

**Kailua Christian Church (UCC)**  
**Sunday, July 9, 2023**  
**Dr. JR Cuevas**

**THE DANGER OF NEGLECTING GOD'S WORD FOR TRADITION**

**Scripture reference:** MARK 7:1-13

No evangelical church that I know of has ever told me that they don't believe in the Bible. No church that I know of has ever claimed that their goal in ministry was to invalidate or neglect the Bible or forget the Bible. In fact, the very opposite is true. Every church that I have met claims to love the Bible. Pastors and preachers usually have a Bible up with them when they preach. Church members often own a copy of the Bible at home, or have one downloaded in their phones. No church - and no true Christian - would ever claim that they want to be guilty of neglecting the Word of God in life. And yet, even the most well-meaning churches - and Christians - are in danger of neglecting the Word of God. But how? And for what? This is the very aim of this 3-part sermon series: to expose the dangers of neglecting God's Word in the church. None of us want to be guilty of it. But all of us, if we are not careful, may be in danger of doing so.

And believe it or not, churches end up neglecting the Word of God because of tradition. Not lawlessness. Not immorality. Not paganism. But tradition of men. Yes, even Christian traditions of men. Yes, even church traditions - the things, both good and neutral, that we have done for generations that are not unbiblical but are also not in and of themselves mandated in the Bible. As Christians, the Spirit warns us about this very thing in Mark 7:1-13. As Christians, we must be very wary of holding fast to church traditions, because through this we may end up neglecting the very Word of God and end up being displeasing to him.

In this particular passage of Mark 7:1-13, we see both the **reality** and the **rebuke** of wrongly holding fast to traditions in the church at the expense of obedience to the Word of God. We are called to be honest about this reality in our own lives and churches, and repentant before the rebuke.

First, in verses 1-5, we see the vital importance of being honest about the reality of holding too tightly to traditions in our lives and churches. This honesty is something that the hypocritical Pharisees and the scribes didn't have. They insisted in their own hearts that they were being lawful and obedient toward God's Word, when in fact they were not. Rather, they were holding fast to their own traditions that may have not been bad in and of themselves, but that God Himself never commanded. This was exposed when they critically inquired of Christ why his disciples didn't ceremonially wash their hands before eating the way the religious leaders did. Back then, in an effort to symbolize their commitment to holiness, the religious leaders (Pharisees and scribes) would fastidiously wash their hands, pots, and other vessels after going to the marketplace where they would interact with Gentiles, who they believe defiled them. Thus, to show that they were cleansing themselves of such defilement, they would wash their hands superficially (rather than for hygienic purposes) before eating. The Old Testament itself

never mandated this from God's people, but the Jewish religious leaders themselves started this practice and passed it down as a way for the people to show their commitment to holiness. Their love for such a tradition, and disdain for those who didn't uphold the same tradition, was exposed when Christ and His disciples decided to do things differently. As Christians, it is easy for us to say that we don't hold tightly to traditions and that we are very flexible people...until someone comes along and joins our church who does things differently. We must always examine whether or not we are doing what we are doing because we know it to be consistent with God's Word, or if we are doing what we're doing simply because it has been done that way for generations. We need to be honest about where we are at.

Second, in verses 6-13, we see the vital importance of being repentant from the rebuke of holding too tightly to traditions in our lives and churches. Back then, there was a tradition in the Jewish community that any person was allowed to call his possessions "Corban", which means given to God. If an adult son did not want to financially support his parents, he could declare his money as "Corban", meaning that his money would be used only for service to God and thus he didn't have to financially assist his parents. Calling your money and property "Corban" and declaring it fully dedicated to the service of God sounds noble. It certainly isn't wicked in and of itself. But it also isn't mandated in the Bible. Financially assisting your parents in their old age, though, is. The problem with the Pharisees and scribes is that they were neglecting what God actually did command (to support parents financially) for what God never actually commanded but that they had traditionally done (calling your property Corban and dedicating it fully to the Lord's service). As Christians, and as a church, there are many traditions that we have. Christmas Concerts, Thanksgiving Potlucks, Summer VBS programs, Monday Movie Nights, Harvest Festivals, and more. Some are good, and some are neutral. It's not wrong to do any of these traditions in and of themselves. But the danger is that a church can become so caught up and fastidious about carrying out their traditional practices but neglecting the Scriptures themselves. Churches can become more fastidious about their events calendar than the doctrinal statement. They can become more attentive to the announcements than the sermon. And whenever we neglect the actual commandments of God for a man-made tradition - no matter what that tradition is - we have begun to displease God.

As a church, hold fast to Christ, and hold fast to His Word. Carrying out long-standing traditions can be good. But making sure that we walk in obedience to the Scriptures is of far greater weight. Remember that Christ did not save us to be traditional. Christ saved us through His death on the cross and gave us life that we may become obedient - not merely busy with church activities. Let us be honest about the presence of an unhealthy holding of traditions in our lives and churches and let us respond in repentance to the rebuke that the Word gives and live out our salvation and redemption by obeying the very Word of which we are born.