

95-07-23Mark

Continued study, chapter 7 begins, Then the Pharisees and some of the scribes came together to him, having come from Jerusalem. Now when they saw some of his disciples eat bread with defiled, that is with unwashed hands, they found fault. For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands in a special way, holding the tradition of the elders.

When they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they wash. And there are many other things which they have received and hold, like the washing of cups, pitchers, copper vessels, and couches. Then the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, Why do your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashed hands? He answered and said to them, Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written.

This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. And in vain they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men, the washing of pitchers and cups, and many other such things you do.

He said to them, All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition. For Moses said, Honor your father and your mother, and he who curses father or mother, let him be put to death. But you say, if a man says to his father or mother, Whatever profit you might have received for me is korban, that is a gift to God.

Then you no longer let him do anything for his father or his mother, making the word of God of no effect through your tradition, which you have handed down, and many such things you do. This section opens immediately after two other reactions to the teaching of Jesus Christ. We saw the reaction of the crowd after Jesus fed the 5,000.

They wanted to make Him king. They searched for Him. They were very disappointed when He was not there, and they came back around the top of the lake looking for Him.

We saw the people in the region of Gennesaret responding to the miraculous powers of Jesus Christ by scooping up the sick and afflicted round about them, bringing them all to Jesus to be touched and to be healed. There is nothing inherently wrong with some of these things, is there? Jesus Christ is the Messiah. He is the coming King of Israel.

What harm can there be in acknowledging Him as King, as this crowd did after they ate of the bread and the fish? We care about those who are sick. We care about those who are afflicted. Can it possibly be said that it is wrong to carry them to the feet of Jesus Christ for healing? Not at all.

I mentioned, I think, last week upon returning from Annapolis and a visit to the Naval Academy that we had been addressed by the superintendent, Admiral Larson, and in addressing the issue

of honor and integrity, which is perhaps one of the most important foundation stones of that institution and that type of training and education. Duty, honor, country is not confined to West Point. All of the service academies strive for those.

The problem has been that in recent times, as actually in times past, there are violations of honor. There are midshipmen and cadets who cheat on tests. There are midshipmen and cadets who take things that they should not.

They deceive. They break regulations and try to cover it up and so forth. So there's a problem of honor.

How do you deal with that as an institution? You get raw material from all around the country. And in analyzing this problem of how to instill ethical behavior, how to instill honor and integrity, what approach are you going to take? You first have to understand the problem. And one of the things the Admiral pointed out is that it isn't that people don't know right from wrong.

This accords with our biblical understanding. Paul in Romans 2 and so forth talks about the law of God that is written in the hearts of all men. Those Gentiles that were not ever under the law have their conscience as a law unto themselves because a sense of right and wrong is instilled within us.

And therefore we are without excuse when we choose the wrong. But he said that's not the problem. It isn't that midshipmen and cadets coming to the academies don't know that cheating is wrong or that stealing is wrong or that lying and deceiving is wrong.

They know that just as well as any of us. It is a commitment to what is right that is lacking. You can give lip service.

Every cadet and midshipman takes an oath when they enter. They subscribe in writing to the honor concept or the honor code. How strong is that commitment? I will not lie.

I will not cheat. I will not steal. It doesn't say I will recognize them as right or wrong.

It says I will abide by it. I will commit to this lifestyle. That commitment is what is lacking.

That strong motivation to pursue the right is what isn't there. A second part of this ethical dilemma is that it is not enough to simply distinguish between right and wrong and seek a commitment to the right. Suppose you have someone that says, I have made that commitment.

I want to do what is right. But now I'm faced with a situation and my options don't involve right and wrong. Maybe you face a decision like that today where several options face you.

There are none of them that are proscribed or prohibited in Scripture. There are none of them that involve a moral decision to do wrong. You're instead choosing between several right options.

This comes up all the time when you're engaged in ministry. You have ministry opportunities. You have responsibilities to your family.

