

Mark 7 (Part 1): 1-23 - God Looks At the Heart

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“Now when the Pharisees gathered to him, with some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem, ² they saw that some of his disciples ate with hands that were defiled, that is, unwashed. ³ (For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands properly, holding to the tradition of the elders, ⁴ and when they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they wash. And there are many other traditions that they observe, such as the washing of cups and pots and copper vessels and dining couches.) (That sounds like just a heap of fun) ⁵ And the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, “Why do your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?” ⁶ And he said to them, “Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written,

*“‘This people honors me with their lips,
but their heart is far from me;
⁷ in vain do they worship me,
teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’*

⁸ You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men.”

⁹ And he said to them, “You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to establish your tradition! ¹⁰ For Moses said, ‘Honor your father and your mother’; and, ‘Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.’ ¹¹ But you say, ‘If a man tells his father or his mother, “Whatever you would have gained from me is Corban”’ (that is, given to God)— ¹² then you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or mother, ¹³ thus making void the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And many such things you do.”

¹⁴ And he called the people to him again and said to them, “Hear me, all of you, and understand: ¹⁵ 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.” ¹⁷ And when he had entered the house and left the people, his disciples asked him about the parable. ¹⁸ And he said to them, “Then are you also without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, ¹⁹ since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is

expelled?” (Thus he declared all foods clean.)²⁰ And he said, “What comes out of a person is what defiles him²¹ For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery,²² coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness.²³ All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.”” (ESV)

Stop there. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, open our hearts to the ministry of Your Word. Teach us today, because You are the teacher. Fill us with understanding. I pray, my Father God, for eyes that would see and ears that would hear. Lord, open our hearts to Your voice. We ask it in Jesus' precious name, amen.

Every so often, when I'm talking to people who don't go to church, and maybe even don't believe in God, or maybe they do, but they're not really sure what they believe because they really haven't applied themselves. And I'll start talking a little bit about some of the things that I've learned that God's taught me over the years.

And they'll, they usually have this interesting sort of a phrase or statement that they make to push you back a little bit and give a little distance in the conversation, and they will say, well, I'm not religious. And that's a very common statement that someone will make.

And my immediate response to people like that is, neither am I, and I really, truly mean that from a very sincere standpoint, I don't consider myself a religious person at all because religion has taken on a completely different connotation. And it's essentially what we're seeing here in this passage.

Religion is so much today bound up in traditions and rituals and semi-mindless sort of things that we do, to go through the process, or go through the motions of doing church, or doing the God thing, whatever the God thing happens to be, or whatever.

That it has really just lost a lot of its meaning and its importance. And truly what we're going to see in this passage is that God doesn't want you to be religious.

God wants to have a relationship with you. He wants to know you. He wants you to learn from him. He wants you to hear his voice, and He wants you to be led by His Holy Spirit, but He does not want you to be led and governed by religious thought, which ends up being rather perfunctory, and mindless, and legal from the standpoint of, here's what I do next, and so forth. And this is what Jesus is being confronted with here in this passage by these individuals known as scribes.

Now, let me stop there just for a moment, because in order to better understand these men, who are coming and talking to Jesus, I think maybe a little bit of historical background might be needed.

Around the 4th or 5th centuries, before the time of Christ, around the time of Ezra, you guys remember Ezra? The office of scribe got an upgrade. Now the word scribe simply means copyist. And it was today we would call them Kinko, I suppose, or something like that, or Xerox or something, because essentially their job was to copy the scriptures and that was fundamentally all they did.

But around the time of Ezra, Ezra changed all that for scribes because Ezra was a teacher, and as a teacher, at the time when Israel was now coming back into the land after the 70-plus years of exile in the Babylonian Empire, they were now coming back to their homeland, they were reestablishing their lifestyle and their observance of God and so forth as it relates to all of those things.

Ezra was very critical in the time of Israel to teach them the Word of God, which they had largely not been hearing during their time of the Babylonian captivity. But Ezra, again, was known as a teacher, even though he was just a copyist. Let me show you an interesting passage from Nehemiah that talks about Ezra, and it goes like this. It says,

Nehemiah 8:8 (ESV)

They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave sense, so that the people understood the reading.

They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave sense, so that the people understood the reading.

