

*The Mask of Religion*  
Mark 7:1-13  
Reading: Matthew 23

Bethany Baptist Church  
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...pray...

*Want a Greek vocabulary lesson?*

υπο κριτης – (2x)

(derived from TDNT)

If I say it *carefully*, you can practically hear the English term that is almost its *cognate*.

The term begins with a preposition, **υπο**, meaning *under*.

The word had a history of development; it's a *noun*, but the early definition was derived from a verb simply meaning, "to expound, to answer, **explain**."

Soon it became associated with the idea of **acting**. In Greek art, the actor was the *interpreter (explainer)* of the *poet* or the *chorus*.

The Greeks recognized that the *actor* plays a part, perhaps numerous parts, *removed from reality*.

And on the Greek stage, the actor often worked *under a mask*, to help him project an *assumed persona*.

In classic Greek thought, the idea of the υπο κριτης is never inherently **good** or **bad** – the actor simply *plays his part & wears his mask*, to portray an image that *isn't real*.

But by the time *Jesus of Nazareth* had come to *heal the sick & preach the Kingdom*, the term **hypocrite** had come to be uniformly **damning**.

No one then, *no one now*, wants to be thought of as a **hypocrite....**

Why did Jesus accuse the Pharisees & scribes of acting – of moving behind the mask.

But what does *wearing a mask* have to do with *worship*?

**Please turn w/ me in your NT to Mark 7:1-13.**

The term *hypocrite* occurs only *here* in Mark, but **20X** total across the Synoptic Gospels: Matthew, Mark, & Luke. *It's never a good thing!*

*What does wearing a mask have to do with living the Christian life?  
Let's make three points from Mark 7:*

- 1. The Pharisees Worshiped Behind a Mask (1-5)*
- 2. Jesus Came to Rip Off the Mask (6-13)*
- 3. You need to Remove Your Mask.*

## 1. Jesus accused the Pharisees of worshiping behind a mask (vv.1-5).

- A. Here is a bunch of guys who *lived behind the mask* – living to *convince others* they were *something* they really weren't!  
 ...from v. 1...
- i. **Scribes** – a Jewish religious professional → *legal specialists*. Specifically, w.r.t. *Torah*. From generation to generation, the scribes preserved the *traditions* of the rabbis.
    - a. **It was quite a tradition!** The rabbis had divided the Mosaic law into **613** separate decrees, **365** could be classified as *prohibitions* (no you *don't*) and 248 as *directives* (you *must*).
    - b. **Who could live that way!?!**
  - ii. **Pharisees** – a religious *sect*. The Pharisees were *separatists* who tried to maintain the appearance of living according to those **613** interpretations developed by the Scribes.
    - a. Mark *opens a window* into the lives of the *Pharisees* in **vv.3&4**, which is a sort of *parenthetic* note in the Greek text...
    - b. ...The Pharisees carefully *washed their hands* before *every meal*.
    - c. And let's be careful here: we aren't talking about **personal hygiene** – the Pharisees & scribes were *fixated* on *ceremonially cleanness* derived from over-strict understandings of the **OT**.
    - d. When they return from some busy, bustling public place, there would be this nagging concern: *what if I accidentally touched something unclean? And didn't even know it!*

- e. So when they returned from the market, they were *extremely careful* to cleanse themselves.
  - f. And they had *rules* concerning the ritual washings of their *cups, pitchers, & copper kettles*.
  - g. In the days of Jesus, the scribes had taught the traditions of the elders *orally*, by spoken word. Within the years that followed, those *oral traditions* would be codified in a collection of rabbinical teachings called the *Mishna*.
    - a. The *Mishna* devotes **30** chap. just to washing vessels!
    - b. **30 chapters!?!** - I don't like going through the *owner's manual* on my dishwasher...
  - h. By the way, Mark tells us something else about the Pharisees: *these finicky religious perfectionists hated Jesus*. Mk 3:6 tells us they were *building alliances* w/ groups that would normally be their *enemies*, in order to *destroy Him*.
- iii. Because they *hated Him*, they *were* watching every move He made. So when He came out of *Gennesaret*, probably now in *Capernaum*, this hostile troupe of *religious actors* gathered together from Jerusalem and *surrounded Him*.
- a. **Jerusalem** – The *City of David*. The *home* of the Temple. The *scene* of the annual feasts. The **HQ** for the Sanhedrin (Jewish council). *Jerusalem* – the *seat of Jewish orthodoxy*.

