

The Gospel of Mark, Teacher's Guide

Week 10: True Purity and Genuine Faith

Mark 7:1–37

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

Mark 7:1–37 is one of the doctrinally weighty chapters of the Gospel. In a single passage Mark gives us Jesus' explicit teaching on the relationship between human tradition and the Word of God, His clarifying statement on the true source of defilement, His decisive parenthetical declaration that "all foods" are clean, a powerful illustration of Gentile faith in the Syrophenician woman, and the deeply tender healing of a deaf and mute man with the word "Ephphatha." Doctrinally, the teacher will need to handle the authority of Scripture over tradition, the internal source of sin, the fulfillment and setting aside of the Old Law's ceremonial regulations in Christ (food laws, festivals, Sabbaths), the universal scope of the gospel for Jew and Gentile, and the inner heart-cleansing that Christ accomplishes through the gospel and the New Covenant.

At the same time, this chapter is profoundly formational. Most of the students sitting in front of you have at least one tradition they love more than they realize, at least one external religious habit that has quietly replaced inner walking with Christ, and at least one item on the list in 7:21–22 they recognize in themselves and have not yet confessed. The lesson should not allow easy generalities. Help students name something specific. The Pharisees would have failed this chapter quietly, in their own way, while still being there for every Sabbath service. Long-tenured Christians are at the same risk. So is the teacher.

Finally, do not miss the breadth of the chapter. The gospel that calls out the inner sin of Israel's religious leaders also crosses into Gentile territory and welcomes a desperate Syrophenician mother who comes with no claim except Christ's mercy. The Christ who declares all foods clean is the same Christ who declares all peoples welcome at His table. The chapter ends with a deaf man hearing, a mute man speaking, and a crowd saying, "He has done all things well" (7:37). Let the lesson land on the same note. Bring your own deafness, your own muteness, your own closed places, and let Christ speak "Ephphatha" over you.

Question 1

Student Question:

When the Pharisees accuse Jesus' disciples of breaking "the tradition of the elders" (7:5), Jesus answers, "You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men" (7:8). He then gives the example of 'Corban' (vv. 9–13), a tradition that effectively let people sidestep the command to honor father and mother. What is Jesus teaching about the proper relationship

between human tradition and the Word of God, and what is the warning here for any church or believer in any century?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The opening dispute looks small but is enormous in its implications. The Pharisees and scribes from Jerusalem are essentially the doctrinal watchdogs of Israel, and they have come to Galilee to evaluate Jesus. Their question, “Why do your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders?” (7:5), assumes the equality, or even superiority, of human tradition with the Word of God. They are not asking, “Why do they violate Scripture?” They are asking, “Why do they violate our additions to Scripture?”

Jesus does not negotiate the question on their terms. He answers with a devastating quote from Isaiah 29:13. “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” (7:6–7). Then He gives them His verdict. “You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men” (7:8). The accusation is staggering. They are not building on Scripture. They are using their traditions to displace it.

The example He gives is brutal. ‘Corban’ (literally, “given to God”) was a vow by which a person could declare resources dedicated to God and therefore unavailable to their aging parents. Functionally, the person kept the use of the resources during their own lifetime, while telling parents in need that nothing could be done. The tradition allowed people to look devout while disobeying the fifth commandment. Jesus calls it what it is. “Thus making void the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down” (7:13).

The biblical principle is clear and enduring. The Word of God is the supreme authority for the faith and practice of God’s people. Traditions, customs, denominational habits, family practices, and inherited assumptions are subordinate. They may be helpful. They may be harmless. They may even reflect the Word in places. But when a tradition contradicts or sidesteps the actual teaching of Scripture, the tradition must yield. The Pharisees’ mistake is one of the most common in religious history. We add to the Word until our addition becomes more important than the Word itself.

This is one of the great commitments of the church of Christ: to take the New Testament as the only authoritative pattern for the church’s faith and practice. Not creeds. Not councils. Not denominational distinctives. Not even cherished traditions of our own heritage when they cannot be grounded in Scripture. “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16–17). What the New Testament teaches, we hold to. What it does not teach, we do not bind on others as doctrine.

