

The Law Misunderstood.
Mark 7:14

Psalms 51

Hebrews 8

Congregation. Jeremiah 31:31-34

This morning I want to recap a little bit from the last time we were here, since it was a 2 weeks ago and this weeks passage flows directly out of the previous 13 verses. So let us start out this morning by reading the first 13 verse's here in chapter 7 of Mark. In Jesus dealing with the Pharisee's here he goes right to the core of the issue. They are looking at the outside works of his disciples and Jesus directs them to the inward sins of their hearts, calling them Hypocrites, fakers. Taking a passage from Isaiah, a prophet well esteemed by the Pharisee's and applying it to them.

“This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. And in vain they worship me teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.” This really is the core issue of faith and religion is it not? Not just here with the pharisee's but also in the world today. There are so many who with their lips proclaim Christ, or God yet in their lives there is no reflection of Christ's life within their own. These are those who just like the pharisee's here always looking for an outward appearance of morality and law keeping as their justification toward God. Yet their heart is deceitful and wicked, as Christ points out here in this chapter with their practice of setting aside their personal wealth toward the church in the event of their death not leaving any for their families or the poor.

This outward act of piousness that Jesus points to, this claiming their wealth as Corbin, exposes that while they may observe their traditions and think themselves holy, but their heart is wicked and full of deciept for they are taking something which was designed to support the temple worship and priests and twist it into their own selfish gain. Their quote and quote donation, was not truly a donation but rather a designation that upon their death the temple and priests would obtain their land and wealth. Which gave them full usage of it until their death. So they were not sacrificing anything in their giving, but rather were denying their own family their rights to their property and wealth. As you can see it looks pious, but in reality it is grounded in selfishness, and bitterness toward their own family.

With their lips the serve God, but with their hearts they serve themselves. And as we know, God does not require mere lip service, and moral behavior but a devoted heart. And it has always been this way, King David understood this when he wrote Psalm 51 that we read this morning. After David was caught in sin with Bathsheeba, he did not look to cover it over with their traditions, and sacrifices but instead cried out to God for forgiveness. For he understood that God's righteous requirement was not the blood of lambs and bulls, but something else, a broken and contrite heart. God requires true repentance of the heart, not just outward workings. That is not to say that your outward works of morality and good deeds are not good, but it is the heart behind those deeds is what matters. Goodness flows from a heart full of the love of God, It is what is inside flowing outward that shows a heart that has been justified by God, not the outside works that justify the heart. But I am getting a little ahead of myself here, there you have it, the conclusion to today's message.

This issue here is one thing that I think can not be stressed enough. As I said when we were here in this passage 2 weeks ago, the world is full of pharisee's and hypocrites. Those who appear righteous on Sunday, but on Monday return to their sinful lives. There is no true change, but rather just an outward action of religion. “The people honor me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.”

We see this teaching continued in the last half of chapter 7 here as well which is our passage for today. So let us read this morning starting in verse 14 to verse 24. The Pharisee's were criticizing Jesus disciples for not observing their traditions of hand washing before eating, believing that they must be cleansed first in case they may have come in contact with anything considered unclean that they would be defiling themselves. This included not only for hygiene sake as we would today, but also included ceremonial uncleanness. Such as touching an item in the market that was previously touched by a gentile, and then if you were to eat you would be taking that uncleanness into yourselves. But Jesus says here, it is not what enters a man that makes a thing unclean, but that which comes out of a man

This is just another way to say the same thing that he did earlier in this chapter. It is an issue of the heart, not an issue of the action. If what is inside is clean, that which it produces will also be clean. But if the heart is full of wickedness, out of it flows all kinds of wickedness, defiling even the acts that one does. This teaching of Jesus here is probably what Paul had in mind when he wrote Galatians chapter 5. Let us turn there and read that.

“I say then, walk in the spirit and you shall not fulfill the lusts of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh and these are contrary to one another so that you do not do the things that you wish but if you are led by the spirit you are not under the law.” It is once again, the inside flowing outward, not the outward cleansing that which is inside. The spirit working through a heart devoted to Christ producing good works, not the good works producing a clean heart. “Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousy, outburst of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like, of which I told you before hand just as I have told you in times past that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the spirit is Love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Christs have crucified the flesh with it's passions and desires. IF we live in the spirit, let us also walk in the spirit.”

