



8: Inside Out | Pastor Joe Witter | August 1, 2010

A. Fellowship Time (10-15 minutes)

1. Chitchat. Perhaps offer coffee, tea, or a cold drink with some snacks.
2. Pray (or invite someone to pray) to open the discussion.

B. Review Time (Read the summary below to the group: 5-10 minutes)

Introduction: This summer, we are working our way through the Gospel of Mark. In Mark 7 Jesus and His followers have a run in with the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law, Jewish religious leaders who were very meticulous in their religious observances. [Read **Mark 7:1–23** together now.] The Jewish religious leaders were concerned that Jesus' disciples were breaking the rules related to ritual hand washing. The issue was not physical cleanliness, but ceremonial cleanliness, or purity. It was about being acceptable to God. The first five books of the Old Testament are the Torah, or the Law of Moses. This Law had 613 specific commands that ranged from moral law, such as the Ten Commandments, to civil law that regulated community life in Israel, to ceremonial law that related to religious practices, such as sacrifice. Several centuries before Christ, Jewish religious experts became concerned with applying these laws to every conceivable situation. They developed a "passion for definition." Work had to be defined, and this resulted in thousands of rules and regulations governing every conceivable action and situation. Three centuries after Christ, they were written down in what is known as "the Mishnah." 25% of the Mishnah was rules about ritual purity, from hand washing to washing dishes, as Mark mentions here. It was a religious system of thousands of rules and regulations that one followed to be acceptable to God. It put all the emphasis on externals, but Jesus challenged this system. He insisted that it was upside down and inside out.

1. Upside down: when we elevate tradition above Scripture. Jesus accused the Pharisees and teachers of the Law of putting their own human traditions above the commands of God. There is no command in the Old Testament Law requiring everyone to do a ceremonial hand washing. It was a human tradition, not a divine command. When we elevate human tradition above God's commands, we end up doing crazy things. We forget that the Great Commandment is to love God and love people. And it gets worse, when our human tradition actually violates a divine command. We always want to submit our traditions to God's word. The New Testament uses the word "tradition" in both a negative and positive sense. Here we see the negative: the traditions of man are contrasted with the commands of God. But "tradition" is also used positively, of the apostles' teaching about Jesus that was faithfully passed down from the apostles to the next generation. **1 Corinthians 11:2** says, *"I praise you for remembering me in everything and for holding to the teachings, just as I passed them on to you."* And **2 Thessalonians 2:15** says, *"So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter."* Paul writes in **1 Corinthians 11:23**, *"For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread,"* and in **1 Corinthians 15:3**, *"For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures."* The Greek word for "tradition" refers to something that is passed on. This tradition was the teaching of the apostles that was guarded and passed on to each new generation. This is the Great Tradition that is recorded in Scripture and that the church has guarded for 2000 years. Each generation develops its own traditions, but it is upside down when we elevate human traditions over God's word. It is inside out when we emphasize externals over the heart.

2. Inside out: when we emphasize externals over the heart. Religion often devolves into a system of rules and regulations that emphasizes externals rather than the heart. The Gospel is about our Creator God coming to earth to bring us back into a relationship with Him that makes

all things right, starting in our hearts, and then out into the world. But we take that relationship and turn it into a bunch of rules about external things. These religious people were very concerned with ceremonies, but not with the heart. If you didn't wash your hands the proper way before you ate, you wouldn't be acceptable to God. It didn't matter what was in your heart. As long as you washed your hands, you were clean. But Jesus said in **Mark 7:14-15**, "*Listen to me, everyone, and understand this. Nothing outside a man can make him 'unclean' by going into him. Rather, it is what comes out of a man that makes him 'unclean.'*" This was one of the most radical things Jesus ever said. In addition to the ceremonies of hand washing, the Jews had a long list of clean and unclean foods. Eating something unclean made you unacceptable to God. They took this very seriously. They were willing to die for it, and did. Then Jesus came along and, with a single sentence, swept all of it away. Jesus explained in **Mark 7:18**: "*Don't you see that nothing that enters a man from the outside can make him 'unclean'? For it doesn't go into his heart but into his stomach, and then out of his body.*" It's all external, but God looks at the heart. In **1 Samuel 16:7**, Samuel believed Eliab to be God's choice for king, but the Lord told him, "*Do not consider his appearance or his height for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance; the Lord looks at the heart.*" And Jesus tells us in **Mark 7:20-23**, "*What comes out of a man is what makes him 'unclean.' For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and make a man 'unclean.'*" The Greek reads, "*From inside, from the hearts of men, the evil thoughts come out.*" Then Jesus lists them: sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed and so on. All our sin and impurity comes from our evil thoughts. This is why in **Matthew 5** Jesus took the commands from externals to internals. [Read **Matthew 5:21-22** and **Matthew 5:27-28** together now.] Jesus knew that the problem isn't outside us. It's inside. Jesus came to scrub us clean and to change us from the inside out. He came to give us a new heart that results in new thoughts, new actions, and a new life as it says in **2 Corinthians 5:17**, "*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!*" We can't make ourselves clean and acceptable to God, but Jesus can. Religion deals with externals. Jesus deals with the heart. And one last thought: Jesus said in **Mark 7:6-7**: "*Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written: 'These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.'*" Jesus called these very sincere and religious people hypocrites. They go through the motions, but their hearts are far away. Religion starts outside and emphasizes externals. Jesus starts inside and emphasizes the heart.

C. Life Group Questions (Select, revise, and add as desired: 20-40 minutes.)

1. Describe a time when you've found yourself tempted to elevate tradition above Scripture.
2. What are some ways we, as either individual Christians or churches, can guard against getting our priorities upside down?
3. Paul notes passing down positive traditions in Christ's family. Review **1 Corinthians 11:2, 11:23** and **15:3**. What are some ways you practice this command?
4. Do you ever feel like you're "going through the motions" of Christianity while your heart is far from God? How can we change our focus from external things to the heart? What does the Sermon on the Mount teach us about that focus?

D. Personal Application (1-3 minutes)

Ask yourself: what am I doing now that I couldn't do without the Holy Spirit? Make a list and surrender your heart to God this week.

E. Prayer Time (As a whole group or subgroups of 3-4; 10-15 minutes.)

- Ask God to help you reveal any areas where you are tempted to emphasize externals rather than what is in your heart.
- Ask Him to "scrub your heart" and surrender yourself to Him.
- Pray about any other issues that came up during the discussion.