You have responsibilities before the Lord. How do you balance those right things? Because a right thing can become a wrong thing when it shows up in the wrong place in your scale of priorities. If, for example, ministry rises far above family responsibility, someone can be out there ministering and preaching the gospel and end up with a divorce or with wayward children.

Two right things, responsibility to family, responsibility to ministry. And in making the choice on a daily basis, allocation of time, allocation of priority, something right can become something wrong. Sometimes right things are a means of spirituality.

Sometimes right things are a result of spirituality. We have to make those distinctions. It's not as easy as looking in the Bible and saying, this is right, this is wrong, I will do the right.

We have to think. We have to analyze. We have to assign priorities to right things so that right things don't become wrong things.

This is the case that we've just seen in the last half of Mark chapter 6. Yes, it is a right thing to acknowledge Jesus Christ as King, but it is not a right thing when it is done for the wrong reasons, when it is done out of a sense of self-preservation, when it is seen as a lever to overthrow Roman rule, when it is seen as a means to get oneself out from under Roman oppression. It's a right thing, but it becomes wrong when it's done for the wrong reason. It's not God's time.

It's not God's plan. It's not God's power. But on the surface, it's a right thing.

These people will no doubt stand before the judgment seat and say, He's the Messiah. He's the King. I tried to make Him King.

What's wrong with that? And God will point these very things out. The same thing in this very last section in Gennesaret. The people recognized Him.

They knew He had miraculous power and they did a right thing. They brought people to the feet of Jesus. But why? They saw Him as a quick fix.

They saw Him as a means of improving circumstances in time. That is not a means of spirituality. That's not a means of worship.

That's not a means of glorifying God. That is a result. And when you take something that should be a result and you try to make it a means, you take a right thing and you make it a wrong thing.

That's the situation as we come into chapter 7. Now the Pharisees and the scribes have come together to Him, coming up from Jerusalem. And they see the disciples. Notice they don't see

Jesus Christ.

And they don't accuse Jesus Christ. These are His disciples. Are eating bread with defiled or unwashed hands.

They had a tradition, grounded in Scripture, that there should be something special as a member of the people of God, a member of the nation of Israel, to honor God in the things that you do. To be pure. Be ye holy, for I am holy.

The very word Pharisee, you know what Pharisee comes from? It's a Hebrew word. Parash. Parash means to separate or to be separated in the passive.

The Pharisees wanted to come out from among them and be ye separate. They named themselves this name. We're not like the nations.

We're not unclean. We're not unwashed. We seek purity.

Is that a bad thing? Is that an evil thing? To seek purity? It is not. To express purity and a desire to please God in your daily life, your daily habits, that's not a wrong thing, is it? The Pharisees made the mistake that we often make because that should be a result of a relationship with God. That should be a result of a genuine love for God and a genuine recognition of one's place in God's plan.

It's a result. Instead, they took that result and tried to make it a means. I will wash my hands and wash my cups and I will be pleasing in the sight of God.

No, no. Become a person who is pleasing in God's sight and these things will have meaning. These things will be an expression and a result of your relationship with God.

But you can't push a rope. You can't work backward from results to create the means. Notice also, Jesus did not go to the Pharisees.

Jesus did not accost the Pharisees and say, By the way, you're the religious leaders of Israel. What do you think of me and my disciples? The Pharisees have come up to the Gennesaret, Galilee region, which is a fair trek to look at Jesus Christ. They have come from Jerusalem to Him.

So now, they are looking at Jesus Christ. And this is a second observation we can make about this ethical dilemma, this moral problem about choosing between right things. We know that we can't live in a vacuum.

We know that we have to look at others as well as ourselves. It's important to discern when someone is a wolf in sheep's clothing. It is important to discern when someone is walking in error.

That's a legitimate function. It's a necessary function. It's part of wisdom in this life.