For students, this carries lasting weight. The pattern Jesus warned against did not end with the Pharisees. Every congregation, every family, every Christian, must ask in every generation, “Are

we shaped by the Word, or are we shaping the Word by our traditions?” The first is faithful Christianity. The second is the religion the Lord condemned in Mark 7.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The absolute authority of Scripture, especially the New Testament, as the standard for the faith and practice of the church (2 Timothy 3:16–17; 2 Peter 1:20–21)
- The subordination of all human traditions to the Word of God (Matthew 15:1–9; Colossians 2:8)
- The danger of teaching as doctrine the commandments of men (Isaiah 29:13; Mark 7:6–7)
- Faithful Christianity as the recovery and preservation of the New Testament pattern in every generation
- The need for ongoing self-examination by every congregation and believer regarding their own traditions
- Rejection of denominational distinctives that cannot be grounded in Scripture
- Reverence for traditions that genuinely reflect Scripture and humility to set aside those that do not

Discussion Prompts

- What is the difference between a helpful tradition and a tradition that has crowded out the Word?
- Where do you see this pattern at work in religious life today (in any tradition, including ours)?
- What helps a believer and a congregation keep the Word in its proper place of authority over inherited practice?

Question 2

Student Question:

Most of us carry some traditions that are dear to us. Some are helpful. Some are neutral. Some quietly compete with the Word of God for first place in our convictions. Where might you have allowed a personal tradition, a family practice, a denominational habit, or a deeply held assumption to crowd out the actual teaching of Scripture, and what would it look like to bring it back under the authority of the Word?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is a question that should be allowed to make every student uncomfortable, including the teacher. The Pharisees did not think they were making the Word of God void. They were trying to protect it. They believed their additions were faithful applications of biblical principles. The trouble was that the additions slowly became, in their minds and in their practice, equal to or more important than the Word itself. The pattern is subtle. It almost always feels like devotion.

The first place to look is in personal convictions. Most Christians carry a set of beliefs about what real Christianity looks like that are partly biblical and partly cultural, partly Scriptural and partly inherited. Some of these convictions are good. Some are simply preferences dressed up as principles. Help students think honestly. Where do they hold a position so strongly that anyone who differs is automatically suspect, and yet they cannot really show where Scripture clearly teaches it?

The second place to look is in family practices. Households often pass down beliefs about money, gender roles, hospitality, holidays, child-rearing, and the use of time that are partly biblical and partly cultural. None of this is necessarily wrong. Some of it is genuinely Christian. But the family tradition is not the same as the Word, and disciples are meant to be shaped first by Scripture.

The third place to look is in our own heritage as a people of God. Every faithful tradition carries with it some practices that have become deeply familiar but that do not have a clear Scriptural mandate. These can be matters of liturgical style, language, music, scheduling, and many other patterns of congregational life. Some of these are wise choices that reflect Scripture well. Some are simply the way we have always done it. The question is whether we have allowed any of them to function as if they were the Word of God itself.

The corrective is not to abandon all traditions. Healthy churches and families have wise practices that have stood the test of time. The corrective is to keep the Word in its proper place above every practice, and to be willing to bring our practices back under its authority when needed.

Encourage students to identify one specific area where they suspect they have been holding a tradition more tightly than the Word, and to make a deliberate study of what Scripture actually teaches in that area this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The continuing need for every believer to bring their convictions back under the authority of Scripture (Acts 17:11; 2 Timothy 2:15)
- The difference between cultural preferences and biblical commands
- The danger of equating long-standing congregational habit with apostolic doctrine
- Humility as an essential discipline for faithful interpreters of Scripture (Proverbs 11:2; 1 Peter 5:5)
- The role of brothers and sisters and elders in helping us see our own blind spots

Discussion Prompts

- What is one tradition or assumption you have held that you have not deliberately tested against Scripture?
- What would a faithful, humble re-examination of that area involve this week?
- How does a congregation grow in distinguishing tradition from the actual Word of God?

Question 3

Student Question:

After His confrontation with the Pharisees, Jesus tells the crowd, “There is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him, but the things that come out of a person are what defile him” (7:14–15). What is Jesus teaching about the source and nature of sin, and how does this both correct the Pharisees’ externalism and prepare us to understand why we need an inner work of God, not just outward religion?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Jesus turns from the Pharisees to the crowd and reframes the whole conversation about defilement. “Hear me, all of you, and understand: There is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him, but the things that come out of a person are what defile him” (7:14–15). When the disciples ask Him privately about it, He explains. Food enters the stomach and is expelled. It is not the actual source of moral defilement. The source is the heart. “For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person” (7:21–23).

