

14 S. after Pentecost 8/25/24
Mark 7:1-13 16B

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

p. 321 {p. 300} - What is the 2nd Commandment?
What does this mean?

The 2nd Commandment teaches us not to misuse 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*, but the 2nd Commandment really does not pertain to four-letter words (Ep 4:29). It has to do with telling lies about God. Luther writes in the Large Catechism,

“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. I have to emphasize this, as we lived through the age of Covid, 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. Here’s the key: this ritualistic washing of hands, as well as cups and pots, was **not** – did everybody hear me say “not” -- required by God in His law. The rules about washing were part of the later traditions

added by religious leaders; we could say simply the opinions of men.

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. That’s why Jesus says this, *“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.*

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. You can’t drink alcohol, or dance, or play cards. You can’t eat meat of Friday and you have to pray to Mary. You have to do 5 things – confess “There is no god but Allah and Muhammad is his prophet;” say prayers 5X each day; pay alms; fast during the month of Ramadan; and make a pilgrimage to Mecca. Do these 5 things, and you might just enter Paradise. And, the President, Prophet, and Seer in Salt Lake City says wear the correct undergarments and 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’m not joking, by the way.

These are the traditions of men, the lies of the devil. 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 opinions of men, *I do not nullify the grace of God, for if justification were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose (2:21).*

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 (vv. 25-27).

Do you happen to recall Jesus’ dying words on the cross? “It is finished!” 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 the Bible 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 (Ep 2:8-9).*

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? Let me share with you 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, my hope for everlasting life and heaven 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, and the traditions 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.

Bad example: I say and teach that Christians can only wear Saucony running shoes. So, when you go for your daily run, you must wear Saucony shoes. Which isn't a good illustration, because I'm currently running in Brooks shoes. But, I see you running in your Saucony's and I think and tell people, "How could you do such a thing!"

Do you see what happens in my example? I've become a pharisee and, by my own traditions and opinion, I think I'm a better Christian than you are. So that there is no misunderstanding, let me be clear: we live under the banner of Christian freedom, which means you can wear any brand of running shoes your little heart desires. In fact, {smart} won't run at all, right. God's Word says absolutely nothing about running shoes.

3. And, there is great danger to your faith and conscience. It is impossible to keep all the rules, the traditions, the commandments, the opinions of men. When the focus of your faith is always yourself – what you've done, what are to do or not do, what you are supposed to do -- you are always left asking, "Have I done enough? Have I been good enough to get into heaven?" 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." Yes, My Friends in Christ, faith always trust, always hopes, always rejoices in Jesus – alone.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.