

JESUS' UNIVERSAL TEACHING OF PURITY IN MARK 7:1-15

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Abstract

Masalah makanan haram dan halal merupakan perkara besar dalam Kitab Suci, baik dalam Perjanjian Lama maupun Perjanjian Baru. Tokoh-tokoh dalam Kitab Makabe seperti Eleazar serta seorang ibu dengan anak-anaknya lebih rela mati daripada harus makan makanan haram. Meskipun secara mengejutkan tidak banyak dibahas dalam Perjanjian Baru, tema haram dan halal ini pun disinggung dalam situasi yang serius dan dengan pernyataan-pernyataan yang mutlak, baik dari Yesus sendiri maupun dari para rasul. Injil Markus secara spesifik juga membahas soal ini dalam pasal 7. Pembahasan Markus ini, selain mencatat salah satu pernyataan doktriner Yesus yang paling mutlak, menyumbangkan pula alasan-alasan teologis dan praktis yang matang. Haram dan halal menurut Yesus dalam Injil Markus dikembalikan kepada maksud dan tujuannya yang hakiki, yang tidak pernah hanya soal fisik, melainkan memiliki nilai teologis yang intrinsik. Kutipan dari Kitab Yesaya dalam perikop ini menjadi kunci utama untuk memahami dimensi teologis yang mendasari ajaran Yesus mengenai haram dan halal. Rupanya nilai terhakiki dari dimensi teologis ajaran Yesus tentang kemurnian itu terletak pada universalitasnya. Untuk pembahasan kali ini, saya tetap memilih metode analisis naratif dengan fokus pada analisis karakter berdasarkan interaksi mereka dalam percakapan.

Keywords

purity, Mark 7, interaction, character, characterization, narrative analysis

The teaching about clean/pure and unclean/defiled food is one of the most guarded Jewish traditions since the Old Testament, especially after the era of the Second Temple. What makes it important is that it is not only about food and beverages nor their alimentary aspect, but their consequences regarding the worship in the Temple. Hence, the relationship between the Jews and Jahweh. Hence, their identity and status as the Chosen People. The severity of its trespassing is feared even more than death. That was why Daniel and his three associates, Eleazar, and the seven brothers chose to renounce the unclean food compelled by their adversaries at the cost of their lives. Daniel, Sadrakh, Mesakh, and Abednego survived. Eleazar, the seven brothers and their mother, did not.

This article intends to demonstrate that the heroic sacrifice of these characters is never devalued by the teachings in the New Testament regarding the same issue. Jesus, at the roots of His every teaching, always observes the Law. He only put each matter in its most delicate yet intrinsic value. Jesus in Mark 7:1-15 makes a distinctive notion about the nature of the Law of the clean and unclean. By stating the most fundamental *telos* of purity, Jesus levitates the issue towards its perfect sense.

METHOD AND LIMITATION

It is not unusual to analyze a dialog as a narrative. The plot will be slow. However, the characterization will be easier. Text criticism of the text will be necessary to arrive at the

credible translation and structure. Sectional analysis will follow. The focal point of the analysis will be the interaction such as questions and responses, agreements and disputes, or the length of discussion regarding an issue.

As suggested by its title, this paper will not offer comprehensive study of purity in the New Testament. It will mainly focus on Jesus' response regarding the issue. The verses will be analyzed strictly synchronistic. However, for the plausibility of the translation, textual criticism will be necessary.

TEXT OF MARK 7:1-15

(1) Kai suna_{gontai} pro_j auvto_n oi Farisai/oi kai tinej tw/n grammate_{wn} evlqo_{ntej} avpo. ~Ierosolu_{mwn} (2) kai i_{do}ntej tina_j tw/n maqhtw/n auvtou o_{ti} koinai/j¹ cersi_n(tou/tv e_{stin} avni_{ptoi}j(evsqi_{ousin} tou_j a_{rtou}j) (3) &oi gar Farisai/oi kai pa_{ntej} oi Ioudai/oi eva_n mh. pugmh/2 ni_{ywntai} ta_j cei/raj ouv_k evsqi_{ousin}(kratou_{ntej} th_n para_{dosin} tw/n presbute_{rwn}((4) kai avp_v avgora_j eva_n mh. bapti_{swntai}³ ouv_k evsqi_{ousin}(kaia_{lla} pollaev_{stin} apare_{labon} kratei_n(baptismo_j pothri_{wn} kai xestw_n kai calki_{wn}⁴) (5) kai eperwtw_{sin} auvto_n oi Farisai/oi kai oigrammatei_j/ diatiouv peripato_{sin}⁵ oimaqhtaisou katath_n para_{dosin} tw/n presbute_{rwn}(avlla koinai/j cersi_n evsqi_{ousin} to_n a_{rtou}n) (6) ~O de ei=pen auvtou_j/ kalw_j evprofh_{teusen} Hsai_a peri u_{mwn} tw/n u_{pokritw}/n(w_j ge_{graptai} Io_{ti} o_{uto}j o_{lao}j toi_j cei_{lesi}_n me tima_hdekardi_a auvtw_n po_{rrw} avpe_{cei} avp_v evmou_j/ (7) ma_{thn} de se_{bontai} me dida_{skonte}j didaskali_aj evnta_{lmata} avnqrw_{pwn} (8) avfe_{ntej} th_n evntolh_n tou/ qeoukratei_{te} th_n para_{dosin} tw/n avnqrw_{pwn} (9) kai e_{legen} auvtou_j/ kalw_j avqetei_{te} th_n evntolh_n tou/ qeou/ i_{na} th_n para_{dosin}