This is one of the most important statements in the Gospel about the nature of sin. The Pharisees believed that defilement was primarily a question of what you came in contact with on the outside. The wrong food. The wrong people. The wrong hands. The wrong dish. Jesus relocates the entire question. Defilement is a matter of what is already living inside you. The hands are not the problem. The heart is.

This corrects two errors that still tempt every generation of believers. First, the externalism of the Pharisees, which assumes that managing outward behaviors and contacts is enough. Many Christians are functionally Pharisees here. They are careful about what they consume, what they say in public, who they associate with, and what badges of religious identity they wear. They are less careful about what is going on inside them. Jesus says that the heart is the determining issue.

Second, this passage exposes the inadequacy of all merely external religion to solve the human problem. No ceremony, no rite, no ritual, no posture, no piece of clothing, no diet, and no behavioral checklist can address what arises from within. The defilement is interior. The cure must therefore also be interior. This is exactly what the gospel offers.

The New Covenant promises a new heart and a new spirit. “I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules” (Ezekiel 36:26–27). This is not magic. This is the work Christ accomplishes in the believer who comes to Him in faith, repents of sin, confesses Him before

others, and is baptized into Him for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38; Romans 6:3–5). At baptism the believer is united to Christ in His death and resurrection, the old self is buried, and the believer rises to walk in newness of life (Colossians 2:12–13).

For students this means that the gospel is not just behavior modification. It is a heart transplant. Christ does not merely call us to do better. He cleanses us at the source, by His blood and by His Spirit, and then forms us into the kind of people whose hearts produce different fruit (Galatians 5:22–23). Our cooperation matters. The Word and the Spirit do their work in the willing heart. But the work is interior, not just exterior.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The internal nature of sin: it arises from the heart, not from external contact (Mark 7:21–23; James 1:13–15)
- The inadequacy of merely external religion to address the human problem (Isaiah 1:11–17; Hebrews 9:9–10)
- The New Covenant promise of a new heart and a renewed spirit (Ezekiel 36:25–27; Jeremiah 31:31–34)
- The inner work of Christ accomplished through the gospel response of faith, repentance, confession, and baptism (Acts 2:38; Romans 6:3–5; Colossians 2:11–13)
- The Spirit’s ongoing work of producing different fruit from a renewed heart (Galatians 5:22–23)
- Cooperation of the believer with the inner work of God through obedience, the Word, and the means of grace (Philippians 2:12–13)

Discussion Prompts

- How does this passage correct both rigid externalism and shallow “internal” religion that never produces visible obedience?
- What is the difference between behavior modification and heart transformation?
- How does the New Covenant work of Christ address the inner source of sin?

Question 4

Student Question:

The list Jesus gives in 7:21–22 is uncomfortably specific. Evil thoughts. Sexual immorality. Theft. Murder. Adultery. Coveting. Wickedness. Deceit. Sensuality. Envy. Slander. Pride. Foolishness. Without rushing past it, name the one or two on this list that most accurately describe something already living in your own heart, and what concrete repentance might look like for you this week.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The list Jesus gives in Mark 7:21–22 reads like a diagnostic checklist for the human heart, including the believer’s heart. Evil thoughts. Sexual immorality. Theft. Murder. Adultery. Coveting. Wickedness. Deceit. Sensuality. Envy. Slander. Pride. Foolishness. The list combines public sins, private sins, secret sins, and the attitudes that produce all of them. Few Christians read it without recognizing at least one or two items that are currently active in their own inner life.

This question is meant to interrupt the temptation to read the list as a generic description of “sinful humanity” and to make it personal. The goal is not shame. The goal is honest naming, which is the first step in real repentance. Help students slow down. Pride. Slander. Envy. Coveting. Deceit. Sensuality. These are not just words on a page. They are realities in your week.

What does concrete repentance look like for each item? Repentance of pride includes specific acts of self-lowering: confession, apology, deference, choosing the hidden role. Repentance of slander includes deleting the comment, retracting the story, calling the person about whom we have spoken, choosing to be silent next time. Repentance of coveting includes thanksgiving for what we already have and disciplined refusal of the comparison habit. Repentance of envy includes deliberate prayer for the person we envied and rejoicing in their good. Repentance of sensuality includes practical refusal of input that fuels it and accountability with a trusted brother or sister. Each item on the list has a concrete repentance attached to it.

It is also vital to remember the gospel here. The list in 7:21–22 is what was already in us before we came to Christ. It is what is still being uprooted in us by the Spirit. It is what Christ has paid for in full at the cross and what He continues to put to death in His people through the Word, prayer, the Lord’s Supper, the assembly, and the company of saints. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). Confession of specific sins is one of the great means of grace in the Christian life.

