Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Scripture-Twisting Tradition
Scripture: Mark 7:1-13
Code: 41-32

Let's go to Mark chapter 7. Mark chapter 7 is like so many of the sections in Mark because it is an abbreviated gospel, it's a briefer gospel, it's a fast-pace gospel. His favorite word is the word "immediately." He keeps moving rapidly. He is very selective on the sections that he chooses to write about in the life and ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ and this is one of those very notable ones you cannot overlook. Matthew had a very carefully crafted account of this same incident as well. And, of course, Mark's account before us is a full and enriched parallel account as the one in Matthew.

I want to look at these thirteen verses that start the seventh chapter. I could take the time to read them all but I think what I'm going to do is just kind of work our way through so that we experience the event as it unfolds. That's one of the enjoyable aspects of narrative texts, we are there and we live out the very experience of our Lord and the people who are part of the scene.

I will point to one verse, that is verse 7. This is the key verse to understanding this entire incident. "In vain do they worship Me." Vain worship...vain meaning empty, useless, pointless, lifeless, hypocritical worship. This characterized the people of Israel at the time of our Lord. And it wasn't anything new, it was deeply imbedded into their religion. It was in the water. It was in the ground. It was in the air. It was in the fabric of how they thought and how they acted. They were literally the products of centuries of hypocritical, superficial, empty, useless worship. It was directed at the right God but in the wrong way. God does not accept worship, even worship in His name directed at Him done wrongly. It's a problem, a serious problem to worship the wrong God, and it's equally a problem, a serious problem, to worship the right God in the wrong way. And the Jews had turned this into a highly sophisticated art form.

The message of the New Testament is simple. It's the same as the message of the Old Testament, and that is that God desires to be worshiped from the heart...from the heart. Deuteronomy chapter 6, "There is one God, one Lord and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, your soul, your mind and your strength. That's the first and great commandment. The second, of course, is to love your neighbor as yourself."

This message hasn't changed. If you look, for a moment, at the twelfth chapter of Mark, verse 28, "One of the scribes, expert in the Law, came to Jesus and asked Him, 'What commandment is the foremost of all?' Jesus answered, 'The foremost is Hear O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, with all your mind and with all your

strength.'" And our Lord reiterates that that is the only kind of worship, worship that goes in that direction, that pleases God. And second to that, "Love your neighbor as yourself. There's no other commandment greater than these."

"The scribe said to Him, 'Right, Teacher.'" He agreed with Him, so he is, in a sense, out of touch with his compatriots, fellow scribes. "You have truly stated that He is one and there is no one else besides Him and to love Him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength and to love one's neighbor as himself is much more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices." Wow! He understood it.

And so, in verse 34 Jesus saw that he had answered intelligently, accurately. He said to him, "You are not far from the Kingdom of God."

His proximity to the Kingdom of God was evident because he understood that having a relationship with God is about loving God, it's about the heart, it's about...to borrow the words of Jesus in John 4, worshiping in Spirit and truth. This was a very, very rare scribe because, for the most part, the Pharisees and the scribes were the purveyors of an empty, hypocritical, apostate Judaism, aimed at the right God but offered in the wrong way. And this was nothing new in our Lord's time.

Go back to Isaiah chapter 1. The prophet Isaiah is sent by God long before the Babylonian captivity but to warn Israel that judgment was coming in the form of the Babylonian army who would sweep into Israel, slaughter tens of thousands of people, destroy Jerusalem, destroy the temple, take people captive into Babylon as a divine judgment.

Why would the judgment fall? Chapter 1 verse 10, "Hear the Word of the Lord." Verse 11, "What are your multiplied sacrifices to Me? I've had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed cattle. I take no pleasure in the blood of bulls, lambs or goats. When you come to appear before Me, who requires of you this trampling of My courts?"

They were doing what the Old Testament prescribed with regard to sacrifices and coming to the temple, but heartlessly so, with no love for God. "Bring your worthless offerings no longer," verse 13, "incense is an abomination to Me. New moon and Sabbath, the calling of assemblies, I cannot endure iniquity and the solemn assembly." You can't hold on to all your iniquity and then come and worship and expect Me to accept it. "I hate your new moon festivals and your appointed feasts. They've become a burden to Me. I am weary of bearing them. When you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide My eyes from you, even though you multiply prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are covered with blood. Wash yourselves. Make yourselves clean. Remove the evil of your deeds from my sight. Cease to do evil. Learn to do good. Seek righteousness. Reprove the ruthless. Defend the orphan. Plead for the widow."