B. The Pharisees *lived* behind the mask, and now they *attacked* the Son of God from *behind the mask*.

i. **Vs.2** tells us that that they had spied *some* (not all) of Jesus' disciples eating **w/o** ceremonial washing.

- *Unthinkable!* How could the followers of any *self-respecting rabbi* **dis** the painfully clear directives to *wash your hands before eating?*

ii. So in **v.5** they *poke their finger* in Jesus' chest and *attack* with this **scathing indictment**:

*“Why do Your disciples **not** walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat their bread with **impure hands?**”*

C. But *why* are we accusing the Pharisees of *worshiping behind a mask?*

i. We could dwell at length on the hundreds of **man-made rules** they layered on top of the Torah.

- But that's more an issue of **legalism** than **pretense**.

ii. **Hypocrisy** has more to do with *genuineness (honesty)* than with *rules*.

iv. The answer is here...we can already start to see the Pharisees' mask in this:

Claiming a life of **piety & pure worship**, they use their man-made rules as a **pretense** for **trapping & destroying** the **perfect Son of Man**.

***The Pharisees lived & worshipped & schemed... behind the mask.***

## 2. And Jesus Came to *Rip Off Their Mask*

### A. *Follow with me as I re-read v. 6.*

- i. *Hypocrite* – That word just makes me **squirm!**
- ii. I spoke about it at length already, but let's stop here for just a second and hear this *succinct definition* by **Willem Hendriksen**: “*The hypocrite is the man who hides, or tries to hide, his real intentions under ... a mask of simulated virtue.*” ... *A mask of simulated virtue!*
- v. As Jesus responded to the Jews that surround Him, He appealed to the *Prophets* & then the *Law*; ... to *Isaiah* & then to *Moses*.

### B. First, Jesus quoted **Isaiah** in **vv.6-8**.

- i. The Pharisees *fired off a question* that dealt w/ washing.
- ii. But Jesus' harsh response made no mention of *basins of water, bars of soap, or clean, linen hand-towels*.
- iii. Instead, He *immediately* branded them as υποκριτης – **hypocrites** (v. 6); then He underlined His accusation by quoting **Isaiah 29:13**.
  - This people honors Me w/ their lips,*
  - But their heart is far away from Me.*
  - But in vain do they worship Me,*
  - Teaching as doctrines the precepts of man.*
- a. Jesus is speaking of a *mask* of worship: **words** that others hear that seem to honor God...

b. But **under** those words is a *heart* that is removed far away (the sense of *distance* in v.7 is almost redundant).

- Don't forget, the Hebrew & Greek idea of *heart* never limits itself to the *emotions*... Jesus is exposing the entire moral man – all that we *really* are, on the inside.

iv. Why was their worship vain? *What is the mask the Jesus rips from their face?*

- Verse 7:** *hypocrites* worship in vain because they add this to the *Law: the principles of men*.
- Verse 8:** *hypocrites* worship in vain because they neglect the *command of God* to this end: to *cling* to the *tradition of mere men*.
- The *actor's mask* is this: an *outer show* of obedience to a set of man-made rules, with no *inner concern* for God or His Word.
- The *actor's storyline* is this: *look at me – I'm holy!*

C. Now that *the mask was off*, Jesus turned the full force of the *spot-light* of the Law of Moses on what lay *exposed*.