And you know what, that's a great definition of a teacher. Somebody who reads through the Scripture, who explains the meaning, who gives a sense behind what's going on in the passage, and makes it clear for people, right? I mean, that's just a, frankly, a wonderful definition.

Ezra single-handedly jump-started a new definition of what it meant to be a scribe. And after the time of Ezra, scribes became known as experts in the law and teachers essentially. And during that time, leading up to the time of Christ, they became very passionate in their desire to expand the law and define it and amplify it.

What ended up happening though is they started adding all these rules and all these regulations, and all these little nitpicky sort of things, like how to wash your hands, and I mean exactly how much, how to measure out the water, and all the other things that came along with it. And by the time Jesus came along, this had just permeated Jewish society.

And people were just locked into this legalism. Now, it wasn't in book form by the time Jesus came on the scene. It was still being passed along by oral tradition. And approximately, well, a few hundred years after the time of Christ, all of this oral tradition was written down in what we know today as the Mishnah.

And the Mishnah became so much more than just a commentary on the law by a bunch of scribes and experts. It became equal to the law. It literally, over a period of time, became equal to the Word of God.

And it was known at the time of Christ. Again, they didn't call it the Mishnah during his time. They simply called it the traditions of the elders and meaning those who had come before us and they have left for us these instructions and we are, we now keep them by tradition. Tradition can be very strong in our culture.

So this chapter, as you see here, opens up here in chapter 7, with some of these scribes coming from Jerusalem, along with some Pharisees, to basically check Jesus out. And what do they find? They come to listen to Jesus, to see what's going on. And what do they find? These guys aren't washing their hands, right?

How I would love to have been able to see Jesus do what He did on earth. And all these guys do when they come, they don't, instead of saying, wow, the blind can see, the lame can walk, the deaf can hear.

They're going, these guys aren't washing their hands, right? But that's what the law does. It makes you nitpicky and you're always looking at people to find out what they're doing wrong. Watch your step there, partner. Because if you're doing something wrong, we're going to find it. And so immediately they begin to criticize.

It says in verse 2, *"they saw that some of his disciples ate with hands that were defiled..."* If you look in your Bible there, it says, *"...unwashed."* Now, stop there for just a moment.

That doesn't mean they had dirty hands. It's not like parents who I can't talk today. What's the problem? Like dishing up the meal and there and you look at the kid. Hey, get in there and wash your hands. My parents did that to me all the time. And so this is not what's going on. It's not that their hands are dirty, it's that they haven't washed their hands according to the traditions of all of the little, minute, legalistic sort of ways that they were supposed to do that.

And you'll notice as he goes on in verse 3 because Mark is writing for a non-Jewish audience, he explains what they mean when they said to Jesus, hey, Your disciples aren't washing with the proper traditional sort of a hand wash.

He says in verse 3 here that the Pharisees, all the Jews, they don't even start eating until they've gone through all of these rituals of washing related to the things that they're going to touch.

And notice the wording in verse 5. Look with me here again in verse 5: “*And the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, “Why do your disciples not walk according to the (Word of God? Oh, it doesn't say that, does it? Did you notice what they actually asked Him? They said, why don't your disciples walk according to the) traditions of the elders?”*”

In other words, they're not accusing the disciples of violating God's Word. They're accusing the disciples of violating the traditions that have been handed down over the years, which the Jews had elevated to the place of God's Word. Right? That's what's going on here.

His answer to that question, look at verse 6, and He basically starts off by saying, yeah, Isaiah had you guys pegged when He said, and He goes on to say in verse 7, “*in vain do they worship me...*” The word vain means for no purpose, for empty reasons. And He says, look what He goes on to say, “*...teaching as doctrines (or truths from God) the commandments of men.*”

Now, did you catch that? Jesus...they're accusing Jesus and His disciples of not holding to tradition, and Jesus is accusing them of abandoning the Word of God in order to keep to their traditions, alright? In other words, He says, your teachings are of human origin.

Guys, hear that very carefully. He's saying to them, your teachings are of human origin. Of course, it gets me thinking, what teachings might be going on today that are of human origin? In other words, they are not in the scripture, but are simply things that people believe as truth, even though they are, they have an origin in the teachings of men. Actually, there's tons of stuff.

I mean, I could go on all afternoon. I obviously won't, but I could go on for a long time talking about things that even Christians believe that aren't part of the Word of God. And essentially, these beliefs come from two areas. Let me put these up on the screen for those of you taking notes.

Unbiblical beliefs...

- Institutional traditions
- Personal beliefs

Unbiblical beliefs essentially come from two areas—first, Institutional traditions, and then simply Personal beliefs.

Now, personal belief is not something Jesus was confronting here with these scribes, right? Because you'll notice—look with me in your Bible in verse 8—here's what Jesus is confronting. He says, "*You leave the commandment of God to hold to* (What? Your own personal beliefs? No.) *the traditions of men.*" So that is what Jesus is confronting in these things.

So you see, the popular belief of Jesus's time was a belief system that resulted from years and years—hundreds of years—of tradition that had been passed down, which, as you know, can be very powerful in causing people to believe certain things. And that is what Jesus is dealing with here.

And so, you see, Jesus is talking about the danger of tradition—but not tradition in general, because, you know what I mean? We all have traditions. Every Christmas, our family has traditions that we hold to. We have a tradition of opening up one gift on Christmas Eve, and afterward, we all hop in the car and take our hot chocolate with us and go out and look at Christmas lights—if the weather's not too bad. And we've got other traditions that you do during that holiday and other holidays. Those things are fairly innocuous, fairly benign from the standpoint of...

What Jesus is dealing with here specifically, which is traditions that we elevate literally to the place where they are as important—in some cases, maybe even more important—than the Word of God itself.

And boy, I tell you, tradition was so important in Israel. Notice again what Jesus is accusing them of here in verse 8. Look with me again in that verse in your Bible. He says, "*You (and this is very important) leave the commandment of God and (in order to) hold to the tradition of men.*"

In other words, you're abandoning God's Word so that you might choose to hold rather to the word of men. And that's why tradition of that sort is very dangerous. It becomes more important than God's Word.

And so, what are some examples of unbiblical traditions? Well, like I said, there's a lot of them. We have things we've adopted in the Christian church, and frankly, where Christianity has been represented the longest, there are probably more heaped-on traditions. Where Christianity has maybe been represented a shorter period of time, there tend to be fewer traditions.

I'll just give you one quick example. There are many people—many Christians—who believe that you must have a pastor or an ordained pastor or a priest serve the communion elements to you, or it's not appropriate. Have you ever heard that one? Nothing in the Bible. The Bible doesn't say that. The Bible doesn't limit who can serve communion to whom.

How about baptizing somebody in water? Only a pastor can baptize you in water? Really? Where does it say that? It's not there. We've gathered, we've taken these things on, we've put them, and made them traditions, and they've just become the law, in essence.

Let me show you what Paul said about the danger of traditions from Colossians chapter 2. He says,

Colossians 2:8 (NIV1984)

See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.

See to it that no one takes you captive through (essentially) hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on (what?) human traditions and the basic principles of this world rather than Christ.

I quoted that out of the '84 version of the NIV because I liked the wording of that particular verse. Because Paul is signaling to you and I a danger—that people can, in fact, be taken captive by the power of human tradition.

So, is it still a danger today? Absolutely, it is. You have to be careful. And all we need to do as Christians is we need to say, is that in the Bible? See, the Bible is our authority—not tradition—because traditions get started just because people start doing them.

Now, if there's a tradition that gets started because it's biblical, then it's truly not a tradition of man. It's something that God has established in His Word, and so forth.

Like we do communion when we come together as a body—not because it's just human tradition, but because Jesus told us to do it: When you come together, do this in remembrance of Me, right? (Luke 22:19) So, that's not human tradition. That's something Jesus instructed us to do.

Baptizing people in water—that's not human tradition. Jesus said, go and make disciples of all nations, teaching them to obey everything, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19-20). It's what we're supposed to do. It's what we were instructed to do. It's not tradition. It's instruction. We're following the direction of God's Word.

But how many other things do we do in the church simply because of tradition? There are a lot, believe me. But you know what? As much as tradition is still, basically something that people follow today, tradition doesn't really rule our culture like it has in past generations. I mean, we're not living in Mayberry

anymore, and things have changed a lot—even in my lifetime—from the time that I was a young man. I mean, it's still there, certainly, but not the way that we are seeing here in the Scripture.

What is popular today? What do we elevate today? Well, the second part of that passage I put up on the screen—it was personal belief, personal opinion. We elevate personal opinion today, by and large, more than we elevate tradition. In other words, we look up to it. We admire it.

If somebody has strong opinions about something, we admire them, and we'll even tell them. We'll go so far as to say, well, that might be true for you, which—you pretty much have to take your brain out to say something like that—because something is either true or it's not. Things are not specifically true for individuals. We've believed that lie, which has elevated the idea of personal opinion beyond, in some cases, even beyond tradition.

Have you ever heard somebody say, I don't believe in a literal hell? I have, probably hundreds of times. I don't believe in a literal hell. Okay, fine. Where did that come from? Did that come from tradition? No, that came from personal belief. And here's the question: Why do you believe that?

It's just my opinion, or, I just don't believe a God of love would ever create a place like hell. I get that, but that ends up being nothing more than your opinion. And you know what? People say things like that all the time, and they elevate it above God's Word. And I'll say to them, listen, if I can show you in the Bible where there is a literal place called hell, will you believe it? No, I don't think so.

You know what that person just communicated to me? My opinion trump's God's Word. That's no different than what the scribes were doing back in Jesus' day when they said, my tradition—our tradition—trumps God's Word. It goes beyond it. It transcends it. It smothers it out.

Because this is what we believe, and this is what we've always, we joke about ourselves as Christians that we do things because we've always done them. Why are we doing this? Well, we've always done it that way, which is really a dumb reason to do something, isn't it? Because we've always done it that way. Yeah.

And you'll notice that what actually happens when we exalt something above God's Word—whether it's tradition or personal opinion—what happens is we end up circumventing the very truth of God's Word.

You'll notice in verse 9, Jesus gives them an example. He says, *“You (guys) have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to establish your tradition.”*

Then He gives them an example, saying that Moses told you in the Word to honor your father and mother, right? That's a commandment given in the Word of God: "¹⁰...*Honor your father and mother.*"

Now, listen to me. One of the most practical ways that adult children could honor their parents back in those days—and still very much today in some cases—is to support them.

Your parents supported you when you were young. If there's a need that your parents have in their elder years, it is a wonderful way to show that you honor your father and mother by helping them out, since you're the one now who's working and they are no longer able to work, have an income, and that sort of thing. So God's Word says, "*...Honor your father and mother.*" That's what He's saying here.

But then in verse 11, He says, "*But you say* (And this is the circumventing thing we're talking about), *'If a man tells his father or his mother, ...'*" hey, that money I was going to give you guys to live on during your retirement and help out with your bills and stuff like that? Well, I've decided to dedicate it to God. I'm going to give it as a gift to the church. Don't I sound holy?

And so you see, that money that I was going to give you—it's now Corban. That's a technical term meaning devoted to the Lord. I've given it to God, so there won't be any money coming your way, Mom and Dad. Sorry.

This is what Jesus is saying. He says, you guys have a fine way of circumventing the Word of God to keep to your own traditions. God says, "*...Honor your father and mother...*" but you create a loophole within the context of your traditions that allow these individuals to bypass the Word of God and feel just fine about it. I feel great about not giving my parents any money because I did it to God. I gave it to God. Yes. Now I can feel good about it.

You know what that is? That's religion. That is empty, mindless religion because I'm not taking into account God's Word or the heart of the matter. I'm just juggling, playing fast and loose with wording and so forth and so on.

So that's basically tradition masquerading in the form of godliness. And frankly, that's the biggest characteristic of empty religion. It pretends to be godly, but it's not, because it ignores the truth of the heart. And this is where we come down to what really God cares about. Can I just tell you something?

God doesn't care about your empty religion. He doesn't care about all the religious things that you do. What God cares about is what's going on in here.

That's what He cares about. That's what He's looking at. That's what He's paying attention to. And that's what He wants you to pay attention to as well.

If you're doing things for religious reasons, stop it. Start relating to God on a personal, individual level, like He's real, like He's alive, and like He's someone you can talk to. You'll begin to have what we refer to as a real relationship with God.

I want you to go on here in verse 14 and look at how Jesus emphasizes the heart over empty religion. It says, *"And he called the people to him again and said to them, 'Hear me, all of you, and understand: ¹⁵ 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.'"*

And again, just remember, the scribes and the tradition of the elders taught that if you touched the food you were going to eat with unwashed hands, then you would transfer that defilement to your food. Then, by eating it, that defilement would be transferred to your body, and it would go in and defile all of you. And Jesus is going, that's ridiculous. That doesn't happen.