Encourage students not to leave the lesson without naming, at least in their own hearts and ideally to one trusted person, the sin from this list that the Lord is putting His finger on. The chapter is not finished until honest naming has begun.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The specificity of biblical confession of sin (1 John 1:9; James 5:16)
- The ongoing nature of repentance in the Christian life, not a single one-time act
- The role of accountability and faithful brothers and sisters in helping each other put sin to death (Galatians 6:1–2; Hebrews 3:13)
- The Spirit’s work of mortifying sin in the believer (Romans 8:13; Colossians 3:5–10)
- The completed work of Christ on the cross as the foundation of every Christian’s ongoing repentance (1 Peter 2:24)
- The freedom and joy that flow from confessed and forsaken sin (Psalm 32:1–5; Proverbs 28:13)

Discussion Prompts

- Which item on the list in Mark 7:21–22 most uncomfortably names something in your heart right now?
- What would concrete repentance in that area look like for you this week?
- How can a brother or sister, an elder, or this class walk with you in that repentance?

Question 5

Student Question:

Mark records, almost in passing, the explanatory comment, “Thus he declared all foods clean” (7:19). Connecting this with Acts 10:9–16, 1 Timothy 4:1–5, Colossians 2:13–17, and Hebrews 8–10, what is being taught about the Old Law’s ceremonial regulations (food, festivals, Sabbaths) being fulfilled in Christ, and what is the difference between the ceremonial law that has been set aside in Christ and moral teaching that continues in the New Covenant?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Mark adds an explanatory comment in 7:19 that is easy to miss but doctrinally enormous. After Jesus says that what enters from outside cannot defile, Mark notes, “Thus he declared all foods clean.” The parenthetical comment makes plain that Jesus is doing something significant. The Old Testament ceremonial laws about clean and unclean foods (Leviticus 11; Deuteronomy 14) are being fulfilled and set aside in Him.

This is consistent with the larger New Testament teaching about the Old Law in Christ. Colossians 2:13–17 says, “He has forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross... Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.” Hebrews 8 explicitly speaks of “a better covenant” and says, “In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away” (Hebrews 8:13). Hebrews 9 and 10 detail the fulfillment of the sacrificial system in Christ. Acts 10:9–16 records Peter’s vision in which God Himself declares foods clean, and the door is then opened to the Gentile mission. 1 Timothy 4:1–5 warns of those who require abstinence from foods God has created to be received with thanksgiving.

It is important here to distinguish what has been set aside and what continues in the New Covenant. The ceremonial law (food laws, festivals, new moons, Sabbaths as covenant signs, sacrificial system, temple ritual, ceremonial purity codes) has been fulfilled in Christ and is no longer binding on the believer. The moral teaching of the Old Testament (the principles about idolatry, murder, theft, sexual immorality, honesty, honoring parents, and so on) continues to express the holiness of God and is taught and applied throughout the New Testament. The way

the New Testament reapplies the moral principles is, however, no longer mediated by Moses but by Christ and His apostles.

The Sabbath as a sign of the Old Covenant given specifically to Israel (Exodus 31:13–17) is part of the ceremonial system that has been set aside. The first day of the week is the New Testament day of Christian assembly, established by the resurrection of Christ and the apostolic pattern (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2; Revelation 1:10). The Lord’s Day is not a “Christian Sabbath” under Old Covenant rules. It is the New Covenant rhythm of worship in Christ.

For students, this matters in several ways. First, it protects against legalism that tries to bind Old Covenant ceremonial requirements on the conscience of New Covenant believers. Second, it grounds Christian liberty in foods, drinks, and days (Romans 14; 1 Corinthians 10:23–33). Third, it sharpens our reading of the Old Testament. We read it as fulfilled in Christ, not as a code we are still under. And fourth, it deepens our reverence for the moral teaching of Scripture, which continues to call for holiness of life in every age.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The Old Law’s ceremonial regulations fulfilled and set aside in Christ (Colossians 2:13–17; Hebrews 8–10; Matthew 5:17)
- The Old Covenant Sabbath fulfilled in Christ; the first day of the week as the New Testament day of assembly (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2; Revelation 1:10)
- The Lord’s Day distinguished from a “Christian Sabbath”; it is not Old Covenant Sabbath rules transferred to Sunday
- Christian liberty in matters of food, drink, and days (Romans 14:1–23; 1 Corinthians 10:23–33; 1 Timothy 4:1–5)
- The continuity of moral teaching across both covenants, reapplied by Christ and His apostles
- Christ as the substance to which the shadows of the Old Law pointed (Hebrews 10:1; Colossians 2:17)
- The reading of the Old Testament as fulfilled in Christ, not as a code believers are still under

