

We'll begin by reading Mark 7:1-8

*“Then the Pharisees and some of the scribes came together to Him, having come from Jerusalem. 2 Now when they saw some of His disciples eat bread with defiled, that is, with unwashed hands, they found fault. 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.*

*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.”*

### **Dear Fellow Redeemed,**

The opposition to Jesus is definitely growing. They're bringing in the Big Wigs—the Pharisees and Scribes from Jerusalem, the holiest of the holy, coming to prove that Jesus was NOT holy. They were trying to expose Jesus and His disciples as hypocrites because they did not follow the tradition of the Elders. Jesus indicates that those Pharisees and Scribes were the true hypocrites because they followed their own traditions but NOT the commands of God. Our own human Nature has the same Hypocrisy, so we need to pay careful attention as Jesus shows us

### **The Making of a Hypocrite!**

What is a Hypocrite? We get our word hypocrite directly from the Greek word *Hypokrites* which is an actor, someone who plays the roll of someone else on stage. That's a good description of a hypocrite, someone who is pretending to be something they are not.

Jesus describes hypocrisy by quoting Isaiah. “Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: ‘This people honours Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me.’” First of all we see:

#### **-I- Hypocrisy Is Outward Actions that do NOT Engage the Heart.**

That can show itself in different ways. Some attend worship because of social pressures, they want people to think of them as good Christians, even if they don't really believe what the Bible teaches. They just want to look good to others. They are more interested in pleasing others than God. Because there is no faith in their heart, hypocrites may worship on Sundays, but not live as God's children.

The Pharisees demonstrated a different type of hypocrisy which may very well be the most common and the most deceptive type. They were very devout in their worship and their life. They believed in God and lived very upright lives. However their hearts were not really worshiping God. They made the law into a way to show God how holy they were rather than God showing them how unholy they were. Their worship was more about glorifying themselves than praising God. Listen to what God said about their worship through Isaiah, “Bring no more worthless sacrifices; incense is an abomination to Me. The New Moons, the Sabbaths, and the calling of assemblies—I cannot endure iniquity and the sacred meeting. Your New Moons and your appointed feasts My soul hates; They are a burden to Me, I am weary of bearing them. When you spread out your hands, I will hide My

eyes from you; Even though you make many prayers, I will not listen.” Isaiah 1:13-15  
There are few things that God hates more than Hypocrisy. Claiming to worship God when they are really glorifying themselves. Their heart is far from God.

In order to keep up appearances,

### **-II- Hypocrisy makes Rules You Can Keep to Look Righteous.**

Jesus continues, “And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.” The Jews added hundreds of rules to God’s law. The idea was that they could build a hedge around the law. If they keep these laws, then they will never be guilty of that. The problem is they were all external things even an unbeliever could do. For example: The Jews reasoned if they always perform a ceremonial washing before eating, then they would never be defiled by anything. As Mark explains, “The Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands in a special way, holding the tradition of the elders.” This had nothing to do with personal hygiene or cleanliness. It was a ceremonial act. This **“Special way”** of washing didn’t require much water. They held their hand with fingers pointing up and then tricked a little water over the finger tips until it ran down to their wrist. Then they turned their finger tips down and tricked a little more water from the wrist until it dripped off their finger tips, supposedly taking any defilement with it. Then they could eat.

The Pharisees took this hand washing very seriously. One rabbi taught that it would be better to walk four miles out of the way to get water than to eat with unwashed hands. The story is told of another rabbi who was imprisoned and given a small ration of water, which he used it to wash his hands before eating rather than to drink it. He said he would rather die of thirst than transgress the tradition. They reasoned that if they always performed this ceremonial washing before they ate anything, then they would never be defiled by anything. They would remain holy. They thought this was so foolproof that one rabbi said, “Whoever has his abode in the land of Israel and eats his common food with rinsed hands may rest assured that he shall obtain eternal life.”

You see their hypocrisy was all about outward actions that they could perform with great zeal and diligence no matter the condition of the heart and soul. It was a religion of ceremony and tradition that even a hardened unbeliever could do. It was more concerned with covering up sin, not exposing sin and cleansing it. It was more interested in appearing righteous than being righteous. That is why, later on, Jesus said they were like whitewashed sepulchres. They looked very clean outwardly but inwardly they were full of dead men’s bones. Their heart is full of decay and rot.

Popular Christianity today displays the same tendency. The vast majority of Christian books today are all about how you can be a better Christian. It’s all about what you can do to make yourself better, not about admitting you can never be good enough to please God and repenting of your sins.

When we get caught up in that way of thinking, then the next characteristic of hypocrisy begins to show up.

