



NG Study Guide: Mark 7:1-23 “Jesus Can Make You Clean” [5.2.21]

Love God + know the Bible better:

1. Read the passage cited above, and try to answer the questions below before your group meets.
2. *Leader note: Please review the brief instructions for leaders at the bottom.*

The Study

Thesis: *One person’s idea of what it means to be spiritually clean can vary greatly from another’s. And greater still is the difference between how mankind might define spiritual cleanness and how God defines it. As Jesus talks about traditions and defilement, we’ll discover how each one of us can be made spiritually clean in the eyes of God.*

Context: Another delegation of Pharisees and scribes had been sent from Jerusalem to evaluate the ministry of Jesus. This counsel was meant to see if Jesus was a false prophet or teacher that could potentially lead the Jews astray. However, their fault was found in evaluating Jesus’ ministry based off of religious tradition rather than the Word of God.

1. The Dangers of Tradition [1-13]

Tradition produced spiritual blindness [1]

¹ Then the Pharisees and some of the scribes came together to Him, having come from Jerusalem.

Though their motives of testing Jesus to see if He was a false prophet or teacher seemed right, their tradition caused them to fail to see Jesus as the Messiah God had promised.

Tradition produced judgmental hearts [2]

² Now when they saw some of His disciples eat bread with defiled, that is, with unwashed hands, they found fault. Technically speaking, the disciples hadn’t broken any explicit commandments. The fault that the Pharisees found with the disciples for eating without defiled (unwashed hands) was in reference to ritualistic cleansing that had become a tradition based out of the commandment in Exodus 30 and 40 that the priests were to wash their hands and feet before entering the Tabernacle. Though the disciples hadn’t broken a commandment, the Pharisees based judgement and found fault because of their tradition.

Tradition produced prideful hearts [3-4]

³ 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. ⁴ 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.

To the Pharisees, the cleansing of hands wasn’t enough of a religious act. Therefore, they extended their practices of washing not only to hands, but to cups, pitchers, vessels, and couches used for eating. In their minds, the more they could do to make themselves clean, the better they were. And this tradition of religiosity produced pride.

Tradition inhibited genuine worship [5-8]

⁵ Then the Pharisees and scribes asked Him, “Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashed hands?” ⁶ 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. ⁷ And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’ ⁸ 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.”

For all of their traditions and rituals as acts of religion, Jesus reveals that their outward acts were dissonant from their hearts. Though the Pharisees view their traditions as a means to clean themselves and thereby draw closer to God, in reality their hearts were far from Him and offered Him empty worship.

Tradition produced disobedience [9-13]

⁹ He said to them, "All too well you [e]reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition. ¹⁰ For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother'; and, 'He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.'¹¹ But you say, 'If a man says to his father or mother, "Whatever profit you might have received from me is Corban"—' (that is, a gift to God), ¹² then you no longer let him do anything for his father or his mother, ¹³ making the word of God of no effect through your tradition which you have handed down. And many such things you do."

The Pharisees were well-aware of God's commandments, and likely more so than any other Jews. Here, Jesus references a specific commandment ("honor your father and your mother"), as well as points out the Jewish tradition of "Corban" (willing your possessions to the temple – a special gift to God). While God's explicit commandment was to honor your father and your mother, the Pharisees used the tradition of Corban to disregard God's commandment.

Use the Word to protect yourself from the dangers of tradition.

While traditions aren't inherently bad, their danger comes from elevating them above Scripture. The Word of God should directly influence the way we live and stands as our highest authority.

2. The Root of Defilement [14-23]

Defilement begins in the heart [14-16]

¹⁴ When He had called all the multitude to Himself, He said to them, "Hear Me, everyone, and understand: ¹⁵ There is nothing that enters a man from outside which can defile him; but the things which come out of him, those are the things that defile a man. ¹⁶ If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear!"

As Jesus turns His attention towards the multitude, He reveals that what a person consumes doesn't defile them, but rather what a person *produces*. Ultimately, our sin is not an outward stain from this world, but an inward stain from an unclean heart.

We need Jesus to cleanse and renew our hearts [17-23]

¹⁷ When He had entered a house away from the crowd, His disciples asked Him concerning the parable. ¹⁸ So He said to them, "Are you thus without understanding also? Do you not perceive that whatever enters a man from outside cannot defile him, ¹⁹ because it does not enter his heart but his stomach, and is eliminated, thus purifying all foods?" ²⁰ And He said, "What comes out of a man, that defiles a man. ²¹ For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, ²² thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. ²³ All these evil things come from within and defile a man."

Though the Pharisees had all of their traditions and rituals that they thought made them clean, the one thing the disciples had that the Pharisees didn't was a relationship with Christ. In every traditional sense, the Pharisees were "better" religious people than the twelve. But it isn't tradition or rituals or abiding by the law that makes one clean. The only way to be made clean is to be in relationship with the Savior and to be washed by His blood.

How can we experience heart renewal?

i. Ask God to search your heart: *Psalm 139:23 Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, and know my anxieties; 24 And see if there is any wicked way in me, And lead me in the way everlasting.*

ii. Ask God to soften your heart and receive His Spirit: *Ezekiel 36:26 I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27 I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them.*

iii. Ask God to strengthen your heart: *Psalm 27:14 Wait on the Lord; Be of good courage, And He shall strengthen your heart; Wait, I say, on the Lord!*

iv. Ask God to give your heart new desires: *Psalm 37:4 Delight yourself also in the Lord, And He shall give you the desires of your heart.*

Study Guide Qs

Q1. How might traditions help one grow as a disciple? How might they hinder growth as a disciple?

Q2. How has God's Word protected you from some of the dangers of tradition?

Q3. How has your idea of "defilement" changed after studying this passage?

Q4. What are ways we can encourage those around us who may be feeling "unclean"?

"Digging Deeper" (optional or alternative study)

1. Learn more about the biblical meaning of "clean" and "unclean" in the Old Testament and New Testament:

<https://www.gotquestions.org/Bible-unclean.html>

2. Take some time to read through the entirety of Psalm 51 to see how David asks God to cleanse him: <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm%2051&version=NKJV>

Love your neighbor *outside* the group better:

1. Who would like to share how they sought to befriend or build relationship with their neighbors where they live, work, study, or play this past week?
2. Are there some needs that can provide us an opportunity to love our neighbor outside the group?
3. Here is a neighboring idea(s) for us to consider for the week(s) ahead:

Sometimes introducing yourself to a neighbor can seem daunting. Consider baking treats for your neighbors to help break the ice and start a conversation.

Love your neighbor *inside* the group better:

1. Are there some needs in our group that can provide us an opportunity to love our neighbor within the group?
2. What might we do about that need to help?

Prayer [Loving God and Neighbors better]:

Close the NG meeting with a time of group prayer. Encourage each participant to pray, but don't force anyone to pray. Encourage the group to keep their prayers brief so that each person can pray.

Leader Notes:

1. Seek to involve as many group participants as possible. A good group discussion time allows people to get to know the passage and one another better.

2. Feel free to pre-select the discussion questions that you want to focus on in case there isn't enough time to answer them all.
3. The "Digging Deeper" section provides some optional or alternative study and discussion activities. As a group leader, you can choose to focus on the "Digging Deeper" section, include part of that section in your group meeting, or not use it at all. Try to give the group sufficient notice so they can be prepared for the meeting.
4. Every time you meet consider asking:
 - a. What about this passage is particularly exciting, challenging, or confusing? If a leader is uncertain about a question of doctrine or theology don't hesitate to follow-up with your coach during the week. Then revisit the issue(s) when the group gathers next time.