This sounds much the same as what Jesus says here in Mark does it not? Out of a wicked heart flows evil thoughts, adulteries, fornication, murders, theft, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, and evil eye, blasphemy, pride, and foolishness. Both of these list's, the one in Galatians, and the one here in Mark stand in line with the Mosaic Law, but draw out the simple fact that the mere external keeping of the law amounts to nothing if the internal intention of the heart is wicked and full of sin.

If you notice in both of these lists there is a mixture of both physical acts, and internal mental states. But as we have seen in the sermon on the mount even those lists of physical expressions of sins have a deeper internal meaning. Mathew 5:21 “ You have heard that it was said to those of old, you shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in the danger of the judgment But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment.” Further down verse, 27, You have heard that it was said to those of old, you shall not commit adultery, but I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”

This Jesus guy is tough! Who can ever accomplish this standard? OF course the answer is no one but Jesus himself, which is why we need him to stand in our stead before the almighty righteous and holy God. The Pharisee's, had the teaching of God completely backwards, looking to cleanse what was inside by focusing on making the outside clean.

It is not as if Jesus had come and changed the law, but rather he has come and has now shown us the true purpose and meaning of the law. As we read this morning, even David understood that God required more than just ritual sacrifices, that there was more to these laws and traditions. They were given to show man's state toward a Holy God, not to justify man in their doing, but rather to condemn man in their inability to keep them completely. God's just and moral law was never given to offer salvation, but rather it was given to drive us to despair. To expose our wicked and sinful hearts.

The law still stands today, just as it did in Moses' day. Its purpose is to condemn all who are under it which is everyone who is not covered by the blood of Christ as Paul writes in Romans 8. "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the spirit." IF you are walking in the spirit, covered by the blood of Jesus Christ, you are not condemned by God's holy law, for Christ has fulfilled it on your behalf, being the one who paid the penalty of the law for you. Verse 2. "For the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death." This verse is beautifully echoing Galatians 5, contrasting the law of the spirit versus the law of sin and death. The law of the spirit is love, peace, longsuffering, and law of sin and death is murder, fornication, idolatry, and as Paul says in Galatians, for those who live by the spirit, there is no law of sin, death, and condemnation for we have been saved from such.

Continueing on here in Roman's 8. "For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending his own son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the spirit." Once again, walking according to the spirit, having fulfilled the righteous requirements of the law through Christ Jesus, not our own adherence, our own righteousness, but Christ's. Having our vessels cleaned from the inside by the conviction of the spirit through the blood of Christ sanctifying our lives. Not the other way around as the pharisee's understood it. Verse 5. "For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the spirit the things of the spirit, for to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace." If your focus of your belief is on your fleshly deeds, your ability to be a good person. If you think that you will stand before God and be able to claim your own merit then you are sorely mistaken. For to focus on such things, to be carnally minded, believing your own morality and so called righteousness will be enough will result in your death, it is only in the spirit, it is only through Christ that we can find life and peace with God.

I can not stress this enough for this is the central message of the bible, and of our faith. We can not gain our own righteousness. I feel that this is important to grasp just as much today as it was with Christ calling out the pharisee's in their falsehood. As we go over this passage here in Mark, just as we did in the first half of this chapter it stands out to me pointing out the falsehoods that we see today. So many people, both those who attend church services, and those who do not are resting on their own ability to be good and moral people. But the entire bible points to the fact that there are none who are good, there are none who can stand up to God's standard of righteousness. If we look back through out the history of mankind if there would appear to be anyone who had accomplished this it would have been the Jews striving to keep the law, but who is the target of Christ's most scathing teachings? The religious leaders, the pharisees.

Thinking one self to be righteous, or at least, good enough is a very dangerous place to be. Remember back in chapter 2. Who did Jesus say he had come for. "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call the righteous, but the sinners to repentance.

This goes back again to what David said in Psalms, God does not require our strict adherence to laws and traditions, but rather a broken heart that cries out to him. One who recognizes that they are lost and undone, not standing in pride and arrogance on their own merit but those who humbly stand in the merit of Christ. What we are actually seeing here is a complete and utter misuse of the law by the pharisees. The law was not given to save, but to condemn. There is no hope if what you are trusting in for your righteousness actually does nothing but point to your condemnation, your inability to stand before God righteous. As I was thinking on this this week it dawned on me how intrinsic the miss use of the law is in Christianity today, ranging from committing the same errors that the pharisees themselves committed with completely false understanding, to miss appropriation, and use of the law today. So I want to look at those today since the miss use of the law is at the heart of what is going on here in his passage. Focusing on what one does to be righteous, and not what God has done in the hearts of men.