That, once again, is a result of a healthy relationship with God and a healthy understanding of the right measuring stick to measure other people with and how far to go in that measurement. Where do we slip over from discernment into judgment? Judge not, lest ye be judged. Yet, Paul also says, Mark out those among you who are not walking according to the faith.

Sometimes, it's necessary to separate after a first and a second warning. Treat someone like a heathen and a tax collector. How can you decide who you're going to treat like a heathen and a tax collector if you have not evaluated their walk and their life, the outcome of their faith or the lack of it? This is a right thing to evaluate others, to estimate where they are.

Where does it become a wrong thing? First of all, it becomes a wrong thing if we overstep and we go beyond evaluation to judgment. What's the difference in discernment and judgment? Discerning is taking a measuring stick and taking the measure of another person, taking the measure of a leader, a pastor, a teacher, someone who is in a place of prominence, a missionary. Churches must evaluate their missionaries to decide whether or not to continue supporting them.

It is a necessary function. Where it gets over into judgment is when we decide to pass and execute sentence. I have measured you.

I have found you to fall short. Now I am going to put the penalty on you. I am going to undermine your reputation.

I am going to speak ill of you to others and undermine their confidence and their estimate of you. That's your penalty. Not only have I weighed you in the balance and found you wanting, but I am now going to penalize you by reducing your standing in the community, by ostracizing you, by punishing you in other small ways That's judging.

We must discern. We must evaluate. But we must not pass sentence and we must not execute that sentence.

That is God's prerogative. It is necessary for us to measure so that we can make our own decisions. But we do not start making decisions for other people.

We don't start changing the circumstance of their life because we have measured them and found them wanting. What are the Pharisees doing here? The Pharisees have failed on both counts because first of all, they have a faulty measure. They are not measuring by a biblical standard, are they? They are measuring by the standard of their tradition.

They have set up in their mind what spirituality is. They have set up in their mind and in their tradition handed down from father to son for decades what it is to be holy and to be religious. That's the measuring stick that they use on Jesus and His disciples.

A, it's not a valid measure. Nowhere in the Old Testament will you find God saying, Behold, if thou eatest thy bread with unwashed hands, thou art defiled. Get thee outside the camp.

It doesn't say that. This is an extrapolation. You know what we do.

There are people who are believers who come to a relationship with God that is genuine. They find ways to express that genuine relationship in certain things that they do. Some people who have a gift of encouragement may wind up expressing their relationship with God in rapport with others, in visiting with others, in encouraging and lifting others up.

Other people look at that person. That person may eventually look at themselves and say this is a good expression of someone who has got a healthy Christian life. So then we begin to take that and crystallize it and say a healthy Christian life always includes encouragement, visiting, lifting up and so forth.

And we try to bottle the essence of faith. We try to bottle the fruit of faith and say I've captured it. It's encouragement and visiting.

Substitute your own favorite expression of a healthy spiritual life. Then we try to hand that bottle to someone else and say if you want to be spiritual, visit and encourage. If you want to be spiritual, do this expression that I have found to be valid in my own life.

And in trying to pass that bottle to another person, the essence of faith evaporates because we've now codified it. We've externalized it. We've made it into a tradition.

And it can't be done that way. We're pushing a rope. We're trying to work from the outside back into the soul.

I have life and growth and vitality and the energy of God in my soul that expresses itself in this way. Take this thing to yourself and that life and energy and vitality will soak into your soul. And it doesn't work.

It never can. These things are always results. They are never means.

This is what the Pharisees have done. This is the great tragedy of the Pharisees. What are they doing? We have found that the cleanliness, the washing and the respect for God that we try to express is the means.

And so now they've passed that on from father to son. And there is no faith. What did Jesus say? You're like whitewashed tombstones.

You look great on the outside, but inside you're full of dead men's bones. So this is the operation that they engage in here. In verse 5, the Pharisees and scribes ask Him, Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashed hands? Now this

idea of tradition has come up before.

