verse 6, "Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively applied to myself and Apollos for your sakes, so that in us you may learn not to exceed what is written, so that no one of you will become arrogant in behalf of one against the other."

Now, you can't see it as well in our New American text, I think in this case it's one of the rare times the NIV is more accurate, but in verse 6, there is a famous saying from the early church; in fact it's introduced by an article in the Greek text. He says this, "so that you might learn in us the meaning of this saying..." It was a saying very popular and common in the early church; what was it? *Mē hyper ha gegrapται*, [Μὴ ὑπὲρ ἃ γέγραπται,] not beyond what has been written. That was the saying they embraced. What has been written? What does the Word of God say? We're not going to go beyond that.

Can I admonish you? Let's live like that. You don't need manmade rules. What does the Word say? Not beyond what has been written. If it's not clear chapter and verse, then don't let it bind your conscience and don't use it to bind the consciences of others.

Number two – this passage is a call to each of us to examine how our personal fences, those rules we do set up, might in fact be undermining God's own commands. You know, one of the most shivering verses in all the Scripture to me comes at the end of verse 13; you see what Jesus says? "...and you do many things such as that." Many times I find myself praying to the Lord, "Lord, reveal to me if I'm doing things in my own heart and life that are undermining Your divine intention, Your divine will."

We need to examine, are any of our personal fences, our rules, our little decisions we've made about what we're going to do and not do – are any of those in fact undermining God's law? Whenever we add our own rules to the bare Word of God as Luther called it, we risk undermining the original intention of God Himself, just as it was with the Pharisees.

Number three – this is a call to self-examination. Are we wearing a mask? Are we wearing a mask? Are we serving God with our lips, but not with our hearts? We need to remind ourselves that Jesus sees every bit as clearly today as He did in the first century; He saw through all of the façade, all of the things that would have, frankly, impressed us if we had seen the Pharisees, and He knew their hearts. We need to examine our own hearts and ask God to examine them. I love that expression from the Psalm, Psalm 139, "Search me, O God, and know my heart...see if there be any way in me that causes you pain." And God, help us to pray that. Are we the real thing?

Number four – it's a reminder to be grateful that God has revealed Himself in a Book, and that Book is complete, it has everything we need, it has every expectation from God; that Book is enough, and we don't need to add anything to it. And when we do, like the Pharisees, we may very well end up creating a system that runs contrary to the very will and purpose of God. All

manmade false religion substitutes their own ideas for divine revelation. May God help us to see the false, and to stay committed to the true, to the bare Word of God. Let's pray together.

Father, thank You for the insight that You've given us into all false religion. It's always about manmade rules, meant to make people appear righteous on the outside, when, in fact, there's no change of heart, there's no love for You, there's no love for others; it's all façade, it's all form and show. Father, remind us when we look around at the false religion in our world, when we encounter those who are entrapped by it, to pray for them, to reach out to them with pity and concern, and Father, we pray for those who lead false manmade religions, that embrace human teaching rather than Your divine Word. Father, bring repentance to their hearts and if they will not repent, Father, I pray that You would remove them from influence so that they would not take others to hell with them.

Father, we thank You for the truth of Your Word; help us to center our souls in Your Word and Your Word alone. Thank You, Father, for Jesus' example that He would not bow, He would not bend to any manmade rules, but rather, His mind and heart and soul, His life was held captive by Your bare Word; may we live like that. Forgive us, Father, for adding to Your Word, forgive us for spinning off our interpretations that aren't clearly based on the text of Scripture and establishing that as if it had some authority. Lord, help us to see that in doing that, we undermine Your authority in our lives and in the lives of our families, the lives of those we touch. We thank You and praise You O God, that our Lord set the example of sola scriptura; may we follow in His steps, we pray in Jesus' name, Amen.