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¹ Mark used the specific word koinoj for “unclean/defiled” which was different from the more frequently used word avka_{qarto}j to refer to unclean or amej in the OT. The word avka_{qarto}j in the OT covered many things: “unclean animal or food” in Lev 11:4-8; 11:24-47; 12:2-5; Num 18:15; Deut 12:15.22; “unclean leper” in Lev, 14:57; Num 5:2; “uncleanness because of gonorrhea” in Num 5:2; “uncleanness because of corpse” in Num 5:2; 9:6-10; 19:7-22; “unclean spirits” in Zech 13:2 (cf. the noun avkaqarsi_a: “uncleanness because of semen” in Lev 22:4; Lev 15; 16; 18; 19; Num 19:13; “the uncleanness of the land of the Gentiles” in Ezr 6:21; 9:11; 1 Macc 13:48; “the uncleanness of women in their menstrual period” in Ezek 22:10; 36:17; Lev 15:25; but for a clear reason the most despised of them was “the uncleanness of idolatry” in Jer 19:13; Ezek 7:20; cf. Jdt 16:18). In the NT, avka_{qarto}j was used mostly to describe the defiled nature the evil spirits, for example, in Matt 10:1; 12:43; Mark 1:23.26f; 3:11.30; 5:2.8.13; 6:7; 7:25; 9:25; Luke 4:33.36; 6:18; 8:29; 9:42; 11:24; Acts 5:16; 8:7; 10:14.28; 11:8; 1 Cor 7:14; 2 Cor 6:17; Eph 5:5; Rev 16:13; 17:4; 18:2. Koinoj was used with the same sense to Mark 7:2 in 1 Macc 1:47.62; Acts 10:14.28; 11:8. Notably, in Acts 11:8: both words koinoj and avka_{qarto}j appeared together.

² The rare word pugmh, in v.3 literally means “fist”, which refer to the Jewish custom of washing the hands “with the fist”. Some MSS, such as a W, replace it with more familiar and universal word like pukna means “often” or “thoroughly”. The other MSS sy^s omit the expression pugmh/ ni_{ywntai} altogether. I prefer to maintain pugmh because the great majority of MSS choose it (e.g. A B D L) and, it serves the nuance of Jewish custom in this verse. Cf. Bruce M. METZGER, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament, Second Edition*. United Bible Societies, New York (NY) 1994, 80; William L. LANE, *The Gospel according to Mark: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition, and Notes*, Wm. B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids (MI) 1974, 242.

³ Instead of the more ‘Christian’ term bapti_{swntai} (“to purify” supported by more apparatus such as A D W etc.), the MSS a B and some other miniscules write r^{anti}_{swntai}, which means “to sprinkle”.

⁴ Most likely xe_{sthj} in verse 4 is a transliterated word from Latin *sextarius*, a unit of measurement of that time (it’s about half a liter). The other word calki_{on} refers to a type of vases made out of bronze, usually for domestic use. Origen adds kli_{nh} (“bed”) to the list, but most of the important MSS do not contain it. See Alessandro BELANO, *Il Vangelo secondo Marco: Traduzione e analisi filologica*, Aracne editrice, Rome 2008, 498.

⁵ The use of the verb peripate_w is undoubtedly influenced by הלך in Hebrew, which has a meaning of “to follow/to behave” in a metaphorical/moral sense (cf. Isa 2:5; Job 29:3; 2 Kgs 20:3; Ps 1:1; 119:1; Prov 8:20; 14:2; 15, 21, John 8:12; Rom 6:4; 8:4; ff.).

u`mw/n sth,shte^À (10) Mwu[?]sh/j ga.r ei=pen\ ti,ma to.n pate,ra sou kai th.n mhte,ra sou(kai\ o` kakologw/n pate,ra h' mhte,ra qana,tw te^{leuta},tw^{6À} (11) u`mei/j de le,gete\ eva.n ei:ph| a;nqrwpoj tw patri h' th mhtri\ korba/n⁷(o[evstin dw/ron(o[eva.n ev⁸ evmou/ wvfelhgh/j((12) ouvke,ti avfi,ete auvto.n ouvde.n poih/sai tw patri h' th mhtri,((13) avkurou/ntej to.n lo,gon tou qeou th parado,sei u`mw/n hparedw,kate\ kaiparo,moia toiau/ta pollapoiei/te^À (14) Kaiproskalesa,menoj pa,lin to.n o;clon e;legen auvtoi/j\ avkou,sate mou pa,ntej kai su,nete^À (15) ouvde,n evstin e;xwqen tou/ avnqrw,pou eivsporeuo,menon eivj auvto.n o[du,natai koinw/sai auvto,n(avllataevk touavnqrw,pou evkporeuo,menaevstin ta koinou/nta to.n a;nqrwpon^À