Is tradition a bad thing? Does the Bible condemn tradition? Can we go back to our ethical model of right and wrong and say tradition is wrong? Never go with tradition and you're in great shape. If you remember our study of Colossians, you know that we have hit the subject of tradition before. We're going to take a quick, three-minute excursion into tradition, so stay with me.

Turn to 1 Corinthians 11, verse 2. Paul begins this chapter by saying, Imitate me just as I also imitate Christ. Now I praise you, brethren, that you remember me in all things and keep the traditions just as I delivered them to you. Uh-oh.

I thought we were just about to put all tradition in the bad category. Now here's Paul commending the Corinthians because they have kept tradition, because they have imitated the things that Paul has done. Well, now we're back to this quandary because apparently tradition is not always a bad thing.

Turn over a few pages to 2 Thessalonians 2. In verse 15, Paul says, Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or by our epistle. Stand fast and hold the traditions. Does Paul have the standing of an elder in the church? Is he someone to be looked up to as a spiritual leader and followed? Apparently so.

He says, stand fast and hold the traditions. If you look over on the next page in chapter 3 and verse 6, we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us. Here's our discernment.

Here's our responsibility to know which brethren are walking orderly and which are walking disorderly and to withdraw from those that are walking disorderly. That withdrawal should not take the form of a penalty. It should not take the form of execution of sentence.

This is a decision that we make for our own good not to hurt the person that we have decided is walking disorderly. The difference between discerning and judging. But we see from just these few passages that tradition can be a good thing.

Paul says, hold the tradition. Stand fast. So we've got to be a little bit more sophisticated and realize that there are different kinds of traditions.

There's the tradition of men. There's the tradition of God. The traditions that reflect the faith.

We know from Jesus' teaching here in our Mark chapter 7 that when you teach as doctrines the commandments of men, those traditions are bad. But all tradition is not bad. How do we know the difference? Which of our traditions are traditions of men and which of them reflect the faith? That is the challenge that we face.

That's why there are so many hundreds of denominations. That's why there are so many different flavors of believers in Jesus Christ in our day. Because everyone sorts out the level of tradition, the level of commitment to the Scriptures.

The prioritizing of those right things falls out in different ways, doesn't it? Some people prioritize evangelism. Very top of the list. We exist to evangelize.

Some people prioritize personal spiritual growth. We exist to let God have an impact on us first. And all of our other right things flow out of that.

Some churches prioritize a worship experience. We come together to be encouraged, to be uplifted, to be built up. That's at the top of our list.

Are any of those things bad? Is there any of those things that should not ever be done? Should we not have a worship experience? Should we not have an emotional response to what God in the person of Jesus Christ has done for us? That's a healthy right thing, isn't it? Should it be at the top of our priority list above all other things? That's the question. Is evangelism ever a wrong thing? My goodness, you look over in a couple of our passages, I think in Philippians where Paul says there are people that are preaching Christ for completely the wrong reasons, but it's still good. I don't care why they're doing it.

They're preaching Christ and that's what counts. You can't dilute the power of the Word even if you put it in the mouth of someone who's doing it for the wrong reasons. God's Word carries its own power and its own authority.

Even a reprobate, if he communicates the Word, will see that that bread does not return void. Christ Himself in Matthew 23 says the same thing. In fact, let's turn to chapter 23 because this is Jesus Christ on tradition.

Matthew 23. This is important to us, isn't it? Don't we need to know which of our traditions to stand fast and cling to and which of our traditions to scrutinize closely to see if they are traditions of men? Matthew 23. Jesus is speaking to the multitudes and to His disciples.

He's talking about these very same scribes and Pharisees that have showed up in Mark 7. The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. What does that mean? Moses brought the law. Moses was the conveyance by which the Word of God came to the people of God.

That was Moses' function. They referred to the law as Moses. They would say, go look in Moses and you will see that this is what we should do.

Moses stood for and represented the communication of God's truth. The Pharisees and the scribes sit in Moses' seat. They fulfill His function, or they should.

That's what Jesus is saying. The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. They have

inherited that responsibility to communicate the truth.