And then He says in that famous next verse, “Forgiveness in salvation is available. Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord, though your sins are like scarlet, they will be as white as snow. Though they are red like crimson, they will be like wool.” Forgiveness is available if repentance is present.

The prophet Malachi, that wonderful little prophecy that ends the Old Testament, again reminds us of an apostate Israel. That whole prophecy of four brief chapters, is an indictment on Israel for false worship, empty worship, for offering the lame and the halt sacrifice instead of the best lamb, for despising worship, for going through the mechanics of worship while at the same time cultivating iniquity in the heart.

I mean, this was, as I said, this was basically the defining characteristic of the Jewish worship from long before the days of Isaiah, all the way to the time of Jesus their worship was empty hypocrisy. Proverbs 21:27 says, “The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination, well developed, deeply imbedded, empty hypocritical worship characterized the Jews of Jesus’ day as it had their ancestors for centuries...for centuries.

Jesus faced this hypocritical worship in His day as it had been faced by all the Old Testament prophets before the exile and even after the exile. We face it today. There is vast, far-reaching, sweeping, worldwide, empty meaningless worship directed at God that is nothing but hypocrisy and sham and externalism and legalism and ceremony and ritual and we’re all very, very familiar with it.

Our Lord collided with this. Came to bring the true religion, the religion of the heart, loving God from the heart with all your soul, all your mind, all your strength, all your heart. In fact, He declared that the people who propagated this other kind of religion were sons of hell, producing more sons of hell. Called them snakes and vipers, He cursed them in Matthew 23, curse after curse after curse after curse after curse, “Cursed be, you Pharisees and scribes, hypocrites.” He repeats the word “hypocrite” again and again and again. And He gave that speech in the temple in the last week of His life right in the face of the leadership and the hearing of all the people who were gathered for the Passover.

Yes, this compassionate Jesus who healed everybody, who delivered people from demons and who raised the dead, who brought such common grace at such an extent the world had never seen and has not seen since, demonstrated His love and compassion and mercy and kindness toward those who were suffering. But at the same time, when He turned to face the purveyors of false religion, He unleashed the most blistering denunciation that ever came out of His lips, Matthew 23. Empty worship...empty worship engulfs people in a damning false religious system.

Now here we are in the seventh chapter of Mark. We have just come from some events in the ministry of Jesus that mark the peak of His popularity. The sort of peak event is described in chapter 6, the feeding of the, let's say, 25,000 people. Jesus created fish and crackers out of His own hands. Fed them all and they collected twelve baskets to feed the twelve Apostles. It is a miracle power, creative power and a miracle of amazing precision. Just exactly enough and twelve left over to feed the Apostles. This massive miracle stunned the crowd. And according to John, all four gospels record that miracle, according to John's gospel they were so overwhelmed by this, they wanted to make Him King by force. So this is the apex of His popularity. He refuses that shallow, superficial, self-interested effort to make Him King so they could continue to benefit from His powers without necessary believing His message...they refused that. And He said, "I would rather talk about the bread of life, spiritual things far more important than these physical things."

They wanted nothing to do with that, in that same chapter in John that tells the story of them wanting to make Him a King ends with the comment that many of His disciples left Him and walked no more with Him. They went away when He told them the issues that He was concerned about were spiritual and not material. They were materialists. They were religious materialists. Their religion was superficial, not from the heart. Superficial religion doesn't change the heart. They were materialists at heart and they were supernaturalists in their ceremonies. But in any case, they did not love God nor worship Him from the heart. They didn't hate their own sin, they didn't embrace Jesus as their Redeemer and the Savior.

From here on then...that was the peak...and once He refused to keep up the free food and refused to be forced to be a King, the popularity begins to decline...begins to decline. And His attention to the crowds begins to diminish. Oh there are still crowds. He'll feed four thousand a little after this. There are still crowds as He spends the final year of His ministry down in Judea. There are still towns and villages that He circulates through. There will be some crowds. They don't reach the proportions that they did at the peak in Galilee. But most of His efforts are toward His twelve disciples as He prepares them for the monumental task of going into all the world under the power of the Holy Spirit, that we read about, to preach the gospel all the way to the ends of the earth. He will tell parables but won't explain them anymore to the crowd. He'll explain the to the Apostles.

His popularity then begins to fade. And the work of the scribes and Pharisees to discredit Him is beginning to gain momentum. In fact, we know the timing of this because John 6 says it was around the Passover that He fed that crowd, probably preliminary to the Passover.

So we know it's a year now from His death. The Galilean ministry is coming to its end. During that last year of ministry, He spends His time training the Twelve.

Well here, the conflict occurs that probably happened a lot....a lot. We can't assume that this a rare occasion but more likely this is a common occasion. Maybe the issue shifted a little bit. Maybe it was

on this issue as well other times, but He was in constant conflict with the leaders of Israel embodied in the scribes and Pharisees.

What we learn from this is that He rejected all of that phony religion, highly religious rejecters of the truth, highly religious hypocrites, highly religious purveyors of error will be rejected by God. Religion is not the path to God, heart worship is. Religion is the road to hell. And we see here the compassion of Jesus can also be the condemning judge. Compassionate to the people in their suffering, condemning to the false religionists He had been healing, basically the end of chapter 6 verses 53 to 56, healing everybody...everybody as He had been for the two years of His ministry. Anybody who touched Him, it says, was healed. This indiscriminate healing of everyone, delivering them from demons, disease and death.

But there weren't many who believed in Him. Most of them left, rejecting His message, disinterested in feasting on the bread of life. They were...they were the kind of people who would line up today for the prosperity gospel, who want healing, success in life, wealth, have all their needs met which is what the prosperity gospel promises and it's despised by God today as it was then .

Now we meet the condemning judge in verses 1 to 13. Let's work our way through this rapidly. I just point out four segments, the confrontation. "The Pharisees and some of the scribes gathered around Him when they had come from Jerusalem."

Time again, it's around the Passover, some time, we don't know exactly when. The delegation of the officials come, representing Judaism at its peak, at its apex. They are the official Jerusalem experts. They're from the seat of religion, the place of the schools of theology, the location of the most eminent minds and, of course, the location of the great temple....very prestigious group, no doubt requested by Galilean counterparts who needed some help to discredit Jesus and wanted the experts from Jerusalem to show up. They are legalistic, self-righteous, external hypocritical phony religious members of the establishment. They are of their father, the devil, full of hate for the truth, hate for the Son of God, purveyors of lies. They are the darkness and they hate the light. They come from Jerusalem which means they have more prestige than anybody else. They want Jesus dead and they're looking for more ways to make sure that can happen...things for which to indict Him and the battle intensifies.

This is a head-on collision between true and heart religion and false and external religion. Now the first blow in the conflict is thrown by the scribes and Pharisees. Verse 2, "They had seen that some of His disciples were eating their bread with impure hands that is unwashed."

Now I have to stop here and explain a few things. It doesn't mean they were unsanitary. People are not stupid and the disciples of Jesus are not stupid and Leviticus encouraged people to wash their hands, even though they didn't know a lot about germs in those days, they could connect the fact that

if you had hands that had been somehow soiled, people got sick by that. I mean, they could make that connection. You need to be protective of what you put in your mouth. And they knew that. That is all the Old Testament prescribed about that. Just keep your hands clean from those kinds of things that are obviously dirty. The only other kind of ceremonial washing in the Old Testament was with regard to priests in the book of Leviticus. There were some things that priests did ceremonially to demonstrate the need for cleansing from sin as part of their priestly function of offering sacrifices and things like that. But as far as everybody went, the Old Testament only prescribed that you do what's obvious and keep yourself sanitary, protect what goes into your mouth.