### **-III- Hypocrisy loves to Find Fault in Others.**

That was the whole reason the Pharisees came from Jerusalem, to watch Jesus intently and find something to accuse Him of. So, when they saw Jesus’ disciples walking through a field and pick some grain and then eat it without washing their hands, they said, AHA! Why don’t your disciples keep the tradition of the elders. They are eating with unwashed hands.

Hypocrisy is very critical of others and loves to find fault with others because it makes you feel superior. The law is given to act like a mirror for us to look into our own heart to see our sinfulness and need of forgiveness. Hypocrisy turns the law into a pair of binoculars

that allows you to see into other people's hearts and lives to accuse them.

It's not that it is wrong to make your own rules for daily living as we seek to carry out God's commands. We all make rules for our families to follow. Some have rules about how much TV their children can watch or what kinds of shows they can watch. Some don't let them watch TV at all. Some have rules about how many friends they can have over or what types of friends they can have. That's all fine and good to have such rules for your family to help you live a godly life. However, the hypocrisy in our own heart begins to think that our ways and standards are the best, and then we become critical of other families. We point the finger, and think to ourselves, or even come out and say it, "Oh, that person isn't a very good Christian, they let their children do that?" "I can't believe you let your kids watch that TV show." On it goes. Hypocrisy loves to be critical of others because it makes you feel superior!

Do you see how hypocrisy destroys faith. It begins to think that doing certain things is what makes you holy and acceptable to God. The Pharisees and Scribes were harsh and judgmental against others for not keeping their human traditions, but they didn't keep God's commands. Their own hearts were full of greed, envy, lust and hatred and judging contrary to God's command to love your neighbour as yourself, yet they considered themselves holy because they washed their hands before they ate anything.

Lets read the next section, **verses 9-13.**

*9 He said to them, "All too well you 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."*

#### **-IV- Hypocrisy Tries to make Disobedience look Righteous.**

Jesus indicates that the 4th commandment is not just about honouring and obeying your parents when you are young. It is also about taking care of your parents and providing for them when they are older. The Jews made a way to disobey God's command and make it look like they were very holy. They dedicated all their money and property to the Lord by saying "Corban" over it. Since it was dedicated to the Lord, they couldn't use it to care for their parents. The kicker is, they didn't have to actually give any of it to the Lord, it just was dedicated to Him. If they wanted to use it for themselves, they just said "Corban" over it again and they could spend it on themselves.

King Saul did a similar thing. God commanded Him to utterly destroy the Amalekites and not take anything. That was God's punishment for the wickedness of the Amalekites. Saul did defeat them but he did not kill their King and he kept the best of the sheep and cattle. When Samuel asked him why he didn't obey the Lord's command he said, he kept the best sheep and cattle to sacrifice to the Lord. He was trying to make his disobedience look and sound holy. But Samuel didn't fall for it. He said, "To obey is better than sacrifice."

Think about yourself. If we are caught in some disobedience, and we try to make make excuses for ourselves to make it sound like we did the right thing, that is the hypocrisy of our heart showing itself. We would rather justify ourselves than repent and be justified by God.

Now Jesus turns to the people to be sure they got the point. We read the last section, **Vs. 14-23**

*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!"*

*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."*

### **-V- Hypocrisy has Only One Cure - Jesus**

Faith is all about what is in the heart. Washing your hands cannot cleanse your heart. Keeping rules can not make us holy or acceptable to God. Traditions in themselves are not bad, but if we begin to think that we are more righteous because we follow certain traditions, we are deceiving ourselves because the defilement is already in our heart, like the bitterness mentioned in our Epistle reading from Hebrews 12. All sins begin in the heart. Even if we manage to keep our life looking pure outwardly, our heart is still full of every kind of sin. And that's what God sees. The only thing that can make us acceptable to God is the forgiveness of sins in Jesus. It is seeing the greatness of our own sins and turning to God in repentance.

During Lent we see the real cost of our evil heart at the cross. As we sang last Wednesday in Hymn 153 st. 3, "*Ye who think of sin but lightly nor suppose the evil great here may view its nature rightly, here its guilt may estimate. Mark the Sacrifice appointed, see who bears the awful load; 'Tis the WORD the LORD'S ANOINTED, Son of Man and Son of God.*" You see Jesus dying in agony on the cross, that's what you deserve—for all eternity. Jesus was suffering for every evil thought and desire of yours and mine. At the cross we also see Jesus' amazing love as He willingly suffered and died for us. With Christ's Cross before our eyes, we will mourn over our sins in genuine repentance. At the same time we can rejoice in His love and forgiveness.

The cure for hypocrisy is a careful examination of our own heart to see our sinfulness and to find our righteousness and our acceptance before God in Christ alone. That in turn will also change our hearts, so that we delight in doing God's will, not to become better people or to look good in the eyes of others, but in joyful praise of the one who died for us and rose again. Then we will truly seek to live godly lives from our heart in true worship and praise to God.

Amen.