Therefore, whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do. Now, here's a startling claim. Here's Jesus Christ, the one who's calling them whitewashed tombstones.

He says, woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites. He's telling His disciples and the multitude here what the Pharisees and the scribes tell you. That, observe and do.

What's His point? The Word of God is the criteria by which we judge. Even a reprobate, even someone who communicates one thing and does another, has brought you the Word of Truth. Respond to that seed that's being scattered in your soil.

It doesn't matter if a sinner scatters the seed. It doesn't matter if a machine scatters the seed. The importance is what do you do with the seed of the truth of the Word of God? That's what counts.

That's what Jesus is saying. He doesn't tell His disciples, look at those scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, whitewashed tombstones out there trying to impress people and so forth. He says, when they sit down and teach you the Word of God, you listen, observe, and do what the law of Moses tells you.

Don't throw it away because someone communicated it to you that isn't following it themselves. That's not the issue. You seek the truth.

You follow the truth. He says, what they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their works. For they say and do not do.

They bind heavy burdens hard to bear and lay them on men's shoulders, but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers. If you go into some of the tractates of Mishnah and Gemara and all of these other writings of the religious system of Judaism, you find some of these heavy burdens. You know, there was the injunction in Scripture that said on the Sabbath day, rest.

Not only you yourself, but your servants and your animals are to rest on the seventh day. So, Judaism, Phariseeism, had to come up with a definition. Well, if I'm going to move around on the Sabbath, how far do I go before I have not rested anymore and I've broken this commandment? So they came up with the definition of a Sabbath day's journey.

Here is a distance that you can go and you haven't broken the Sabbath. You go beyond this line, you're not resting on the Sabbath. They said, well, animals are supposed to rest on the Sabbath.

Here's what we'll do. We'll say that if you sit on your animal, if you sit on your donkey and go a Sabbath day's journey, not only have you not worked, but your animal has not worked either. But now if you pick up a switch to whack that burro and get him to go down the road, now you've laid a burden on him.

He's carrying a stick. That's just a small version of putting a pile of wood on his back. That's work.

That's breaking the Sabbath. So you can ride the donkey a Sabbath day's journey, but you can't carry a stick because that's putting a burden on the animal. Now, this Sabbath day journey thing got to be kind of inconvenient.

So, they looked back in the law and God talked about sitting in your house and meditating on God and so forth. So this is what they would do. On Friday, they would take a skin of water and some bread and go out just short of the limit of a Sabbath day's journey.

And they would deposit this bread and this water in a safe place. Knowing that they needed to travel on the Sabbath, what they would then say is because I have bread and water stored out there, that is the limit of my house. So that's where my Sabbath day journey really begins.

My journey begins when I leave my house. Well, I've got bread and water out there. That's the limit of my house.

So you could actually get two Sabbath day journeys in on the Sabbath by going a Sabbath day journey, picking up your bread and water, and leaving your house, and now you're going another Sabbath day journey. These writings are just replete with this sort of maneuvering and minutia that were a part of this tradition. This is what Jesus is talking about when He says you lay these heavy burdens on people.

Trying to bottle the product of faith. Trying to pass it along as a system of behavior. If you behave this way, you will be pleasing to God.

If you do these things on the outside, you'll be rehabilitated on the inside. We know as members of a Bible church that things don't flow in that direction. Dr. Wright can tell you that in electricity, there is a little component of a circuit that's called a diode.

It doesn't do anything fancy. It doesn't amplify. It doesn't turn electricity to heat.

It doesn't store anything. You know what it is? A diode is a one-way gate. Electricity can flow one way, but it can't go back the other.

Our spiritual life is that way. We have diodes in our soul. The Spirit of God, the Word of God get inside us and create energy that flows outward in a one-way direction.

Those fruits and those expressions can't work energy back into our soul. It's a one-way flow outward. Traditions are an attempt to push the energy in the wrong direction.