Discussion Prompts

- What is the difference between the ceremonial law that has been set aside and the moral teaching that continues in the New Covenant?
- How does Mark 7:19 fit with Peter’s vision in Acts 10 and Paul’s teaching in Colossians 2 and 1 Timothy 4?
- Why is it important to distinguish the Lord’s Day from a “Christian Sabbath” under Old Covenant rules?

Question 6

Student Question:

Even believers who would never call themselves legalists often try to earn God's favor by external religious activity rather than walking in the inner work He alone can do. Where in your own life do you tend to rely on outward markers (attendance, knowledge, position, generosity, visible service) to feel secure with God, and what would it look like to receive from Christ the inner change He actually wants to give you?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Externalism does not require Pharisee robes. It can wear the comfortable clothes of any long-tenured congregation. Christians who would never call themselves legalists can still rely heavily on outward markers to feel secure with God. Attendance becomes the proof we are walking with the Lord. Knowledge of Scripture becomes the proof we are growing. Position in the church becomes the proof we are useful. Generosity becomes the proof we are devoted. Visible service becomes the proof we are spiritual.

None of these are bad in themselves. Attendance matters. Knowledge matters. Position can serve the body. Generosity is commanded. Service is commanded. The problem is when these outward markers become substitutes for the inner walk with Christ that they were meant to express. We can do all of them and have a heart that is far from God (Isaiah 29:13). The Pharisees were impeccable at the outward markers and Christ named their heart as the issue.

Help students examine themselves. Where do they rely on outward badges of religious belonging more than on the inner reality of walking with Christ? The diagnostic question is honest: if everything outward were stripped away (the attendance, the position, the knowledge, the reputation), what would be left of your actual life with Jesus?

The corrective is not to abandon the outward. It is to ensure that the outward is the overflow of an inner life with Christ. Time in the Word for the sake of knowing Him, not just for the sake of being prepared to teach. Prayer that is honest conversation, not just dutiful recitation. Worship that is heart engagement, not just attendance. Service that is overflow of love for Christ, not just performance of duty.

Encourage students to identify one outward marker they have been relying on and one inner reality Christ is inviting them into. The two are not opposed. They are meant to flow together. The outward without the inner is the religion Christ rebuked in Mark 7. The inner without the outward is the religion James warned against (James 2:14–26). Both/and is the faithful life.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The danger of substituting external religion for inner walking with Christ (Isaiah 29:13; Matthew 23:25–28)
- The proper relationship between inner faith and outward obedience (James 2:14–26)
- The means of grace as channels of inner formation in Christ (the Word, prayer, the Lord's Supper, the assembly, the company of saints)

- Self-examination as a recurring discipline of Christian life (2 Corinthians 13:5)
- The Spirit's ongoing work of conforming the believer to Christ from the inside out (2 Corinthians 3:18)

Discussion Prompts

- What outward marker have you been relying on more than the inner walk with Christ it was meant to express?
- What would deliberate cultivation of the inner life look like for you this week?
- How can our class help one another guard against externalism without losing the importance of faithful outward obedience?

Question 7

Student Question:

A Syrophoenician woman, a Gentile, falls at Jesus' feet and begs Him to cast a demon out of her daughter (7:24–26). His initial answer sounds severe, but she persists in humility, accepting that the children must be fed first while still asking for the crumbs (vv. 27–28). Jesus answers, "For this statement you may go your way; the demon has left your daughter" (7:29). What is Mark teaching us about the nature of saving faith, the breadth of the gospel offer to Jew and Gentile alike, and the welcome Jesus gives to those who come without claim?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This scene is one of the most striking in the Gospel of Mark. Jesus crosses into the region of Tyre and Sidon, deliberately Gentile territory. A Syrophoenician woman, by every category outside the covenant community of Israel, comes and falls at His feet, begging Him to cast a demon out of her daughter. His initial response sounds harsh to our ears. "Let the children be fed first, for it is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs" (7:27). The reference to children is Israel; the reference to dogs is the Gentiles. Jesus is articulating the order of redemptive history: salvation goes first to Israel, then to the nations (Romans 1:16).

