

Mk. 7:1-13 “The Washing of Cups”

For the Children: Which do you think your parents would prefer: a son or daughter who didn't always get every spot off the dishes when they helped clean up after meals, but who really wanted to be helpful and please dad and mum; or a child who loved to make sure every bit of dirt was removed, but didn't do it out of love for dad and mum? The Lord knows we will never obey Him perfectly in this life. But He wants to see us trying to please Him, with His help. He is not pleased when we try to impress Him with our deeds, as if we are so wonderful and good. **Questions:** Give some examples of things some might do to try to impress the Lord. What sort of things do people add to God's Law, to try to appear more holy than they are? How do those who really love the Lord look at God's Law?

Introduction:

First Point: The Addition of Laws

- **Additional Purification Laws:** Those who want to impress God or even save themselves by their own law-keeping often invent new laws that they feel are more “do-able.” The OT Law required priests to wash before entering the Tabernacle/Temple (Ex. 30:19); it also required an Israelite who had contacted something unclean to bathe and wash his clothes. But the practice that every Jew should wash his hands before eating bread, was a tradition invented by the Jewish leaders
- **Missing the Point:** It might seem like a good thing to make every Jew act more like a priest, to dedicate all of life to God and to go beyond what the Law required. But the problem is that these defilement/purification laws were meant to show Israel that no one could meet God's standards – all were contaminated by sin – so that they would all see the need for the Saviour. Instead, the Jews tried to make themselves more holy
- **The Precepts of Men:** This is one of the reasons why God forbade adding to the Law – to stop man acting like the Lawgiver and thinking he can make himself holy. In worship and life in general, sinners should not add to God's Law or take away from it (Dt. 4:2, 12:32). This is the point of the 2nd commandment and the Puritan-Reformed “regulative principle” based on it

Second Point: Using the Law Against the Law

- **Experts at Setting Aside the Commandments:** Another legalistic way of making the sinner appear more holy than he is, is to find loop-holes to remove the force of commandments we cannot keep properly – either by playing off one part of the Word against another, or by playing off human traditions against the Word. Here, the Jewish leaders allowed their people to claim their possessions were “Corban” – dedicated for special, sacred use, so they couldn't be used for a common use such as helping needy parents. The laws of offerings and of vows were used to offset the 5th commandment – to invalidate the Word of God (vss. 9, 11, 13)
- **Accepting the Perfect Word:** The Word, however, is meant to be used to glorify God and benefit sinners. It has been written by the all-knowing God for that purpose. It contains no contradictions. It should therefore not be used to play one part off against another

Third Point: Using the Law to Replace the Heart

- **Lips Versus Hearts:** When sinners know, deep-down, that they are not right with God, they often resort to these additions and subtractions. The Lord applied Is. 29:13 to the Jewish leaders, because their honouring of God was merely external and formal – not from the heart. Worship of this kind is not acceptable to God (v. 7)
- **Worship from the Heart:** The Lord requires worship that comes from a heart that loves Him above all else (Dt. 6:4). Such a heart knows that the sinner cannot keep the Law properly. It therefore looks to Christ for forgiveness. Then it asks God for help to be more holy in practice, out of gratitude. That is very different than using human traditions to earn favour with God or to impress men

Conclusion: