

Title: RESTORING TRUE RELIGION, MARK 7:1-13
(Chatham, NJ; 09/02/12, AM) [S-P, Two-Point Outline]

Theme: Jesus attacked those whose false piety had enabled them and many others to disobey the Commandments.

Purpose: To explain how these allegedly religious people had actually disobeyed God and to apply that same explanation to religious and non-religious people who do the same things today.

Introduction:

1. Many prophets before Jesus have pointed out the false piety of people who worship God with their lips but whose hearts are far from him.
2. They demonstrate this by their disobedience. "By their works you shall know them."
3. Jeremiah 7:9-10 cuts through the lives of those who stand before God but don't take obedience seriously.
4. Jesus encounters people who have shrouded their piety in a lot of man-made religious gestures but whose lives do not reflect obedience to God's laws.

I. Washing Hands/Washing Hearts, Mk. 7:1-13

A. Washing as a religious cleansing

1. Jesus' disciples ate with unwashed, defiled hands, 2
2. The Pharisees deemed it irreligious
3. Mark explains what they do in verses 3-4; he probably does this for the benefit of his readers many of whom are Gentiles by this time
4. They don't eat unless they wash, baptize, or purify themselves, 4
5. The OT contained ceremonies involving ritual cleansings: from bodily discharges, priestly washings, etc.
6. For the Pharisees this is a religious rite that must be followed in order to be pure
7. Jesus takes issue with the definition of what makes one impure or defiled (14-23)

B. Your hearts are far from God

1. These washings have no spiritual value; they do nothing to heal or harm our relationship with God (though they have hygiene value)
2. Jesus accuses them of being far from God; they only pay him lip service
3. They ignore the real issues involved in the religious life
4. His accusation is in line with Jeremiah and other prophets (Isaiah 29:13)

C. He illustrates

1. As to the 5th commandment: honor father and mother (provide for them); the New Testament tells children to "obey your parents in everything," Col. 3:20
2. They established laws of Corban (originally a sacrifice, but here money that could be set aside for religious purposes and then considered an offering to God)
3. Something dedicated was now meant for religious purposes and could not be used for non-religious purposes (note the alleged religious impulse)
4. The problem here is that honoring parents was a religious purpose, not to mention that Corban was used to hide money
5. Paul connects our faith to parental obligation, 1 Tim. 5:8; further on he counsels widows to care for their elderly before burdening the entire community, 18
6. The Good Samaritan took his religious life to the highways and byways

II. The Separation Today (of our hearts from God)

A. Keep religion out of everyday life

1. The duty to love God and neighbor has cultural consequences

2. But many today would rather have faith be only a private matter, not something that bears directly on societies' important moral issues
3. Former Gov. Mario Cuomo's position on abortion is the classic example: though Catholic he believed that he could support abortion as a public official while being against it in his religious life
4. The left and the abortionists loved this argument
5. He could maintain a religious veneer without caring about the murder of children

B. Sexual mores

1. Homosexuality – without undue attention to this, we have discussed numerous times the inability to justify this practice with Christian teachings and even within the natural order of sexual relations
2. Yet many turn it into an issue of justice and love, thus divorcing it from obedience to clear contrary commands
3. Pre-marital sex: we've taken this out of the context of marriage
4. Marriage: we seek to re-define it contrary to the created order of things
5. Some people still try to maintain belief in Christ, and it usually appears in the form of people saying, "I'm a good person."
6. At least the prostitutes in Jesus' day knew they weren't living right, Mt. 21:31-32, when they heard John's preaching

C. Substitute religion

1. Anytime we have separated our behavior from obedience, no matter what religious practices we engage in, we have done what the Pharisees did
2. Worship is intensely influential
3. What we do here must reflect in the way we live
4. And we cannot make substitutions to make ourselves feel religious

Conclusion:

1. Don't worship with your lips only; it is one of the pitfalls that James implies.
2. Talk is cheap; actions speak louder than words.
3. The Gospel demands obedience, Mt. 7:21.
4. Don't let your religious duties keep you from practicing the real thing: obedience to God's commands.
5. The Gospel is the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ for the forgiveness of sins. Accept it today and live it tomorrow.