But that's not what they're talking about. Mark explains that in a parenthetical section there in verses 3 and 4. Here's his explanation. "For the Pharisees and all the Jews," this reminds us that all the Jews basically bought into the Pharisees form of religion, rather than the Sadducees who were the religious liberals, "The Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they carefully wash their hands." And there's an interesting phrase here in the Greek that includes the word "fist." It's actually and literally the word "fist." They had some kind of ritual ceremony that involved the fist, whether it meant they put their hand into a fist or whether it meant that there was some kind of washing that only went from the wrist forward...we have no idea, we can't find anything that indicates what it was but it does identify for us that there were some kind of specifics with regard to their washings. We don't exactly know what.

Anyway, they don't eat unless they carefully wash with the fist thus observing the traditions of the elders. This isn't about what the Scripture says, this isn't about sanitation. This is tradition...tradition. The elders are their forefathers, the rabbis, generation after generation after generation before. And when they come into the marketplace, they do not eat unless they cleanse themselves and there are many other things which they received in order to observe such as the washing of cups and pitchers and copper pots. In other words, they have developed a system of all kinds of washings and if they go into the marketplace, that's the particular illustration used here, they would escalate the need to do ceremonial cleansings because in the marketplace...guess what?....you would bump in to all kinds of unclean things and unclean people. You might hit a Samaritan, You might run into a Gentile. You might touch somebody who touched a dead body. There were a myriad of ways to be defiled. You might touch somebody who touched a reptile, and it goes on and on and on and on. This was not about sanitation...this was not about sanitation. This was about external rules that had to do with ritual defilement.

Now to understand this tradition to the elders a little bit, I'm going to give you a quick run through history, okay? The traditions of the elders...this is about tradition, did you notice that? A tradition, verse 3, tradition of the elders...verse 5, tradition of the elders...verse 8, traditions of men...verse 13, tradition.

That's what the conflict is about. It's not about Scripture. They were...they were not nearly so concerned about Scripture as they were their tradition. They had made their tradition equal to the tradition. In fact, they had made it superior to the Scripture, like the Roman Catholic Church, and like those false religions that have a tradition equal to the Scripture and a tradition that is the only legitimate interpreter of the Scripture.

It all started, Moses gave the moral law at Sinai and then the Law of God was written down, the Pentateuch being the primary law, and the rest of the Old Testament came. The Jews were concerned about the holiness of the Law in external ways and they wanted to protect the Law. So when the Law was handed down, there were some of the leaders of the great synagogue at Jerusalem who said, "We need to build a fence around the Law. We need to make sure that that Law is kept. And in order to make sure that Law is kept, let's put a fence around it away from it and if people stop at the fence, then they'll never get close to violating the Law. So the fence consisted of generation after generation of rituals and rules and ceremonies and behaviors of all kind, prohibitions, precepts to protect, supposedly, the Law of God. And that's the accusation. Not that Jesus broke the Law, but that He violated the traditions.

When the...when the Jews came back from captivity, they did want to protect the Law. They wanted to keep the Law. Remember Ezra? Ezra studied the Law and observed the Law and taught the Law and, you remember, he got up and read the Law and there was a great revival. The Law was recovered when they came back after the seven-year captivity. And so, Ezra was the first of a group of men known as scribes and their job was to study the Law and explain the Law so that people would know what the Law was and they would be able to avoid violating God's holy Law.

Well, hypocrisy was already everywhere soon after Israel came back and so they decided that in order to assure the people wouldn't break the Law, they'd just put up more and more and more and more barriers, a massive amount of material developed, I mean massive called The Tradition of the Elders. In fact, 200 A.D., not long after the life of our Lord, Rabbi Jehuda(?) pulled together all of this material and it was an eclectic array of material, some of it sort of authoritative teaching by rabbis, some of it scribbled notes by students. It was all kinds of material, good, bad and indifferent, arranging from things that were stupid and foolish and crazy to things that were more sensible. This massive material was all collected together, put in one form and it was called The Mishnah and that means "to repeat." It represented the total accumulated content of Jewish tradition. It contains the decisions of wise men and the musings of idiots and everything in between. But the idea was to elucidate and interpret the Law. The material is full of books, tracts, treatises, headings, chapters, paragraphs.