So, as it goes on here, the disciples aren't really sure they understand all of this because they are Jews. They've been taught these same things all their lives. So they're hearing Jesus say these things, and they're like, okay, I think You just contradicted what we've been hearing from the traditions of the elders all these years. Would You explain it to us?

I love how Jesus says, so, are you guys then without understanding too? Which is paraphrased as, are you guys really dull? He says, *"¹⁸...Do you not see that whatever goes into a person (into their mouth from outside) cannot defile (you)... since (all) it... (does) go into the body) and (then) is expelled? It doesn't go into your heart, right? That's what He's saying here.*

And that's the first reference—verse 19: *"since it enters not his heart..."* Right? Food doesn't go into your heart. We're not talking about the physical heart; we're talking about the spiritual heart, the place of how we relate to people and how we relate to God, and so forth.

He says, food doesn't go there. It just goes into your stomach and then is expelled. Then He goes on to say—oh, an interesting little parenthetical note here by Mark—*"Thus he declared all foods clean."* In other words, for you and I, from the standpoint of Jesus, there are no unclean foods.

Then He goes on here and He says, in verse 20, *"What comes out of a person is what defiles him. (What's He talking about?) ²¹ For from within, out of the heart of man (second heart reference) come (these sorts of things) evil thoughts,*

sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, ²² coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness."

He says, where do these things come from? They come from within, and they are the things that defile you. It's not that Twinkie that you just ate. It's probably not a good idea to eat it, but it's not going to defile your heart. He says, it's what comes out of your heart. And we know that out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks. So how do you know what's in your heart? It often comes out of your mouth.

And we try to apologize, I don't know where that came from. I do, right? Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks. Right? Out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth... Listen, you've got some pretty vile things coming out of your mouth. Oh, I don't know where that came from. I'm so sorry. I know where it came from.

It came from a dirty heart, right? A heart that you need to bring before God and be cleansed from. Here we are, trying to worry about what we're eating, and Jesus is caring about what's in our hearts and what comes out of our lives toward others, and so forth.

As we've already mentioned, there were many times in Israel's history that God's people, the Jews, lost sight of what we're talking about here today. They fell into religion. They fell into empty, religious exercise and experience that really had nothing of any sort of real devotion in it. And there's an example given to us in Isaiah chapter 1. Let me show you this passage. God is speaking through Isaiah to the people, and He says,

Isaiah 1:11-13a (NIV2011)

"The multitude of your sacrifices— what are they to me?" says the LORD. "I have more than enough of burnt offerings, of rams and the fat of fattened animals; I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats. When you come to appear before me, who has asked this of you, this trampling of my courts? Stop bringing meaningless offerings!"

"The multitude of your sacrifices— what are they to me?" ... (He says, listen) "I have more than enough of burnt offerings, of rams and the fat of fattened animals; (And look at this) I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats. When you come to appear before me, who has asked this of you, this trampling of my courts? (And then He says) Stop bringing meaningless offerings!"

A fascinating passage because it asks a question: Who asked this of you? You know what the people could have said? You did. You're the one that told us to

do this. But you know what God is accusing them of here? It has become empty religion. Now, I told you to bring these offerings because I wanted them to break your heart. I wanted them to get to the depth of who you are so that you would understand that somebody has to die—that sin brings death, and the wages of sin is death.

And that's why I established this sacrificial system for you—so that you would understand that it's a bloody, gory, messy thing, this forgiveness issue. And it's not something where you and I can just sin and go, oh, thank You, God, for forgiving me. I'm going to go sin again. I wanted you to understand how bloody and how gory and how rotten this whole process of sin is and the need for forgiveness that comes with it.

But the Jews—they just got used to all the blood and gore. And they're like, hey, do my own thing. I'm going to take an animal over to the temple and sacrifice it. Here we go. Here's my bull. Here's my goat. Here's my ram. I'll sacrifice it, and now I'll be all good with God.

Then God goes, no, no, no. He says, I have enough. I have enough. Stop bringing me meaningless offerings. In other words, stop playing at religion. Stop being empty in a religious way. Listen, I always want your heart. I always wanted your heart. I didn't care about all the rest. It was all just a picture.