This is much like when I first started attending Spurgeon Heritage, I was completely unaware that there were so many different views, and understandings of the book of Revelation. I was taught the view known as dispensationalism, and I thought that was the only view. It is much the same with the handling of the Mosaic Law. Depending on what camp you fall into is likely the only teaching you may have heard on it. So I want to spend the rest of our time today talking about 3 different false views of the role of the law in the christian believer today. The first, is the Catholic Church. Now I am not completely sure what their teaching on the old testament laws would be, but I am looking rather at a miss appropriation of the principles here

It would seem that the Catholic church has erred in principle in the same way that the pharisees have erred in understanding. Exchanging Israel for the church, that is believing the the catholic church organization is God's chosen people. The Pope, the priests, having become like the rabbi's and the leaders of the Jewish faith in Israel, teaching that your justification, your righteousness before God is found in the church, in it's ordinances, it's traditions. This sounds very much like the pharisees that Christ is talking to here in Mark. Putting their trust on the physical, on the outward works and appearance of righteousness. The Catholic church has exchanged the mosaic law, for their church traditions elevating them to the same point that the pharisees had elevated the mosaic law. This is a grave error, creating a false faith that is looking to things outside of Christ for their justification and righteousness. You do not have to spend a whole lot of time reading scripture before you realize that our hope is not in the church, it is not in the pope or the priests, but it is in Christ, and Christ alone.

The 2nd miss use of the law is what we see that is very common in baptist churches today that hold to a dispensational understanding of Scripture. What I mean by dispensational, is the belief that the bible is divided into various dispensations. Even they debate on how many dispensations there are, but in general it is the idea that the law was given to Israel as a means of salvation, but we gentile believers in this church age, or dispensation are not under the law for it was given to Israel. While there is some truth there, they take it to far to the point of pretty much teaching that throughout God's working with man that there has been 2 different ways of salvation. 1, by keeping the law, and 2 by Christ's death. This is an error, and misunderstanding of scripture born out of the idea of "rightly dividing the word" into different dispensations. They reject the law for the gentiles, but see it as still operational for Israel. But I ask, what about the book of Galatians, it doesn't say this. Paul answers the questions in chapter 3, verse 19. "What purpose then does the law serve? It was added because of transgressions, til the seed should come to whom the promises were made, and it was appointed through the angels by the hand of a mediator."

The law was given because of sin, until Christ should come. Verse 21. "Is the law then against the promises of God? Certainly Not! For if there had been a law given which could have given life, truly righteousness would have been by the law." The law does not give life, the law does not grant righteousness, its role, purpose and function is to point to the one who does, to the promised seed, to the messiah, to Christ. There are not 2 dispensations here, it is the Israel, and the gentile church, but we who are in Christ are the church, the true Israel. Verse 27. "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." And here it is, "And if you are Christs, then you are Abraham seed, you are the true Israel, the true descendant of Abraham if you are in Christ, and heirs according to the promise.

Now that bring us to The 3rd miss use of the law which is held predominantly by the Reformed Church, and the Reformed Baptists like them. They understand the law to have been fulfilled in Christ for justification, and salvation purposes. But the error that they make, is summed up in this statement. "Now that you have been saved by Christ, you have been given the ability to keep the law." Now that may sound ok, it seem to make sense but the problem here is it's focus. And in doing so commits a grave error of once again returning to law to work out our righteousness. Search as you may, you will never find one passage, or one verse in scripture that follows this logic. The old Testament told of the messiah to come, and now that the messiah has come we are to look to him for all things, not to Moses. That is the point of the book of Galatians, the book of Hebrews, the book of Ephesians, in fact the entire new testament. As we read this morning in Galatians, those who are in the spirit are not longer under the law. If you are Christs then you have the holy spirit, and if you have the holy spirit there is no need for the mosaic law. You have been saved from the condemnation of the law, you are righteous before God, not because of some adherence to a list of rules and regulations, but because of Christ and his work on the cross.

