

Day 72, Mark 7

by David Servant

David Servant warns against the dangers of man-made doctrines and the importance of understanding the reasons behind God's commandments.

Scripture: Exodus 34:26, Matthew 15:3, Mark 7:3, Galatians 1:10, Colossians 2:8

Topics: "Legalism", "Tradition"

Description

David Servant delivers a sermon on the dangers of man-made doctrines, using the example of the Pharisees who created numerous 'fence laws' to prevent breaking God's commandments. These traditions, like the Mishna, eventually became as binding as the Mosaic Law, leading to a legalistic and burdensome approach to faith. Jesus condemned the Pharisees for prioritizing human traditions over God's commandments, revealing their hearts were far from God and warning against following such precepts of men.

Transcript

Mark mentions how the Pharisees observed "the traditions of the elders" (7:3, 5), one of which was the requirement to wash their hands carefully before eating, and another of which was cleansing themselves after returning from the marketplace. Those traditions were originally based on God's commandments and were designed to put a hedge around them, so that by following the "fence laws," there was no possibility of breaking God's laws.

For example, the Mosaic law declared, "You shall not boil a young goat in its mother's milk" (Ex. 34:26). This related to an occult fertility rite practiced by the Canaanites---whom the Israelites dispossessed after their deliverance from Egypt. God didn't want His people practicing pagan superstitions. The Jews, however, ignored the spirit of that particular law and created fence laws to prevent anyone from getting anywhere close to breaking the letter of it.

For example, a person might, at the same meal, drink goat's milk and eat goat meat. There was some chance---albeit a slim one---that the milk might be from the mother of the goat that was being eaten. Once mixed in the stomach and heated there, a "boiling" of sorts would occur, and one would be guilty of boiling a goat in its mother's milk! So a fence law was established to prevent such a "transgression" from ever occurring. That law forbade the eating of any meat and dairy product together, because you never know if some goat's meat may have mixed with some beef at the slaughter house, or if some goat's milk may have been mixed with some cow's milk at the dairy!

If one ate any meat product, he must wait a specified time for it to be fully digested before consuming any dairy product, and vice versa, lest they mix in one's stomach. And all meat and dairy products should be kept in separate kitchens, lest there be any accidental mixing of the two. Moreover, completely separate dishes must be kept for eating meat and dairy products, because there was a chance that a small particle of cheese might remain on your plate from a previous meal. If that cheese was made from goat's milk, and if you happen to eat some goat's meat on that same plate, that goat's meat might be from a goat whose mother's milk was used to make the cheese, and thus when combined in your stomach, you'd be guilty of boiling a young goat in its mother's milk! (It was because of these fence laws that I found it impossible to order a cheese pizza with pepperoni the last time I visited in Israel!)

There were at least 1,500 fence laws surrounding the single commandment that forbade working on the Sabbath. Walking across a field on the Sabbath was forbidden, because you might inadvertently cause a grain of wheat to separate from its stalk, thus making you guilty of reaping on the Sabbath. Your foot might also step on a grain that had fallen on the ground, and by stepping on it, you might cause the wheat to be separated from the chaff, making you guilty of threshing on the Sabbath. It was also possible that your garment could create a breeze that would cause the chaff to blow away, making you guilty of winnowing on the Sabbath. And if a bird saw that grain and swooped down to eat it, you would be guilty of storing grain on the Sabbath!

Eventually, all those fence laws came to be considered as binding as the Mosaic Law, and they were compiled into what is called the Mishna. If there was disagreement between the two, the Mishna, by its own testimony, actually superseded the Mosaic Law. This Jesus condemned, citing an example of how the scribes and Pharisees invalidated the fifth commandment, and by their tradition released people from responsibility of caring for their elderly parents. Their doctrines were "precepts of men," which proved that their hearts were far from God.

The lesson for us? Beware of man-made doctrines. And if we understand the reasons behind God's commandments, we're less likely to be misled by those who want to saddle us with heavy burdens.

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