TRANSLATION

(1) And gathered around Him the Pharisees along with some of the scribes, who had come from Jerusalem. (2) And had seen some of the disciples of Him ate their bread with defiled hands, that is, unwashed. (3) – For the Pharisees and all the Jews unless they wash their hands thoroughly do not eat, keeping the tradition of the elders; (4) and from market unless they purify themselves eat not; and other many things there are, which there are received to observe, washings of cups and jugs, and bronze vases – (5) And ask Him the Pharisees and the scribes, “Why walk not your disciples according to the tradition of the elders, but with defiled hands eat their bread?” (6) And He said to them, “Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, ‘This people honor me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. (7) But in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.’ (8) Abandoning the Commandment of God you hold fast the tradition of men.” (9) And he said to them, “How well you reject the Commandment of God, in order to keep your tradition. (10) For Moses said, ‘Honor your father and your mother,’ and, ‘He that speak evil of father or mother, let him surely die;’ (11) but you say, ‘If a man were to say to his father or his mother, ‘Anything you might have had profited from me is *Corban*, which is offering, (12) no longer can you permit him doing anything for the father or the mother;’ (13) making void the word of God by your tradition, which you have delivered. And many such things you do.” (14) And he summoned again the crowd, and said to them, “Hear me, all of you, and understand! (15) There is nothing from outside the man, that going into him can defile him, but the things which come out of the man are those that defile the man.”

STRUCTURE

The dialogue can be straightforwardly divided in three parts. First part is 1-5 with the subjects oi Farisai/oi and oi grammatei/j from Jerusalem (1.5). The theme of their part of the dialogue was eating with defiled hands (evsqi,w in 2.3.4.5; cei,r in 2.3.5, especially koinai/j cersi,n in 2.5) as a walk (peripate,w in 5) against the tradition of the elders (th.n paradosi,n tw/n presbute,rwn in 3.5). The second part is Jesus’ response to them in 6-13. This response can be split into two obvious sub-parts: (a) the citing from LXX Isa 29:13 opening the main passage regarding the choice of Jesus adversaries, which was tradition of the men over Commandments

⁶ The phrase qana,tw| te^{leuta},tw literally has to be translated “die the death”, but in LXX the use of the dative of the cognate (derived from the same form) noun with the verb, has similar function as the infinitive absolute used with a finite verb in Hebrew, which is to emphasize the meaning of the verb. Therefore, qana,tw| te^{leuta},tw can be translated as “let him absolutely die” or “let him really die”. See further explanation regarding cognate participle or noun in C.F.D. MOULE, *An Idiom Book of New Testament Greek*, Cambridge University Press, London 1959, 1953¹, 178-179.

⁷ Mark gave an internal translation here for korba/n, the transliteration from Hebrew !Br>q, as “offering”. The transliteration of this term is found only here in the Scripture.

of God (6-8) and (b) its explanation with an example of violation: the commandment to honor the father and the mother (9-13). In the last part (14-15), on one hand, Jesus went from general to particular theme, stating His position clearly above the purity, but on the other hand, He went from the particular audiences to those general, the crowd, promulgating that His teaching was supposed to be for all (cf. the use of the word *anqrwpoj* in 7.8.11 and most particularly three times in 15).

- a) Question of the adversaries from Jerusalem regarding purity (1-5).
- b) Jesus' Response on Tradition (6-13):
 - i. The error of the leaders from Jerusalem: tradition of men over the Commandment of God (6-8);
 - ii. An example of the error (8-13).
- c) Public proclamation regarding the source of defilements (14-15).

QUESTIONS REGARDING PURITY (1-5)

Mark 7:1-5 began with an introduction of the Pharisees and some scribes who had come from Jerusalem to questioned Jesus. Van Iersel and Kernaghan remind that the mention of "Jerusalem" here should be treated carefully, signaling that the text is not supposed to be treated only in a ritual or religion context, but also in political context.⁸ By confronting the emissaries from Jerusalem, Jesus was facing some fractions of His people, but those who had power to subjugate Him in political sphere. Joachim Jeremias believes that the Pharisees had great influence in the society at that time, religiously and politically alike, because of their unique role as teaching-priests.⁹ If Jeremiah's opinion was right, it wouldn't be odd then if the Pharisees and the scribes, the experts of the Law, felt responsible to reprimand Jesus regarding the tradition of elders in the context of rites and offering.¹⁰ They had to be the vanguards of tradition. While there might be nothing wrong with their role, what troubled Jesus was their

⁸ Bas VAN IERSEL, *Marco, la lettura e la risposta, Un commento*, Editrice Queriniana, Brescia 2000, 215; Ronald J. KERNAGHAN, *Mark*, Inter Varsity Press, Downers Grove (IL) 2007, 156-158.