What is remarkable is the woman's response. She does not protest. She does not insist on her rights. She accepts the place she has been given and replies, "Yes, Lord; yet even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs" (7:28). It is one of the most beautiful confessions in the New Testament. She accepts the priority of Israel and yet trusts that even one crumb from the table of the Master is enough for her daughter. She does not come with claim or demand. She comes with empty hands and trusting humility.

Jesus answers with delight. "For this statement you may go your way; the demon has left your daughter" (7:29). The healing happens at a distance, by His word, in response to her humble persistent faith. Mark wants the reader to see this clearly. Saving faith is not about pedigree,

status, or claim. It is about coming to Christ as one who has nothing to give except trust in His mercy.

There are at least three large doctrinal truths in this scene. First, the gospel is genuinely for the nations. The pattern Mark has been weaving (the demoniac in Decapolis in chapter 5, now this Syrophoenician woman in chapter 7) shows that the kingdom is breaking out beyond Israel. Christ will eventually commission His church to make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:18–20), and that mission has its visible foreshadowing here. Second, saving faith is humble and persistent. The Syrophoenician woman is one of the great pictures of how anyone comes to Christ. Third, the welcome of Christ extends to all who come this way. There is no Gentile too far, no past too dark, no station too low, no background too unfamiliar to receive the saving mercy of Christ.

For students, this scene is both convicting and freeing. It convicts the religious heart that comes to Christ on the basis of credit. It frees the broken heart that comes to Christ with nothing but need.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The breadth of the gospel for all peoples and nations (Genesis 12:3; Isaiah 49:6; Matthew 28:18–20)
- The order of redemptive history: to the Jew first, then to the Greek (Romans 1:16; Acts 13:46)
- Saving faith as humble, persistent, and trusting in Christ’s mercy rather than personal claim
- The welcome of Christ to all who come in faith and obedience (John 6:37; Hebrews 7:25)
- The breaking down of the wall between Jew and Gentile in Christ (Ephesians 2:11–22)
- The church as the family of God drawn from every nation (Galatians 3:26–29; Revelation 5:9)

Discussion Prompts

- What does the Syrophoenician woman model about how anyone must come to Christ?
- How does this scene fit with the larger movement of the Gospel toward the nations?
- What does “faith that takes the crumbs gladly” look like for a Christian today?

Question 8

Student Question:

Where in your own walk with Christ are you tempted to come with a list of claims (your years in the church, your knowledge, your service, your good behavior) rather than with the empty-handed humility of the Syrophoenician woman, and what would it look like, this week, to come to Christ honestly as one who can claim only His mercy?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Many believers, especially long-tenured ones, come to Christ each week with a quiet list of claims. Years in the church. Knowledge of doctrine. Faithful attendance. Service rendered. Sins resisted. Money given. Children raised. Trials endured. None of these are wrong in themselves. They become a problem when they become a substitute for honest dependence on Christ's mercy.

The Syrophenician woman teaches a different posture. She had no claim. She had no pedigree. She had no record of devotion she could offer. She had a desperate need and a confident, humble faith in the mercy of Christ. She asked for crumbs and was given a feast. Her empty-handedness was the very thing that opened the door.

For students, this question presses on a real temptation. We can subtly believe that the longer we have followed Christ, the more credit we have accumulated. We may not say it that way. We may not even think it that way consciously. But the inner conversation can drift in that direction. "I have done my part. Surely the Lord will hear me." "I have been faithful for a long time. Surely He owes me." "I am not like those who have not served the way I have served." Each of these is the religion of the Pharisees, not the religion of the Syrophenician woman.

The corrective is honest humility. Confession that, after a lifetime of grace, we are still saved by mercy. That the cross is still the only ground on which we approach Him. That every spiritual victory has been His work in us. That every gift we have given has come from His hand first. That every service we have rendered has been an honor, not a payment. That we come, every day and every week, as those who can claim only His mercy.

Encourage students to come to Christ this week (in private prayer, at the Lord's table, in personal Bible reading) with empty hands. To lay down the list of claims. To say, in honest faith, "I am here only because of your mercy." That is the posture in which Christ delights to receive His people.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Salvation by grace through faith, not by accumulated credit (Ephesians 2:8–9; Titus 3:4–7)
- The ongoing posture of humble dependence in the life of every believer (Philippians 3:7–11; Galatians 2:20)
- The danger of subtle self-righteousness in long-tenured Christians (Luke 18:9–14)
- Christ's delight in those who come to Him without claim (Matthew 11:25–26)
- Faithful service and obedience as the fruit of grace, not the basis of standing (1 Corinthians 15:10)

Discussion Prompts

- What list of claims do you subtly carry when you come to the Lord?
- What would it look like to come to Christ this week with the empty hands of the Syrophenician woman?