It was all meant to just be a picture to help you understand the dynamics and the realities behind this issue of forgiveness. I long to forgive you, but your hearts have grown so far away from Me now that you go through these processes as just a religious exercise. And it now means nothing to you.

You've truly become religious, and it's empty, and it's ugly, and there's nothing real. There's nothing genuine. There's nothing true in this. You just go through the motions. You light your candle, throw your holy water, and you're done. I want your heart. I want you.

Look at king David. I love this passage from Psalm 51. He had an understanding like nobody else. He says, and by the way, as you read this, I want you to understand David prayed this prayer after committing adultery with a woman and then covering it up for probably about nine months. And he prays to God, and he says, listen,

Psalm 51:16-17 (ESV)

For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering...

You know why? Because God had said in the law that when people engaged in adultery like that, they deserved to die. Pretty far cry from our culture today, isn't it? David begins this prayer by saying, I'd bring you an offering, but I know that's not what you're interested in. I'd offer up the blood of a goat or bull or ram or something like that, but I know that's not what you're looking to get.

What do You want? He says, "... *The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; (he says) a broken and contrite heart, (that's what you're looking for, and that is something You will never)...despise.*"

Listen, God despised those blood sacrifices that we read about in Isaiah, that the people were bringing in an empty religious way. David gives the other side of the coin.

He says, I know what you'll never despise—a broken heart. When I really, truly care about the fact that I have violated Your word and that there's nothing I can do—just because I went and lived the way I wanted, I went out, I got drunk, I went on a bender, I did this, I did that—so I better get back to church. Yeah, I better get back to church, and I'll start going to church, and I'll start feeling better about myself. That's religion. That's empty religion. God's like, stay home. You might as well just stay home because what you've set out to do is just to be religious.

God wants your heart broken over your sin. He wants you to bring it to him and say, Lord, would you please forgive me for what I did? I know that I disappointed you. I know that I violated your word. I know that I fell short of what you've asked of me in the way that you've called me to live. And so I ask you today, forgive me for what I've done.

And God promises He'll forgive you. Promises: If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness, it says in 1 John. So there's a promise. (1 John 1:9)

Oh, I don't want to go that far. I'll just go to church for a while, say a couple of prayers. Maybe I'll do that for a week. I'm going to read my Bible for a week. I'm going to say some prayers. I'll pray for some other people. Scan the internet, maybe Facebook, see who's having trouble. I'll start praying for people. That'll get me back in God's good graces. That's religion.

And God wants nothing of religion from you. He wants your heart, and He wants it to be broken. And then, I love this passage. This is before David

actually became king, and in 1 Samuel, we're told about the process by which Samuel chose David.

1 Samuel 16:6-7 (ESV)

When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, “Surely the LORD’s anointed us before him.” But the LORD said to Samuel, “Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart.”

And it says when they came, and there were all the sons of Jesse who came parading in front of Samuel, it says that Samuel looked on the oldest son of Jesse, Eliab, and he thought to himself, oh, this is the one. Surely the Lord's anointed is before me. But look what God said.

“The Lord said to Samuel, “Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the Lord sees not as man sees...” Man looks on the outside appearance. That's religion. But the Lord looks where? On the heart.

Listen, do you want to know the key to understanding God's Word? I'm going to give it to you right here, right now. It's all about the heart. It's all about the heart. Forget religion. Forget organized, ritualistic stupidity. And love God with all your heart. And look to the heart. And know this: God looks on the heart. That's it. That is the key right there to understanding and walking in the understanding of scripture. It's all about the heart. That's what He cares about, and that's the Old Testament by the way.

We need this reminder, you guys, because all of us, myself included, can slip into religious thinking very easily. Suddenly, I'm trying to do it on my own. I'm trying to impress God by doing this—reading my Bible more, I'm going to pray more, I'm going to do this. He wants your heart. Let all those other things that God might lay upon your heart to do for others spring from a heart that's right with God, not a life that's trying to get back in His good graces by your religious activity. That's not what He cares about.

So when somebody says to you, well, I see that you're a religious person, you just tell them, oh no, nothing of the sort. I'm not religious, but I have a relationship with Jesus Christ, and my God cares about my heart, not about my religion. He doesn't care about your religion either. He wants to know you personally. He wants to talk to you personally.