⁹ L.L. Grabbe puts the Pharisee sect among the minority movements with small influence towards Jewish society in general despite their obvious approaches to gain more political influence. Lester L. GRABBE, "Judaism, History of, Part II, Second Temple Times (586 B.C.E.-70 C.E.)", in J. NEUSNER – A.J. AVERY-PECK – W.S. GREEN (eds.), *The Encyclopedia of Judaism (2nd Edition)*, Vol. 2, Koninklijke Brill NV, Leiden 2005, 1309. However, his analysis seems to ignore this claim of Joachim Jeremias. According to Jeremias, while the leaders and influential members of the society, especially before the rebellion in 66 ad, might have been the scribes, only a handful of them became priest. On a contrary, a great number of Pharisees gained political influences through their position as teaching priests. Joachim JEREMIAS, *Jerusalem en tiempos de Jesus, estudio economic y social del mundo del Nuevo Testamento*, Ediciones Cristiandad, Madrid 1977, 269-271. In accordance with Jeremiah, Cohen also stresses the important role of the Pharisees in the time of Jesus. Cohen explained that the priesthood of the Pharisees might be different from the Aronic priesthood, which was hereditary. The Pharisees was known as the priests responsible for teaching. Their particular role led the people to call them "Rabbi". Ruptured from their sovereignty, the Jews in the time of Jesus sought out one of their ancestral identity, the Law, making the position of the Pharisees as the guardians of Law more significant and influential. After the destruction of the Second Temple of Jerusalem (70 AD), the Jews lost not only their sovereignty, but also their Temple. The Law became the last barrier of their ancestral identity. The position of the Pharisees sect became even stronger. Thus, began an age of a class in the society beyond the Temple and the inherited office of priesthood. Ironically, their influence as Rabbi of the society became too publicly accepted their existence as a sect was slowly fused into the society. With that the Jewish sectarianism also came to an end. GRABBE, *op. cit.*, 1309. S.J.D. COHEN, "The Significance of Yavneh: Pharisees, Rabbis, and the End of Jewish Sectarism", in *HUCA* 55 (1984), 27-34.

¹⁰ According to Meyer, due to the limited sources describing the first-century Pharisees, the theory of Jeremias cannot be challenged appropriately. However, his analysis and in-depth studies of the available historical sources was remarkable and had long-lasting influences over scholars after him. John P. MEYER, "The Quest for Historical Pharisees: A Review Essay on Roland Deines, *Die Phariseer*", in *CBQ* 61 (1999), 720.

inner motive. Their drive to uphold the visible and distinguished identity through the practices of Law had blinded their eyes and deafened their ears from seeing the true identity of the Jews, people chosen by God to receive and observe His Commandment (cf. 7:18-19).

Jesus was aware of the role of His adversaries as teachers or “Rabbi”, quoting the Prophet Isaiah in 7:7: “...in vain do they worship me, *teaching* as doctrines the precepts of men.” It is interesting that Jesus was also called “Rabbi” in Mark: twice by Peter (9:5; 11:21), once by Judas (14:45), and Nicodemus called Him with the more delicate “Rabbouni” in 10:51. As we have seen in the last chapter, teaching was an important element of Jesus’ mission. He taught (didaskw) in many occasions (1:21; 2:13; 4:1; 6:2; 6:6; 6:34; 8:31; 9:31; 10:1; 11:17; 12:35; cf. 14:49). His townsfolk perceived the dunamij of His teaching (6:2). He taught even better than the scribes, because He taught with authority, with evxousi,a (1:22). The dispute in Mark 7:1-23, then, was a dispute between teachers.

V. 2 is interrelated to v. 5, separated by a long but important explanation of the ritual customs of the Pharisees in vv. 3-4. It is obvious that Mark made that long explanation because he considered readers with no or little understanding of Judaism and their rituals.¹¹ Logically, this teaching targeted readers beyond the Jews. Perhaps that’s the reason Mark and the other evangelists chose to use the more elegant Greek adjective koinoj for “defiled” in reference to the customs of the Gentiles. The other adjective usually used in the OT to refer to the meaning of “defiled” or “unclean” is avka,qartoj. Mark used avka,qartoj only for the evil spirits, possibly to describe an obvious foul nature of them, as the word has a strong negative sense in itself. However koinoj has a more neutral nuance in meaning. It can simply be translated as “common”. William L. Lane, having studied the equivalent phrase for koinai/j cersi,n in the Jerusalem and Babylonian *Targum*, points out the possibility that koinoj was used here to define materials which were neither certainly pure nor impure, but certainly did not belong to the Jewish tradition, or in this case the ritual of purity.¹² This interpretation is very considerable concerning that Mark in the same verse quickly added the explanation that the “defiled hands” simply meant “unwashed hand”.

The concept of uncleanness in the OT can only be understood in the light of Judaism theology of covenant.¹³ The people chosen by God must be holy, because God who chooses them is holy. The Holy God chooses and invites His people to have an encounter with Him. However, only those with pure heart and clean hands can climb the Mountain of God (Psalms 24:3-4). In other words, only those who are free from impurity can present before Him. This logic was followed literally by the Jews. Only those who were considered pure can participate in their liturgical celebrations, especially the celebrations in the Temple in Jerusalem. The unclean people could not attend any of these celebrations, at least before they were declared clean (Lev 13:34.58; 14:8.9.19.54-57; Num 19:19; cf. Luk 17:14). In several cases, the unclean people were banished from the community (perfect *niphal* of “trk”, was used to intensify the act of the exile, for example in Exod 30:38; Lev 7:21.25.27; 13:46; 19:8; Num 9:13). The ones who decided of all these and also were capable to do the cleansing rituals were the priests.¹⁴

¹¹ As correctly noted by R.A. COLE, *The Gospel according to Mark: An Introduction and Commentary*, InterVarsity Press, Leicester 1989, 182.