For example, Mark tells us they had all kinds of laws about the washing of cups and pitchers and copper pots, actually there are thirty chapters in the Mishnah about the ceremonial ritual cleansing of pots and pans. Come on, thirty chapters? Because it wasn't about sanitation, it's about ceremonial

ritual cleansing. So it takes 30 chapters for you to follow the minutia and the prescription of this kind of ritualistic cleaning of a pot or a pan.

Well, there's one whole volume on rinsing your hands ceremonially, and that may be where the fist comes in. I'm not sure just how that worked. Well it was discovered that the Mishnah needed clarity...the Mishnah needed supplementation and so commentaries were written explaining the Mishnah and they were called Gemara. At first they were oral, and then they began to be collected. Gemara means complete. So you have the Mishnah and then explaining the Mishnah you have the Gemara. The rabbinical school at Jerusalem then took the Mishnah and the Gemara and put them both together and came up with the Talmud. Have you heard that word? That's all of that stuff. And then the rabbis at Babylon wrote their own Talmud four times larger than the Jerusalem Talmud. No wonder Jesus said, "You bind heavy burdens on people they can't even carry them." How could you eve get through that stuff?

Then they didn't have enough, so then came the Midrash. The Midrash was all the rabbinic commentary on the books of the Bible. So you had this mass of material that totally covered up the actual Scripture. And, of course, the rabbis were the only legitimate interpreters of Scripture, even as the Roman Catholic Church says, "You better not try to interpret the Bible, the Church is the only legitimate interpreter of Scripture."

Even in the life of our Lord there was a tonnaheim, Aramaic for "to repeat," "to teach," a massive rabbinic interpretation that came out at the very time of Christ. You see, this is why when Jesus preached, they shook their heads and said, "He speaks like one who has authority, not like the rabbis, scribes speak." What do they mean by that? They all quote somebody. They all have to quote somebody. Jesus just said it, He never quoted any rabbis.

How devoted were they to this material? The Jerusalem Talmud, and I quote, says, "The words of the scribes are more lovely than the words of the Law." It says, "It is a greater crime to transgress the words of the school of Rabbi Hillel than the words of the Scripture." It says, "My son, attend to the words of the scribes more than the words of the Law."

So now you know what the story is. By the time you get to Jesus, they're all totally caught up in the traditions of the elders, like Roman Catholics today who haven't got a clue what the Bible says about anything...anything. That's the confrontation. They didn't say to Jesus, "You broke the Law of God." They said...what?... "You violated the tradition." This is the point of attack.

How? Verse 5, "The Pharisees and the scribes asked Him, 'Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat their bread with impure hands?" Not dirty hands, but unceremonially cleansed hands. This is a big issue with them. They said it in verse 2, they accused the disciples of eating with impure hands, not dirty but unceremonially cleansed hands, and repeats it

in verse 5, the same thing is repeated in verse 15, verse 18, verse 20, verse 23. It's all about what's impure.

How important was this? Rabbi Tahaneth said, "Whoever has his abode in the land of Israel and eats his food with washed hands may rest assured that he shall receive eternal life."

Really? Eternal life? That's how far it went. I mean, if you don't have a heart religion, you've got to work your way there. And if you can't get there by being moral, well at least you can get there by rinsing your hands, who can't do that? None of this had anything to do with Scripture.

Oh, by the way, they also taught that a demon named Shibtah sat on men's hands while they slept. And not to wash hands ceremonially meant that he was transferred to the mouth and got inside.

The story is told of famous rabbi Accibah(?) that when he was imprisoned and had his allowance for water restricted, he took what little there was and used it for the ceremonial rinsing of his hands rather than drinking it. To which he responded, "I would rather die than transgress the tradition of the elders." Another rabbi said, "It's better to go four miles to water than to incur guilt by neglecting hand rinsing."

You know, any kind of folly like this, any kind of foolish tradition like this, any kind of externalism like this is the very opposite of what pleases God. He wants that we love Him with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, right? From the heart, that we delight in Him. So that's the confrontation.

The condemnation, verses 6 to 9. He said to them, quoting Isaiah 29:13 verbatim from the Greek translation called the Septuagint. He said to them, "Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites as it is written. You're just like the ones before the captivity. This people honors Me with their lips but their heart is far away from Me." Folks, that is the whole issue of religion. If it's all about the external, if it's all about the ceremonial, the ritual, if it's all about behavior and not about the heart, then it is not what honors God. "In vain do they worship Me that way, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men."