Furthermore you do not need the law, the 10 commandments as a rule and guide for your life, for you have the holy spirit operating in your life to convict, to instruct, and to keep you. You no longer need the archaic moral lists and rules. That being said, it is not as though you don't have a law, we Christians are not lawless, but rather we look to Christ, who has fulfilled the law and has made us free and given us the holy spirit, as our guide in this life. To return to the law, to return to the old covenant is to belittle the ministry of the holy spirit. It is like after having attained a college degree in the English language that you go back and return to studying your ABC's. Let us look quickly at what the Bible says about the law, and see if we can find where it says that it is the rule and guide for the life of the Christian.

Galatians 5:21 "Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not hear the law? For it is written that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondwoman and the other by a free woman But he who was of the bond woman was born according to the flesh, and he of the free woman through promise. Which thing are symbolic, for these are the two covenants. The one from Mount Sinai which gives birth to bondage which is Hagar." The law, is bondage, it is not freedom, it is not salvation, but it is slavery. "For this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children but the Jerusalem above, the true Israel, those in Christ born of promise, is free. For it is written, Rejoice O Barren, you who do not bear, break forth and shout you who are not in labor for the desolate has many more children than she who has a husband. Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are children of Promise. But as he who was born according to the flesh then persecuted him who was born according to the spirit even so it is now.

Nevertheless what does scripture say? Cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the free woman. So then brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free.” So I ask, why if you are a child of the free woman, do you return to the bondage of the law?

Or let us go over to 2 Corinthians chapter 3 verse 4. “And we have such trust through Christ toward God. Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God, who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant. Not of the letter, but of the spirit. For the letter kills, but the spirit gives life.” The law kills, but the spirit gives life. IF we are in the spirit why return to that which kills?.. verse 7. “But if the ministry of death, written and engraved on stones was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of the glory of his countenance, which glory was passing away, how will the ministry of the spirit not be more glorious?” Once again, if we are in the spirit, how can we once again turn back to the law? For if the ministry of condemnation had glory, if the law, the letter that kills, the ministry of death had glory, the ministry of righteousness exceeds much more in glory.”

There is also Hebrews 8 that we read this morning. It's hard to not go through and read this passage again, if you are listening to this recording and did not read it with us this morning, then go, and read it! For Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, a better covenant, not one leading to death as was the old, but one leading to life. Verse 6. “But now he has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as he is also a mediator of a better covenant which was established on better promises. For if the first covenant had been faultless then no place would have been sought for a second.” If the old covenant has been faultless, then there is no need for a 2nd in Christ. I ask, Why then return to that first, faulty old covenant for guidance if you have the better covenant in Christ? Verse 13, “In that he says, a new covenant, he has made the first obsolete, now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.” Christ has not saved us so that we may now follow the law, he has saved us from the law, from the ministry of death, and brought us into the ministry of the spirit and life.

Let us not forget the book of Romans 7 verse 4-6. “Therefore my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another, to him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God. For when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions which were aroused by the law” The purpose of the law is to point out sin, to arouse in us sin so we recognize our need for a savior.” They were at work in our members to bear fruit to death. “not righteousness, but death.” but now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the spirit and not in the oldness of the letter.” Once again.. WHY return to the law for a guide and rule of life?

Romans 10, verse 3-4,” For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seekign to establish their own righteousness have not submitted to the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.” IF you are Christs, you no longer need to look to the law as guide and rule to live righteously, for you now have Christ, and the holy spirit. There is more and I could keep going, but I think I have gone on long enough for today. So to wrap it all up here this morning, the conclusion is that if you are looking to anything other than Christ for your righteousness, for your holiness, for justification, then you are looking in the wrong place. Christ is central, all things are in him, and with him we no longer need these external physical laws and rules for our heart strives to please him, to listen to him, and follow him and the spirit works in us to do so.

Let us not be like the the pharisees, or the catholic church looking to justify themselves through rituals, and outward morality and imposed regulation and law. Let us not create divisions in the bible where there is no divisions. The old covenant was given to point to the new, to point to our need for a righteousness outside of ourselves. The old covenant was never given to righteousness, to produce a way of salvation, for as Hebrews said, if the 1st covenant did so, then there would have been no need for a 2nd. Also let us who have the holy spirit, and Christ working in us not return back to the minister of death as a guide to life. But rather look to Christ, and his word, and the ministry of the holy spirit as our rule and guide to life. I will close today with an exhortation of Paul, in Galatians. “ Stand fast in the liberty of which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage. “