¹² The equivalent phrase in focus is ~ydy ~ts. According to Lane, ~ts here may be translated as “as is” refers to a more neutral sense of uncertain quality of things. LANE, *op. cit.*, 242.

¹³ As showed by these scholars: Walter HOUSTON, *Purity and Monotheism: Clean and Unclean Animals in Biblical Laws*, Sheffield Academic Press, Sheffield, 1993, 15: “...the function of dietary laws in marking boundaries and protecting holiness”; Jonathan KLAWANS, *Purity, Sacrifice, and the Temple: Symbolism and Supersessionism in the Study of Ancient Judaism*, Oxford University Press, Oxford – New York (NY) 2005, 145-174.

¹⁴ Cf. Lev 12:7-8; 13:13.17.34; 14:20.48-53; Neh 12:30; 13:9; Luke 17:14.

Subsequently, they needed to make criteria for each case. At this point, the covenant, promulgated materially by Moses in form of the tables of Commandment of God (Ex 20:13), was transcribed further into some regulations made by men.¹⁵

Vs. 3 and 4 introduced some key terms for the interpretation of the text, despite their syntactical position as explanatory clause. First of all, the statement that the custom of washing hands before eating bread was not belong to the Pharisees alone, but also belong to *pa,ntej oi Vloudai/oi*.¹⁶ With this statement Mark put the disciples in contrast not only the Pharisees and the scribes from Jerusalem. The disciples had done unusual thing outside the common custom of the Jews. The occurrence of the rare word *pugmh*,¹⁷ (can be found only once in the whole NT) and the other customs in v. 4 indicated that Mark was familiar with at least some of the Jewish customs. The custom or the ritual of washing the hands “with the fist” was to them a necessary act to follow *th.n para,dosin tw/n presbute,rwn*. Mark used the word *para,dosij* translated as “tradition” five times in 7:1-15. In the NT this word occurred thirteen times (Matt 15:2.3.6; Mark 7:3.5.8.9.13; 1 Cor 11:2; Gal 1:14; Col 2:8; 2 Thess 2:15; 3:6). According to Alessandro Belano, though the word *para,dosij* has a generic meaning in the Greek literatures corresponding with the meaning “that to be passed on”, in NT the word has an almost technical meaning matches with “regulation”.¹⁸ Matthew and Mark used the word in reference to “the tradition of the elders” (Paul used different word, but with similar meaning to the elder, *patriko,j* “ancestral” in Gal 1:14). “The elders” (from another adjective with substantive meaning *presbu,teroj*) was an equivalent to *lae(rf,y yneiqz* (e.g. in Exod 4:29; 17:6; Lev 4:15; 9:1; Josh 24:1; 1Sam 4:3). Together the phrase “the tradition of the elders” referred to the oral interpretations of written Torah by some elite priests.¹⁹

In v. 5 the real dialogue between the representatives from Jerusalem and Jesus began. They told Jesus what they had seen in form of question. However, the question sounded more like an accusation with a mention of the tradition of the elders. Showing their astuteness, the adversaries of Jesus tried to assail Him indirectly, but at the same time strongly. They claimed that the disciples didn’t walk (*peripate,w*)²⁰ the tradition of the elders and thus violated it. The consequences of the violation as stated above were serious. They waited for Jesus’ reaction. If

¹⁵ Some of these regulations are conserved in *mishnah*, a collection of rabbinic teachings from about 200 BC - 220 AD. For example, the regulation about washing hands mentioned in Mark 7:1-15 can be found in *Mishnah Yadayim* 2:1. (Please note that “*yadayim*” means “hands”). This is a *mishnah* that specifically deals with impurity related to hands and a part of *tehorot*, a chapter discussing the theme of impurity in general.

¹⁶ The determinative adjective *Vloudai/oj* has a substantive sense referring to Jewish ethnographic and religious group, or the Jews. The name derived from the Hebraic masculine proper name *hd|hy*, Judah. The first use of this name in the OT as plural referring to a group of people can be found in 2Kgs 16:6. Originally applied to people of Israel from the kingdom of Judah, in post-exilic period the term was used to refer to all the people of Israel, thus became a synonym of “the Israelites”. See BELANO, *op. cit.*, 493.

¹⁷ See footnote no. 2.

¹⁸ BELANO, *op. cit.*, 495.

¹⁹ Only by the end of the first century ad, *halakhah*, a collection of interpretations by the these elites consisted of rabbinical law and customs, together with *taryag mitzvot* as well as Talmudic laws, were acknowledged by the religion of Judaism to have the same ‘binding’ authority as the Torah. So, Mark at that time could not have access to any fixed regulation or Law of Judaism. Regarding the Pharisees at that time, as testified by Flavius Josephus (being a Pharisee himself), they imposed many regulations even to the Jews beyond Jerusalem by referring to the tradition of the elders, some of those were never written in the Law of Moses (*Antiq.*, 13,297; cf. 18,12).