Christ didn't deny breaking the tradition, He broke it. He broke it without regard for it. He had no respect for their whole traditional system. He ignored it. He swept it aside. It was meaningless. It was damning. It obliterated the truth. What the disciples were doing was not a problem. What the Pharisees and scribes were doing was a big problem. They were actually going to go to hell with rinsed hands.

Then He gives them an illustration of this hypocrisy. After condemning them from the text of Isaiah 29, "You honor Me with your lips, your heart is far from Me," this is empty worship. He says, "You neglect the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men." He says, "You are experts...verse 9...at setting aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition." Underline your...your

tradition. This is yours. This is the precepts of men that has replaced the wisdom of God, the commandment of God. And here's an illustration, okay? Here's an illustration. "For Moses said," let's go right back to the Law, let's go right back to Scripture, "honor your father and your mother, and he who speaks evil of father or mother is to be put to death." That's right out of Exodus 20:12, "Honor your father and mother," one of the Ten Commandments, right? "Honor your father and mother," Exodus 21:17 says, "He who speaks evil of his father or mother, let him be put to death." Kill him. Capital punishment for someone who shows disrespect to parents.

Wow. You're to love your parents, honor your parents, respect your parents, treat your parents with care. That is one of the Ten Commandments. To violate that brought about the penalty of capital punishment. To honor was to respect, to admire, and here's the key, to support, to meet their needs. Support father, support mother. That was in the very fabric of the Ten Commandments, one of the very clear Old Testament principles.

But you say ...verse 11... "If a man says to his father or his mother, 'O whatever I have that would help you is Corban." That is to say, "Given to God." "You no longer permit him to do anything for his father or mother."

What is this talking about? Well Corban means that, devoted to God, an offering. And here's what had developed in the rabbinic system. "O mom, dad, I know you have need. I know you're struggling for food. I so wish I could give you some money. However, it's all devoted to God." That's what they did. And just to make it clear to you, that was a deferred gift. You know what that means? Pledged but not yielded. They kept it and they managed it and they did what they want with it. But the idea is that when I go, it's all God's. And after all, Numbers 30 verse 2 says, "Don't make a vow and break it." This was the rabbinical tradition of looking pious by devoting things to God which was simply a way in which you could violate the commandment to care for your aged parents who were in need. That's how hard-hearted they were. "Oh, I'm very sorry, Mom, Dad, just can't give it to you, I dedicated it all to God and you'll understand that's a much higher calling for this money, isn't it? Nothing better than giving to God.
The whole purpose was, they didn't want to lose the cash. They wanted to avoid the loss by saying this and there were ways in the rabbinical system to undo the vow. The Talmud says that a man was not even bound after saying "Corban" to dedicate the gift, he was not bound to give it immediately, he was not bound to limit its use for himself, he was not bound to give it to someone other than he had pledged to do, that is to say if he chose he could break the vow and give it to someone else...not to God.

And it was pretty typical, according to some of the historians, to say "Corban" over everything you had and in that way you could look spiritual and give nothing to anybody. So you got around a biblical command, didn't you? That's the hypocrisy of your religion. You're using your condition to cause people to disobey God and disobey their parents. You rabbis put this stuff in place. You scribes...this

is your approach. Your tradition has trumped the commandment of God. You're experts, verse 9, of setting aside the commandment of God to keep your tradition.

Verse 13 is the summation...that was the illustration...verse 13 is the summation, "You invalidate the Word of God by your tradition." What an indictment. It's an unbiblical religion. This kind of Judaism is not Old Testament Judaism, it is traditional Judaism. Old Testament Judaism would end up in New Testament Christianity. Do you understand that? If you look at Jewish people today who reject the Messiah, that's not Old Testament Judaism, that's traditional Judaism. That's just the legacy of this stuff, if in fact they hold on to any religion. The Talmud says, "To be against the words of the scribes is more punishable than to be against the words of the Scripture. That's the Talmud. That didn't come along until 200 years after Jesus. But that's how they thought. Jesus says, "No, no, you will not get away with voiding the commandments of God with your tradition." Tradition is meaningless. What matters is a heart that loves God, humble, selfless love.