- How does the gospel keep humbling even seasoned believers?

Question 9

Student Question:

Mark 7:21–23 is one of the clearest New Testament statements about the source and nature of human sin. Bring this passage into conversation with Jeremiah 17:9, Romans 3:9–23, Ezekiel 36:26, and Acts 2:38. What does Scripture teach about the corruption of the human heart, the fact that this corruption arises from our own choices rather than from a Calvinistic inheritance of total inability, and the inner cleansing and renewal of the heart that Christ accomplishes through the gospel response of faith, repentance, confession, and baptism into Him?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Mark 7:21–23 is one of the most important New Testament statements about the nature of human sin, and it deserves careful teaching. Jesus declares that defilement comes from the heart, and He provides the list: “evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness” (7:21–22). The witness of Scripture is consistent. Jeremiah said, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?” (Jeremiah 17:9). Paul wrote, “None is righteous, no, not one... all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:10, 23). This is the biblical anthropology. The corruption of the human heart is real, deep, and universal.

It is important to handle this teaching with care, because the Bible’s view of human sinfulness differs from several common misreadings. On one side, Pelagianism (the ancient and modern denial of real human corruption) treats sin as a series of bad choices in an otherwise neutral nature. The Scriptures do not support this. The heart itself is corrupted. The list in Mark 7 is not occasional misbehavior; it is the persistent output of the unrenewed heart.

On the other side, Calvinistic total depravity teaches that human beings are so corrupted by inherited sin that they are utterly unable to respond to God apart from a sovereign, irresistible work of grace given only to the elect. Scripture does not support this either. The Bible teaches both genuine human corruption and genuine human responsibility. Every hearer of the gospel is summoned to respond, and the response is real, not merely the playing out of a predetermined script. “Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely” (Revelation 22:17). “God now commands all people everywhere to repent” (Acts 17:30). The gospel call is universal and the human ability to respond is real, by the grace and Spirit working through the Word of God.

The church-of-Christ position holds together what Scripture holds together. Sin is universal and serious. The heart is corrupted. We need an inner work of God that we cannot perform on ourselves. At the same time, the gospel call is genuine, and the responsibility to respond is ours. We are not condemned for sins we have not committed, nor are we credited with the guilt of Adam by inheritance. We become sinners by our own choices, in accord with the corruption we

have inherited from our fallen race, and we become justified by the free grace of God received through faith expressed in obedience to the gospel.

How is the inner work of cleansing accomplished? Through the gospel response God has given. The New Testament pattern is consistent. The sinner hears the gospel (Romans 10:14–17). The sinner believes in Jesus as Lord and Christ (John 8:24; Romans 10:9–10). The sinner repents of sin (Acts 2:38; Acts 17:30; 2 Corinthians 7:10). The sinner confesses Christ before others (Romans 10:9–10; 1 Timothy 6:12). The sinner is baptized into Christ for the forgiveness of sins (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; Acts 22:16; Romans 6:3–4; Galatians 3:26–27; 1 Peter 3:21). At baptism the believer is united to Christ in His death and resurrection, the old self is buried, and the believer rises to walk in newness of life. This is not symbolism without substance. It is the moment God Himself appoints for the cleansing of the heart through the blood of Christ.

This inner cleansing does not end at baptism. It continues throughout the Christian life through the work of the Word, the Spirit, the Lord's Supper, prayer, the assembly of the saints, repeated confession of sin, and ongoing repentance. The heart, once cleansed, is to be guarded with all vigilance (Proverbs 4:23) and progressively renewed (Romans 12:1–2; 2 Corinthians 3:18). Salvation begun must be preserved through ongoing faith and obedience, against the real danger of drifting back into hardness (Hebrews 3:12–14).