²⁰ The choice of word is interesting. Adela Yarbro Collins, comparing Matthew and Mark, concludes that the question in Mark is not overtly hostile. Matthew version uses a stronger word *parabai,nw*, “to transgress” (Matt 15:2). Adela Yarbro COLLINS, *Mark: A Commentary*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis (MN) 2007, 349. However, the choice of the word in Mark is logical concerning that Jesus’ adversaries come with hidden agenda. The question must be pretty much polished.

Jesus as the teacher did not blame His disciples, then He justified their actions. Consequently, Jesus ought to be held responsible, too.²¹

JESUS' RESPONSE ON TRADITION (6-13)

The part can be divided in two sections, but as suggested by Lambrecht they are better to be read together.²² The first section (7:6-8) consists of the opening reply of Jesus followed by a quote from LXX Isa 29:13 as a key to show the core of His adversaries' errors. The second section (7:9-13) explained the first section with an example of the violation of the commandment to honor the father and the mother.

The Error of the Leaders: Tradition over Commandment (6-8)

Jesus gave His adversaries a shocking reply. He called the Pharisees and the scribes from Jerusalem "hypocrites" (v. 6). Furthermore, they were hypocrites not in casual sense but those whom Isaiah already prophesized about. In other words, Jesus argued that His adversaries were condemned by the word of God Himself. The reason of their hypocrisy was that they worship God only externally, by lips but their "heart" was far away from God. Jesus fittingly chose the text of Isa 29 because of the similar context regarding the fake worship. As noted correctly by R.E. Watts, as a part of a series of oracles in Isa 28-31, Isa 29 was about the attack on rulers of Jerusalem who had rejected the message of the prophet (see Isa 28:14). These oracles can be conveniently connected to Jesus' critic to His adversaries in Mark.²³ The leaders in Isa 28-31 had rejected Yahweh's instruction and teaching through His prophets (30:1-11), while resorting themselves with their own made teachings to conform the nations and their idols (cf. Isa 28:15-16; 31:1-9). By doing this, their end would eventually come (Isa 30:12-14). Their worship would not be fruitful and they would not be able to solve it (Isa 29:10-12); for they would be condemned to blindness and deafness (Isa 28:9-14; 29:9-12), so they would not be able to read the word of God and understand it (Isa 29:9-16). In short, human-made plans and teachings were futile and due to be broken and failed (cf. Isa 28:13,18; 31:1-3). It was Yahweh who would fulfill His plan in the end (Isa 28:2,18-22).

In context of Isa 28-31, the critic of Jesus in Mark 7:6-7 cannot be interpreted only as a critic regarding the way of worship. It is true that the sincere worship from heart is necessary. The change from *th.n paradōsin tw/n presbuterwn* in vv. 2,5 to *th.n paradōsin tw/n avnqrwn* in v. 7 has a great significance. By quoting Isa 29:13, Jesus stressed out the more profound problem, which was their preferences of man-made regulations (has a more general and universal sense than elders-made tradition) over the Commandment of God (v. 8). By giving comparison to the oracles of Isaiah, Jesus warned them that their wrong preferences would make their worship worthless. It would even lead them to blindness and deafness, with no way back. At the end, their man-made teachings and regulations would only fail. They would be destroyed, and their land would be taken away from them (possible allusion to the destruction of the Second Temple).

An Example of the Error (Vs. 9-13)

Jesus explained His accusation by giving a specific example of the violation of the Commandment of God. It was a counter for the accusation given by His adversaries in 7:1-5.

²¹ Cf. Luke 11:38: Jesus Himself broke the rule by eating with unwashed hands!

²² Jan LAMBRECHT, "Jesus and the Law: An Investigation of Mark 7:1-23", in *ETL* 53 (1977), 48,55.

²³ Cf. Rikki E. WATTS, *Isaiah's New Exodus in Mark*, Baker Academic, Grand Rapids (MI) 1997, 213-218.

It was them who had violated the Commandment of God in order to maintain their own tradition (v. 9). By mentioning the name Moses in v. 10, Jesus stated that He was citing Torah itself. He chose the fourth commandment from Deut 5:16: “Honor your father and your mother,” and related to that from Deut 21:17, “He that speak evil of father or mother, let him surely die!” The commandment to honor the father and the mother was a good choice to confront the commandment to worship God.

While the sentence in v. 11-12 was syntactically inept, it was not difficult to grasp the meaning of it. Jesus accused His adversaries of being evasive in their responsibility to take care of their parents. The responsibility could mean anything, but considering the context of *Corban*, it ought to be financial responsibility. According to Jesus’ accusation, His adversaries had a possibility to make a ‘religious’ excuse, which had been considered higher in priority, to keep the money they had gained away from their parents. This strange concept suggested the existence of an oath, a regulated one.²⁴ In its practice, the oath could be used an excuse to fully neglect the father and the mother (as suggested by v. 12). This was obviously an act of dishonoring them. Lane sees this rejection of one of the commandments as the negation of the whole Commandment of God. There is no circumstance where one can observe one of the commandments while negating the others. In this sense, obviously Jesus respected the Commandment of God. He, however, rejected the man-made regulations created from human interpretations that against the spirit of Torah.²⁵

Public Proclamation regarding the Source of Defilements (14-15)

A change of audiences does not necessarily mean a change of episode. In fact, 7:14-15 cannot be read separated from 7:1-13. Jesus’ statement in these two verses has critical functions to conclude His teaching. First of all, only in this part the question from His adversaries about food purity was answered. Vv. 6-13 was hardly a response to the attack from vv. 2 and 5, although as we have seen from the paragraphs above, vv. 6-13 consisted of Jesus’ responses to the core problem implied by the attack. With the knowledge of the core problem, the response to the original attack can be read with new perspective.

