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JESUS: GOD'S POWER IN ACTION

What Really Defiles

Bible School Lesson for March 30*

By Rusty Westerfield

There is quite a contrast between chapters 6 and 7 in Mark's Gospel. As chapter 6 draws to a close, Jesus has fed the 5,000, walked on water, and healed all kinds of sicknesses. The crowd who was praising and admiring Him in chapter 6 is the same group who eventually calls for His death later on. As one writer puts it, "He moves from hero to zero." He's a hero in chapter 6 and, in chapter 7, He and His disciples are being criticized for breaking tradition.

Five times in chapter 7 Jesus makes reference to tradition. Now, some traditions are not necessarily bad. Paul told the Thessalonians to "hold the traditions" they had been taught (2 Thessalonians 2:15). Paul is talking about the teaching of God's Word. In Mark 7, Jesus is dealing with human traditions that take the place of God's Word.

The Condemnation of the Jews (7:1-5)

The Pharisees and some teachers of the law were criticizing Jesus' disciples because they hadn't washed their hands before eating. The authority figures had taken an Old Testament law that said the priest had to wash before going into the temple to serve and decided that everyone should wash. Next they added detail after detail to the law until God's simple command became something complicated. God had wanted the priest to wash as a sign of a clean heart. But now the real meaning of washing was lost in the ritual itself. Jesus refused to be bound by such man-made traditions.

If we are not careful we can make a similar mistake. We may

come to the worship service and, instead of giving God our best and focusing on His greatness, we might focus on ritual and ceremony. We might judge someone because he lifts or doesn't lift his hands, or based on whether he claps or doesn't clap to the music. In the process we might forget that worship is a matter of the heart, not the hands.

Jesus' Response (7:6-13)

Jesus told them, "You honor me with your lips, but your heart is far from me." He points out that they had established a tradition that a person who had given a gift to God was justified in not helping his own parents in a time of need. But this practice nullified the Word of God.

How many of us honor God with our lips, but our hearts are far from Him? We sing, "My Jesus I love Thee, I know Thou art mine," but we have unconfessed sin in our lives and no sense of security whatsoever. We sing about being the light of the world and never share the gospel with anyone. We serve the Lord with our lips, but our hearts and actions are much different.

Jesus called them hypocrites. That means pretenders. When we say one thing and do another, we are just pretending. Jesus was teaching that human traditions taking the place of human compassion are what truly defile a person. The Pharisees were interested in traditions (Mark 7:1-5). Jesus was interested in the hearts of people (Matthew 9:35, 36).

We cannot let our traditions and ceremony quench our compassion for people. Jesus loved

Home Daily Bible Readings

March 24	Mark 7:1-8
March 25	Mark 7:9-15
March 26	Mark 7:17-23
March 27	Luke 16:10-15
March 28	Colossians 2:6-10
March 29	Psalm 51:10-17
March 30.....	Luke 6:37-42

people and used things. Today we have a tendency to love things and use people. Jesus cursed the fig tree to teach His disciples a lesson about fruitfulness. Jesus didn't criticize the men who brought their friend to Him by cutting a hole in the roof. Their friend was much more important than the roof. Our focus should be on the greatness of God and not how someone expresses himself in worship.

We should make sure that our hearts match up with our lips. Our walk must match our talk.

THE LESSON WRITER:

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Lesson text: Mark 7:1-23. Printed text: Mark 7:1-15. Memory text: Mark 7:21. *Lesson based on International Sunday School Lessons, ©2000 by the Lesson Committee.