For students this carries enormous weight. The heart problem is real. The cure is real too. It is not behavior modification. It is the work of Christ accomplished through the gospel response and continued through a lifetime of faithful walking. The gospel offer is genuine and universal. The response is required and possible. Mark 7 names the disease. The whole New Testament names the cure.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The corruption of the human heart as real, deep, and universal (Mark 7:21–23; Jeremiah 17:9; Romans 3:9–23)
- Rejection of Pelagianism (denial of real corruption) and of Calvinistic total depravity / inherited Adamic guilt
- Genuine human responsibility for our own sin and for our response to the gospel (Acts 17:30; Ezekiel 18:20)
- The universal and genuine gospel call (1 Timothy 2:3–4; 2 Peter 3:9; Revelation 22:17)
- Inner cleansing of the heart through the gospel response of faith, repentance, confession, and baptism into Christ (Acts 2:38; Romans 6:3–4; Galatians 3:26–27)
- The ongoing renewal of the heart through Word, Spirit, the Lord's Supper, the assembly, and ongoing repentance (Romans 12:1–2; 2 Corinthians 3:18; 1 John 1:9)
- The need for vigilant preservation of salvation through ongoing faith and obedience (Hebrews 3:12–14; Galatians 5:4)

Discussion Prompts

- How does Scripture hold together the reality of deep human corruption and the genuine responsibility to respond to the gospel?
- What is the difference between the church-of-Christ understanding of sin and the Calvinistic teaching of total depravity?
- How does the New Testament plan of salvation actually address the inner source of sin Mark 7 names?

Question 10

Student Question:

At the end of the chapter Jesus puts His fingers in a deaf man's ears, touches his tongue, looks up to heaven, sighs, and says, "Ephphatha," "Be opened" (7:31–35). As you close this lesson, where do you most need Christ to say "be opened" in your own life (an area of your hearing of His Word, your speech, a long-closed relationship, a place where your heart has shut down), and what one specific act of obedience would put you in front of Him to receive that opening this week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The chapter ends with one of the most personal scenes in Mark. A deaf and mute man is brought to Jesus. The crowd asks Him to lay His hand on him. Instead Jesus takes the man aside, away from the crowd. He puts His fingers in the man's ears. He touches the man's tongue. He looks up to heaven. He sighs. And He says, "Ephphatha," which Mark translates as "Be opened" (7:34). Immediately the man's ears are opened, his tongue is released, and he speaks plainly.

This is meant to land deeply on the heart of the disciple. Every one of us has places where we are closed. Ears that have stopped really hearing the Word. Tongues that have grown silent where they should speak. Hearts that have shut down toward a relationship that should be open. Wills that have closed against a step of obedience we have been delaying. Hopes that have folded up against a future we cannot see.

The same Christ who said "Ephphatha" over a deaf man still speaks "Be opened" over closed places in His disciples. He does this through the patient work of the Word, the Spirit, the Lord's Supper, the assembly of the saints, faithful brothers and sisters, honest confession, and obedient response. Sometimes the opening is immediate, like the deaf man's ears. More often, it is a steady, daily opening as we put ourselves in His presence and receive His work.

Help students identify the specific place that needs to be opened. A part of their hearing of Scripture that has gone deaf. An area of speech that has gone silent. A long-closed relationship that needs honest reaching out. A confession they have been refusing to make. A step of obedience they have been delaying for too long. A hope they have buried that He may want to raise.

Then invite them to put themselves in front of Him this week. The deaf man was brought to Jesus. He did not arrive on his own. Sometimes we are brought by brothers and sisters. Sometimes we walk ourselves to Him through the means of grace. Either way, the One who said “Be opened” over a deaf man in the Decapolis is still saying it over His people today. The crowd at the end of the chapter exclaimed, “He has done all things well” (7:37). The same can still be said. Bring your closed places to Him, and let Him do all things well in you too.

Close the lesson by inviting silent prayer in which each student names their “Ephphatha” place and offers themselves to Him for opening. The chapter ends with hearing restored and tongues released. The lesson should end with the same kind of expectancy.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Christ as the One who opens what is closed in His people (Luke 24:32, 45; Acts 16:14)
- The ongoing work of Christ in the believer through the means of grace (Philippians 1:6; Hebrews 13:20–21)
- The role of brothers and sisters in bringing one another to Christ for His work (Galatians 6:1–2; James 5:13–20)
- Honest confession and obedient response as the path of receiving Christ’s opening (1 John 1:9; James 1:21–25)
- The expectancy of faith that Christ “has done all things well” and continues to do so (Mark 7:37; Philippians 1:6)

Discussion Prompts

- What closed place in you most needs Christ to say “Ephphatha” this season?
- What is one specific step you could take this week to put yourself in His presence to receive that opening?
- Who could you ask to walk with you through that opening?