Another importance of this part as conclusion was indicated by the word *anqrwpoj* in vv. 7.8.9, which recurred three times in v. 15. The change from *th.n para,dosin tw/n presbute,rwn* in vv. 2.5 to *th.n para,dosin tw/n anqrw,pwn* in v. 7 marked a transition from particular to universal teaching. This change can only be confirmed by a public proclamation to the crowd (v. 14). The statement itself was pretty much self-explanatory, enough to be called radical. Jesus definitively set one of His most straightforward teachings: “There is nothing from outside the man, that going into him can defile him, but the things which come out of the man are those that defile the man (V. 15).” This statement was unmistakably an opposite of the teaching of purity according to the tradition of the elders.

In the verses above, Jesus antagonized the tradition as man-made regulation and teaching, associating it with the man-made regulation and teaching that had brought the Jews into their destruction and exile. The main problem was they preferred it to the Commandment of God. Here he declared something counter to it, thus making His statements in 14-15 a new teaching claimed to be in harmony with the Commandment of God. He did begin with the

²⁴ As pointed brilliantly by Hooker. Morna D. HOOKER, *The Gospel according to St. Mark*, A&C Black, London 1991, 175. However, Hooker doesn’t clearly show the fact that while *Mishnah Nedarim* (oaths) indeed suggests several possibilities of “vow by *Qorban*” (e.g. *Nedarim* 1:4 E; 2:5 I B; 11:5 D), none of them corresponds with the one indicated in Mark 7:11-12.

²⁵ This interpretation is supported by Francis J. MOLONEY, *The Gospel of Mark*, Hendrickson Pub., Peabody (MA) 2002, 141; LANE, *op. cit.*, 252.

imperative *avkou,sate*, a solemn call which had its background in prophetic call to hear the proclamation of the word of God (Josh 3:9; Hos 4:1; Amos 3:1; Mic 1:2, ff.). The addition of the second imperative *su,nete* was necessary to stress out the didactical nature of the statement to come, as marked well by R.A. Guelich.²⁶ It concerns one of the most repetitive themes in the Gospel, which was the ignorance, especially the lack of understanding of the disciples (e.g. 6:52; 7:18; 8:14-21). Ironically, as showed in the 7:17-23, they failed again to understand.

Regarding the importance of the particular rules of purity governing meals, Neusner, an ordained rabbi, explains that the rules realize “the concrete communion, the social existence of the group”.²⁷ This explanation gives the ground to understand the significant of Jewish feast. It is never a simple gathering. It is a formal and legal moment to display their existence, their identity. Therefore, there must be some rules to distinguish their feast from the others. Underlining their system as a whole package, it is clear then to reject these dietary rules means dishonoring the whole system of corporate Judaism.

Jesus’ statement in 14-15 obviously broke the whole concept of alimentary purity. No food can be considered defiled, neither the way human enjoys the food. What is defiled always comes from inside the human. People cannot participate in a Jewish feast without being Jews by observing the whole package of Law and some man-made regulations. On a contrary, such ethnical-identical requirements are not necessary to participate in Jesus’ feast. The defilement that makes men unworthy for His feast does not come from the food or their ethnical identity. It can only come from their heart.

The word *kardi,a* (heart) appears frequently in the NT (e.g. in Matt 5:8; 6:21; 9:4; 11:29; Luke 1:17.51.56; 6:45; Rom 1:29-31; Gal 5:19-21; 1 Pet 4:3; Rev 2:23; 17:17; 18:7; ff.). The equivalent of “heart” in Hebrew is *bl*. This term has various meanings, but majority of the usages refer to “will” (e.g. Exod 4:21; 7:13; 9:12; 10:20; 1 Sam 6:6). It can refer to “the totality of man’s inner or immaterial nature” (e.g. Gen 20:5-6; 45:26; Prov 27:9), but it can also refer to “the totality of a man’s nature and character, both inner and outer” (e.g. 1 Kgs 8:23; Ps 9:1). Sometimes it refers to “wisdom” or “understanding” (e.g. Deut 29:3; Exod 7:23; “wise of heart” in Prov 16:23; 1 Kgs 3:12).²⁸

In Mark 7:6 the sense of “inner” for the word “heart” was obvious, especially when Jesus put it in contrast with “lips”, a physical category. If we read these passages in the context of Isa 28-31, it seems quite obvious that they were critic against the hardened hearts or the stubborn will of the rulers of Jerusalem who chose to depend on man-made regulations over the Commandment of God. These kinds of hardened hearts symbolized by the blindness and deafness (Isa 29:9-10) could not be cured and subsequently would lead them to destruction. While “heart” in 7:6 belonged to a specific group of people, the source of defilement in 7:14 seems to have different nuance. First, here the audiences were the crowd. Secondly, the genitive of the source was “man” (7:15). Obviously, the inner source or the “heart” (cf. 7:19.21) here referred to totality of inner nature of human which defined his or her purity. However, in context of 14-15, the defilement from the inside made the whole man defiled. In this sense, “heart” here had both internal and external allegation.²⁹

²⁶ R.A. GUELICH, *Mark 1-8*, 26, World Biblical Commentary, Dallas (TX) 2002, 374.