The summation is a terrible indictment, invalidating the Word of God by your tradition. They would have gone to the death saying, "We are applying our tradition to protect the Law, to fence the Law." He says, "You use your tradition to replace the Law." No heart.

That's pretty bad, the hypocrisy. One rabbi was said to be honest toward the hypocrisy of Judaism. He said this. "There are ten parts of hypocrisy in the world and nine of them live in Jerusalem." Wow. And he had one for the rest of the world. I'm afraid we are pretty use to this in the church, typical hypocritical religion abounds in all phony forms of Christianity that are anything but a true, humble, selfless love for God and love for the Lord Jesus Christ and delight in Him.

God's name, I think, is taken more times in vain in churches than anywhere else. The blasphemy in the sanctuary is worse than the blasphemy in the street. Empty ceremony, superficial worship, thoughtless praise, errant doctrine, love of error, indifferent prayer, phony ritual, these things abound. They mark hypocrites and the doom of hypocrites is pronounced in Matthew 23. "Judgment will come upon those who offer their lip but not their heart, who draw near with their mouth while their heart is far away," as Isaiah 29 says. All true worship comes from the heart because we love God, because we love Christ and it issues in obedience to Scripture. We don't need tradition, we don't need the church to interpret everything for us. There is one revelation of God that is absolutely true and it's the Scripture and not anything beyond this. And if we love God, we love His Word. If we love His Word, we love to obey His Word. True religion is humble love for and delight in God. Humble love for and delight in Christ. Humble love for and delight in the Holy Spirit, in the beauty of the holiness of our Lord, in the glory of His majesty. And this humble love leads us to love the Word and love to obey the Word.

In Mark 12:15 it says of Christ, "But He knowing their hypocrisy..." Wow. They don't ever escape, no hypocrite ever does. He knows, He knows yours, He knows your heart. He knows if you love Him, if

the trajectory of your life is to love Him with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, if He is your all in all, if He is your everything, if you adore Him, if you love Him and worship Him from the heart, He knows that and He knows if you're a hypocrite. And you're in some pretty bad company if it's all external. We manage...we manage to strip out all the ceremony, don't we? Purposely, to strip out all the ritual, get rid of all the routine, all the costumes, all the falderal, all the superficiality. But we still have the possibility of hypocrisy, people trying to live a good life on the outside earn their way to God while their hearts are far from Him.

What is the solution? To repent. Read the testimony of Paul in Philippians 3. He was a Pharisee, a Pharisee of the Pharisees. He was a hypocrite of the first rank and finally saw it for what it was. He called it manure...manure. And he said, "All those things that once were gain to me, I count it as loss." They were all a disastrous loss. They were driving me into hell. And at that point, he says, "I discovered the righteousness not of my own, but the righteousness of God which comes by faith in Christ and his life was transformed."

Hypocrites desperately need to repent...desperately need to repent. There is forgiveness. "Come now, let us reason together," says the Lord. "Though your sin be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow. Though they be red as crimson, they shall be as wool." The sin of hypocrisy is a sin that God forgives all the time. Embrace His Son, repent of your religion.

A lot of people see their sins in their sins, but they don't see their sins in their religion. Repent of your false religion, embrace the true love of Christ. Pray that God will grant you that forgiveness and that love.

It's been wonderful this morning. Thank You, Lord, for Your goodness to us. Thank You for the time of worship, what a wonderful time it's been for these dear friends who have come to be with us and to celebrate and worship because they love You from the heart. O Lord, I pray that You'll work that work of grace in many hearts today, that You will cause people to understand that there is sin in their religion when it is false and superficial and shallow and ceremonial and ritual and legalistic and self-righteous. May they see the sin in their goodness, the sin in their religiosity and repent of that and embrace the salvation that comes only through loving Christ. We love You, Lord, we love You because You first loved us. We love our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. We love the Holy Spirit. We want to love You with all our being and that is the direction of our lives, that is the desire of our lives. One day we will experience that as the perfection when we love You perfectly in Your presence. Until that day, increase our love for Your glory we pray. Amen.

Available online at: http://www.gty.org
COPYRIGHT (C) 2014 Grace to You

You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright).