

Pentecost 13 8/23/15
Mark 7:1-13 B

“YOU LEAVE THE COMMANDMENT OF GOD AND HOLD TO THE TRADITION OF MEN.”

What is the 2nd Commandment?

The 2nd Commandment is the one about God’s name -- not misusing the name of God. We typically think of the 2nd Commandment pertaining to profanity, four-letter words. To be sure, Paul writes, “Let no unwholesome talk come out of your mouths (Eph 4:29),” but the 2nd Commandment really does not pertain to four-letter words. Its more about telling lies about God. Luther writes in the *Large Catechism* that “the greatest abuse occurs in spiritual matters. These have to do with the conscience, when false preachers rise up and offer their lying vanities as God’s Word.” The greatest abuse against the 2nd Commandment is when false preachers tell their lies as the Word of God.

This is exactly what Jesus is teaching us in our Gospel lesson. Mark tells us that some Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus, not for mercy, but to accuse and condemn Him because some of His disciples did not follow the custom of washing their hands before they ate. Such washing was not done for sanitary reasons, to prevent the spread of germs. Rather, the Jews feared that their hands may have become ritually unclean by accidentally brushing against a Gentile, the possession of a Gentile, or anything else that was ritually unclean. This ritualistic washing of hands, as well as cups and pots, was not required by God in His law. The rules about washing were part of the later traditions added by religious leaders.

I. They were holding to the “tradition of the elders” rather than the Word

of God.

What was so harmful about the Pharisees' and scribes' criticism of Jesus' disciples is the false belief that motivated it. These religious leaders believed that they were right with God because they completely and perfectly fulfilled the letter of the law, the law they themselves had written. In other words, they believed they were saved by their works.

They were adding to the Word of God.

“Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it written, ‘This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’ You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men,”

Jesus said of them.

This tradition of men still fills our world and our ears today. The devil and our own flesh tell us that it is just too easy to be saved by faith alone. So, they tell us that we have to do something to be saved. The Pope says that you can't eat meat on Friday, you have to pray to Mary, and do all kinds of good works, and then, maybe you will get to go to heaven. Islam says you have to do 5 things -- confess “There is no god but Allah and Muhammad is his prophet;” say prayers 5 times each day; pay alms; fast during month of Ramadan and make a pilgrimage to Mecca. Do these five things and you just might enter Paradise. And of course, the President, Prophet, and Seer in Salt Lake City says wear the correct undergarments, don't drink coffee, and you will be the god of your own planet some day. That is, if you are male. If you are a wife, you have to hope that your husband will call your name so you can join him on his planet. I guess if he doesn't call your name you just float out there in space or something, I kid

you not! Still others say don't drink booze, don't dance or play cards.

What do all of these have in common? They are teaching the traditions of men as the Commandments of God. They are telling lies about God and breaking the 2nd Commandment.

To say that faith alone does not save, that you still have to do something to be saved, is a lie of the devil. More than anything else, it destroys the Gospel of Christ. Paul writes to the Christians in Galatia, those saints attacked by the lies of the Judaizers teaching as doctrine the commandment of men, "I do not nullify the grace of God, for if justification were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose (Ga 2)."

In our Lutheran Confessions, our Lutheran Fathers confessed this great truth of Scripture, "Our churches have taught that we cannot merit grace or be justified by observing human traditions." We don't need more rules. We don't need more commandments. We need Grace.

II. How are we saved? By faith in Jesus -- alone, because our Savior did for us what we could not do for ourselves -- He made us holy before God. In our Epistle, Paul teaches us,

"Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her, that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that He might present the church to Himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish."

Christ has finished all that needed to be done for our salvation.

Nothing more needs to be done.

Our Lutheran Confessions say it this way: "Righteousness comes by faith to those who believe that they are received by God's grace into grace for Christ's sake."

Our Lutheran Confessions confess this because this is what Scripture teaches. “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast,” St. Paul writes (Eph 2).

We must firmly hold to the teaching of justification by grace, for Christ’s sake, through faith because it is the chief article of the Christian faith which distinguishes Christianity from all false religions and it alone give enduring comfort to penitent sinners.

III. What happens when we leave the commandments of God to hold to the traditions of men? Several things:

1. The Gospel is obscured. The Gospel is the Good News of the life and salvation that we have in Jesus. But, when the focus of our religion is what I must do or what I must not do, our faith becomes all about me and our foundation is no longer Christ.

2. The 10 Commandments teach us what a holy, God-pleasing life is. If we can define what a holy life is in any way that each of us wants, then the focus is not going to be on God and what He wants, but the traditions, the teachings, of men become more important.

And, there is something else that happens. If I do what I think is holy and God-pleasing and you don’t, it is so easy for me to become a Pharisee and think that I am a better Christian than you are.

These is why we learn the 10 Commandments because they teach us what we should and should not do to lead a God-pleasing life.

3. And, there is great danger to your faith and conscience. It is impossible to keep all the rules, the traditions, the commandments of men. When the focus of your faith is always

yourself -- you are always left asking, "Have I done enough? Have I been good enough?" And, your heart will never rest; your conscience will have peace. How true are the words of St. Augustine, "O Lord, our souls come from Thee, and they know no rest until they rest in Thee."

This is why we pray, "Almighty and merciful God, defend Your Church from all false teaching and error that Your faithful people may confess You to be the only true God and rejoice in Your good gifts of life and salvation."