²⁷ Jacob NEUSNER, “Individual and Community in Judaism”, in Jacob NEUSNER – Alan J. AVERY-PECK – William Scott GREEN (eds.), *Encyclopedia of Judaism, Second Edition, Vol. II F-K*, Brill, Leiden 2005, 1152.

²⁸ See R. Laird HARRIS – Gleason L. ARCHER, JR. – Bruce K. WALTKE (eds.), *Theological Workbook of the Old Testament*, Moody Press, Chicago (IL) 1980, 1071.

²⁹ Cf. LANE, *op. cit.*, 255, while discussing this chapter Lane writes: “...the heart is the center of human personality which determines man’s entire action and inaction.”

With these verses Jesus declared no food that came from outside could defile human, and by that surpassing the food law, especially in Lev 11. The problem is, as demonstrated by Lambrecht, by declining these regulations Jesus Himself criticized some parts of Torah.³⁰ Plausibly, Jesus can be challenged here as inconsistent because His accusation towards His adversaries in 7:9-13 was also about a violation of one part of Torah which negated the whole Commandment of God. Hooker tries to solve the contradiction by arguing that it is a matter of priority. Not all commandments can be treated on an equal level. Jesus believed that He had the authority, as teacher and as prophet to interpret them differently. Hooker asserts that this case is one of the examples when Jesus put Himself above the Mosaic interpretation of the Commandment of God.³¹ This example of surpassing the interpretation of Moses and the other example in 10:1-12 about the law of marriage, apparently presented Jesus as a figure greater than Moses in term of authority to interpret the Commandment of God.

SUMMARIES

1. The theme of uncleanness was connected to the concept of Chosen People of God with their Law and liturgical celebrations. The unclean people should be cast away from the People, declared as outlaws, and did not have any privilege to participate in the liturgical celebrations. Therefore, the question by the Pharisees and the scribes, as the representatives from Jerusalem and the vanguards of the tradition of the elders, towards the disciples of Jesus was not merely a casual one. It contained an aggressive accusation. The violation of the disciple could lead them at least to prohibition to participate in Jewish worship and at most to banishment from the Jewish cultic community. If Jesus did not condemn the action of the disciples, then He would be held responsible of teaching the way of violation to the tradition of the elders.
2. Watts' clear description of the context of Isa 28-31 suggests some important parallel links to Mark 7:6-7. It is obvious that Jesus did not quote Isa 29:13 in random. Mark seemed to realize the connection with his early mention of the origin of Jesus' adversaries: they were among the rulers of Jerusalem. The critic of Jesus and Isaiah shared the similar context. The rulers of Jerusalem chose to go with human plans and teachings, neglecting the true teachings of Yahweh. Their plans would fail. Their days were counted. At the end, God's plan was the one to be fulfilled perfectly. Here I added about the tone of hope, which was somehow missing from Watts' explanation.
3. In 7:9-13 Jesus confronted His adversaries with counter accusation on one specific oath of preserving all their money for the so-called offering to God. Gradually, this human made oath was used as an excuse to erase one of the commandments of God: the commandment to honor the father and the mother. The violation of one of the commandments subsequently would turn into general negligence towards the Commandment of God.
4. Jesus taught something different to what His adversaries believed regarding the alimentary purity. The main point of His teaching is the universal feast where everyone can participate in regardless their ethnic or nationality. This teaching is an opposite to the concept of feast in Judaism. For corporate Jews, a banquet is a special moment to display their unique existence and identity. It was a part of their system of belief. Jesus criticized the fact that somehow this system consisted of not only observation of Torah, but man-made regulations as well. Moreover, the man-made regulations were observed more than Torah to the point

³⁰ LAMBRECHT, *op. cit.*, 76.

³¹ HOOKER, *op. cit.*, 179-180.

that it was used against it. By this teaching Jesus apparently became the interpreter of Torah. Hooker concludes that at this point Jesus believed to have the authority to change the Mosaic interpretation of the Commandment of God.

5. All in all, Mark 7:1-15 presents the figure of Jesus as the teacher of a new openness towards the Gentiles. The ritual purity was rendered insignificant by His teaching. This issue is everything but simple, considering the general tendency of the Jews to follow their rulers from Jerusalem (specifically reminded by Mark in his explanation in 7:3: *pa,ntej oi Ioudai/oi*). From their point of view, the observation of tradition was a vital instrument to maintain their unity and identity as a tribe, religiously and politically alike. Jesus' teaching had great influence because He taught with authority and power. He was a threat to the unity. And with this teaching, He significantly increased the gap between Him and His adversaries.

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