And we do this to one another. We say, you know, you've really got a bad habit here and that habit is defiling you. That habit is keeping you from making progress in the plan of God.

Or this situation in your life, you've got an activity that you engage in or you've got a relationship that you won't forsake. And we concentrate on that. We say, you've got to get this external thing fixed or you're never going to improve in your relationship with God.

You're never going to grow. You're never going to be more spiritual. You're never going to get there until you trim off this ugly branch on your tree.

Not stopping and thinking and recognizing that Jesus says get inside the tombstone. Clean out the dead men's bones and you won't have to whitewash the outside. It's a one-way flow.

That's the problem with the traditions of men. The traditions of God, the ones that Paul says hold on to these, preserve these, keep these. These were expressions of the faith that was inside Paul.

And he says, follow my example. I trust God and these are the particular ways in my life that it works itself out. Follow my example by seeking after the truth.

Seeking after rehabilitation in your own soul so that your life will express righteousness in its own particular ways, the opportunities that God gives you. The Pharisees are trying to work this backward. So Jesus talks about this and He says, as you lay these burdens on people, you try to prove to people that by your externalities, by your practices, what you wear and how you act, that you are righteous on the inside.

They do these works to be seen by men. They make their phylacteries broad. They enlarge the borders of their garments.

Great contrast there between the border of a Pharisee's garment and the border of the Lord Jesus Christ's garment, isn't there? Which one do you touch and get power? Which one is an expression of faith? They love the best places at feasts, the best seats in the synagogues, greetings in the marketplace, to be called by men, Rabbi, Rabbi. But you, do not be called Rabbi for one is your Teacher, the Christ, and you are all brethren. Do not call anyone on earth your father for one is your Father, He who is in Heaven.

I don't know how the padres and fathers, I don't know how they get around this. For my own particular application of these principles, this is why I don't put reverend on my business card. This is why I ask that you simply call me by my name or call me Pastor Hull because that's my function.

But we are all brethren. A teacher, a pastor, a missionary is not an elevated form of life. There is no magical aura.

We don't glow in the dark. A visit from us doesn't accomplish any more than a visit from you. We are all believers.

We have the same Word. We have the same Spirit. We don't all have the same gifts.

And in some cases, you who have the gift of encouragement and you who have the gift of rapport with those who have yet to come to Christ can do a far better job under the ministry of God the Holy Spirit than your pastor or your missionary or your husband or your wife. God has distributed individual gifts and we are not all mouths. And we are not all ears.

We are not all the hand. Each of us has gifts. Don't take your opportunities and hand them off to someone who may not even be gifted by God to fulfill it.

If you think of someone who could use some encouragement or use a visit, that's an opportunity God has brought to you. There's a place where you can express what's in your soul just like we do when we give in the offering plate. It's a one-way flow of the energy and the power of God out from your soul to your environment and to your circumstances.

Do not cast away the opportunity for blessing in time and reward in eternity by saying, well, the pastor could do this. Or, I know a person that's really got a great personality. If an opportunity comes your way, trust God.

You have the Spirit. You have the Word. Seize it.

Exploit it. Use it. Do not call anyone on earth your father.

Do not be called teachers, for one is your teacher, the Christ. He who is greatest among you shall be your servant and whoever exalts himself will be humbled. He who humbles himself will be exalted.

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men, for you neither go in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in. Everything's on the external. The Pharisees are like an outside door to the building.

They don't open that door, and they don't let anybody else open it and go in. What is the door of entrance? It's the Word of God. Jesus Christ is the way, the truth, and the life.

Every book in the Bible testifies of Jesus Christ. On the road to Emmaus, Jesus opened the Scriptures to them and showed them how Moses and the prophets testified of Him. Any book of the Old Testament, any section testifies of Jesus Christ.

He is the way. He is the truth. He is the life.

Don't hide the truth. Don't apologize for the truth. Don't compromise the truth.