- Jesus seemed to *escalate* His counter-attack in **vv. 9-12**.
  - V.9** - “*You nicely (beautifully) set aside the commandment of God...*” **This isn't a complement** – Jesus' words *bite w/ sarcasm*.
  - In **v.8**, the commandment of God is *neglected*; here in **v.9** it's deliberately *set aside*.
    - Beloved, *do you ever do that?* Do you ever deliberately ignore *the clear commands of God* to *maintain your lifestyle?*



- ii. He's already quoted *Isaiah*, now He's quoting *Moses*, citing the *fifth commandment* of the *Decalogue* (*10 Words*): **Read v. 10**
- a. First, **Exodus 20:12 & Lev 19:3** handed Israel the fundamental rule of *honoring your parents*...
  - b. ...then, **Ex 21:17 & Lev 20:9** pronounced the *death sentence* on these who *ignored* God's Word.
  - c. You know...being a *son* or *daughter* is serious business. (**OBTW**, *Jesus was talking to adult sons here!*)
- iii. “...*but* you say...” *but*...think about the line Jesus was drawing – **do you see it there?**; the line between what *Moses said* (v. 10), and what the *Pharisees & scribes said* (vv. 11&12). **That had to cut deep!**
- a. We've seen that the *rabbis* were focused on *ceremonial washing*...but they had *other interests* too!
  - b. The *Pharisees & scribes* were fascinated with the topics of *vows* & about anything to do with the **Temple**, and its life & upkeep.
  - c. A dangerous practice came out of those interests: the vow of **Corban**.
    - **Corban** is from a Hebrew term that describes a *gift set aside to God in the context of a vow*.
    - (Notice that Mark makes a little *parenthetic explanation* for His *Roman, Gentile readers* at the end of **v.11**; same as he did in **vv.3 4**.)

- There was an *insidious loophole* in this tradition: if you had *possession* ear-marked to care for your *parents*, you could declare them **Corban** (*given to God*) and evade your **5<sup>th</sup> Commandment** obligation to honor them.
  - Then...you were actually allowed to *use* the possession ***anyway you pleased!***
- iv. What were the *hypocrites* doing? They were ***invalidating*** one of God's fundamental rules for the life of Israel, and replacing it **with their traditions.**
- And according to Jesus, this was just **one** painful example of *many*.

***The Pharisees lived & worshiped behind the mask.***

***They made the mistake of pointing their finger at Jesus, and Jesus pulled their mask right off.***

### 3. You Need Remove Your Mask...

- A. If you're trying to *impress* people around you with a *man-made set* of moral & religious *rules*, ***you need to stop***.
- B. The *hypocrite's mask* of insincere obedience *sets itself at odds* with the ***Word of God***:

...*follow this thought through our text with me*...

- i. V. 7 – God's teachings are ***added to***...
- ii. V. 8 – God's commandments are ***neglected***...
- iii. V. 9 – God's commandments are ***set aside*** ...
- vi. V.11 – God's laws are ***countermanded***...
- vii. V.12 – God's laws are ***forbidden***...
- viii. V.13 – God's Word is ***invalidated***...

...beloved, if you're living in a way that ***subtracts*** from Christ's commands, ***changes*** His commands, or even ***adds*** to His ***Word***, you're ***carving a mask*** for yourself...

- C. The *hypocrite's mask* hides a heart that's *anything* but *lovely*: What does *religious hypocrisy* really look like?
- i. ***Hollow***: Looks like religion on the *outside*, but holds no interest in *God* or our *fellow-man* on the ***inside***.
    - This was one of Jesus' fundamental points as He quoted Isaiah!
  - ii. ***Man-made***: No basis in the Bible.  
How did Jesus *know* the Pharisees were hypocrites?  
Because their rules were ***home-made***, not ***Bible-made***.
  - iii. ***Strenuous***: Lot's of work. (***Elaborate*** – all those rules!)

- iv. ***Intrusive & unloving:*** *Forces* itself on others.
- You can easily imagine the Pharisees forcing their *nit-picky rules* on their Jewish neighbors.
  - Then see those same *hypocrites standing* around Jesus, trying to *trap* Him w/ their regulations for *washing*.
- vi. ***Dishonest:*** *The mask over the heart.*
- Keeping some *contrived vow* creates a *loop-hole* by which we avoid *fundamental good*.
  - Claiming *righteous indignation*, while seeking the death of the Righteous One.

**Let's take off our masks...**

***Pray...***      *Give us strength to repent and follow Christ.*

*Grant us sincere & obedient hearts.*

*May our lives be genuine and godly.*