It is the power of God unto salvation to those who are going to believe. And if you sugarcoat it, if you water it down, if you leave out sin, righteousness, and judgment, you do discredit and disservice to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It's supposed to be a convicting message.

The Word of God is supposed to step on toes. It's supposed to make us uncomfortable. It is our affliction.

It is the chastening from God that improves us and molds us into the image of Jesus Christ. But we don't want to do that. We want to put on a good appearance.

We want to give the appearance that everything is fine. We don't want to address a need for change. We don't want to address the convicting that God's Word brings.

And so not only do we not go in if we're like the Pharisees, but we also keep others from going in because we don't give them the key. We don't let them see and open that door. Verse 14, Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You devour widows' houses and for a pretense make long prayers.

Therefore, you will receive greater condemnation. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel land and sea to win one proselyte, and when he is won, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves. As near as I can tell, there are two places in the Bible that address a numerical growth program.

Two places. One is in Acts, and one is right here. In Acts, it says, God added daily to the church those who believed.

This is the other growth program. Traveling forth, just like the Pharisees have come up from Jerusalem to visit and to judge the Lord and His disciples. That program in Acts involves people coming to Christ, coming and hearing the Word and responding, and God added them to the church.

This program for numerical growth involves travel, going out, encompassing earth and sea to win a proselyte, and then creating them in one's own image. Woe to you blind guides who say whoever swears by the temple, it is nothing, but whoever swears by the gold of the temple, he is obliged to perform it. This is another one of these hair-splitting activities.

So what's our conclusion here? We know what the Pharisees are like. I think the difficulty that we often have is that we can put the Pharisees in a nice, safe category from ourselves. None of us are hung up on washing as a religious ritual, are we? We recognize it as practical and hygienic, and it's much more enjoyable to eat off a clean plate or drink out of a clean cup than a dirty one.

We don't make that an article of faith. We don't make it a religious practice, do we? So we can say all those silly Pharisees, look at them worrying about this washing of cups. But do we have traditions of men? Have we tried to externalize and tried to make a code out of the expressions of Christianity, and now we preach that as spirituality.

We preach that as the Gospel. This is the way to be a Christian. This is the way to be pleasing to

God.

Do these things. Refrain from these things. We do, don't we? We have certain standards of behavior.

We have certain standards of conduct. And what are we doing? It's very easy to be like a Pharisee and look at others and see where they have fallen short. Look at this.

Can't you see where you need to be doing what you're not doing? It's easy. We always have 20-20 vision when we're looking at others. It's so clear.

Would God that we had that clarity of vision in our own lives to look at ourselves and say, you know, here's what I ought to be doing and I'm not doing it. Here's what I'm doing that I shouldn't be doing. And preach it ourselves and turn that laser beam searchlight of perception on our own lives.

That's what we need to be doing, not falling into this trap. And we do this, don't we? We go beyond perception into judging. We go beyond perception into I will help you conform to my idea of what you should be.

Instead of concentrating on that door, on letting people enter the Kingdom of God through the door of Jesus Christ. You can't push from the outside and get spirituality into someone else's soul. It has to be created there by God through His Word and through His Spirit.

That's why we're a Bible church. That's why we teach the Word of God as the first and foremost thing. When we try to choose between the right things, between evangelism and outreach and youth programs and a worship experience and all of the other right things that are part of the Christian life, we have to decide how are we going to sort those out? How are we going to prioritize them? Which things are means? Which things are results? And do our best before God not to confuse the two.

If we confuse it, we're lost. If we confuse it, we are under a curse. Cursed is the man who puts his trust in man, who makes flesh his strength.

This is the great failing of discipleship programs in our day. Let me disciple you. You lean on me and my encouragement, my exhortation, my accountability.

You tell me your sins. I'll tell you mine. We together will encourage one another to love and good works.

Taking a right thing and making it wrong by turning it into a means rather than a result. It is God's Word. It is God's Spirit.

It is God's power that makes change. You and I can't do it to each other. We have a hard enough

trouble doing it to ourselves.

This is the message of this passage. Contrast the Pharisees and what Jesus is trying to do with His disciples. What does Jesus do? Does He run them into a program? Does He have a small group encounter? He teaches them.

He exemplifies living by faith. And He expects them to do the same. He doesn't codify.

He doesn't set up a system of behavior. He doesn't say, no, let's all wash. Let's all do this.

He says, look at the example of attitude. Look at the example of humility and operate on that. Let's close by turning to the passage that Jesus quotes in His response.

He says, Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites as it is written, this people honors Me with their lips. That's the outside. But their heart on the inside is far from Me.

In vain they worship Me. He doesn't say they're not worshipping Me. He says they're worshipping Me, but it doesn't count.

It doesn't work. It's empty. It's an empty worship.

Why? Because they teach as doctrines the commandments of men. This comes from Isaiah 29, verse 13. But as always, one of the greatest things you can do when you see an Old Testament quote in the New Testament, flip back there because these are bookmarks.

That's not everything Jesus wants to say from Isaiah. That's just in scholarly writing, there's a little abbreviation, C.F. period. It means confer.

It means go see this guy on these pages and read what he says. I'm not going to quote it all to you here, but here's a footnote for you. Go back here and check this out.

This is what Jesus is doing. Isaiah prophesied. He's saying go back and check Isaiah's prophecy.

So look at Isaiah 29. The context here is Israel's failure. They have done this very thing even in the Old Testament days.

They have externalized their worship. They honor Me with their lips in Isaiah 29, verse 13, but have removed their hearts far from Me. Their fear toward Me is taught by the commandment of men.

Their respect for God doesn't come from something that's generated on the inside. It's not the fruit of the Spirit. It's something that's externalized.

We don't have time to cover all of this context, but look over in chapter 30, verse 8. God is talking to Isaiah and He says, Go write it before them on a tablet and note it on a scroll that it may be for

time to come. That means for us. God says, here's this situation, Isaiah, in Israel where this has happened.

Write this down so that future generations will benefit from it. That's us. God told Isaiah, write this down for Tahlequah.

2,500 years in the future they're going to need this. Write it down that it may be for time to come, forever and ever. That this is a rebellious people, lying children, children who will not hear the law of the Lord.

Who say to the seers, do not see. And to the prophets, do not prophesy to us right things. Speak to us smooth things.

Prophesy falsehoods, deceits. Get out of the way. Turn aside from the path.

Cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us. Now do you think anyone in Israel has actually vocalized these words? Are they going to come out and say, we don't want to see God. Don't speak right things.

Speak lies. Or is this in essence what they are saying? What are they probably actually saying? Children who will not hear the law of the Lord. The teaching is tedious.

The teaching bores me. It's not exciting. I don't get a worship experience out of it.

The teaching is too long. The teaching is too detailed. The teaching is too this or too that.

What does that translate to? Speak smooth things. Give me something that's easier to digest. Don't interfere with the schedule of my day.

Don't interfere with my priorities. Don't say things that are going to cause me to have to make a change. Don't say things that are going to cause me to call into question things that I have taken for granted all my life.

Speak smooth things. Prophesy deceits. Get out of the way.

Turn aside from the path. And in so doing, you cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us. Therefore, thus says the Holy One of Israel in verse 12, because you despise this Word and trust in oppression and perversity and rely on them, therefore this iniquity shall be to you like a breach ready to fall, a bulge in a high wall whose breaking comes suddenly in an instant.

He shall break it like the breaking of the potter's vessel, which is broken in pieces. He shall not spare. There shall not be found among its fragments a shard to take fire from the hearth or to take water from the cistern.

Verse 15, in returning and rest you shall be saved. In quietness and confidence shall be your

strength. You don't have to oppress.

You don't have to go out and canvas earth and sea to make a proselyte. In quietness and confidence shall be your strength. But you would not.

And you said, No, for we would not.