

Traditions vs Commandments

by Chuck Smith

The sermon emphasizes the importance of obeying God's commandments over following man-made traditions.

Duration: 37:01

Scripture: Jeremiah 35:15, Ezekiel 33:11, Mark 7:8

Topics: "Repentance", "Obedience"

Description

This sermon from Jeremiah chapter 35 and Mark's Gospel chapter 7 emphasizes the dangers of prioritizing man-made traditions over God's commandments. It highlights the importance of turning from evil, amending our ways, and avoiding the worship of other gods. The message stresses God's mercy and desire for repentance, contrasting the consequences of sin with the blessings of obedience.

Transcript

Shall we turn in our Bibles now to Mark's Gospel, chapter 7. Our scripture reading will be the first 13 verses. I'll read the first and the outnumbered verses. Pastor Brian will lead the congregation in the reading of the even-numbered verses as we stand to read the Word of God.

Then came together unto Jesus the Pharisees and certain of the scribes which came from Jerusalem. And when they saw some of his disciples eat bread with defiled, that is to say, with unwashed hands, they found fault. For the Pharisees and all of the Jews, unless they washed their hands often, they ate not, holding to the tradition of the elders.

And when they come from the market, except they wash, they eat not. And many other things there be which they have received to hold as the washing of cups and pots, brazen vessels, and of tables. Then the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, Why walk not thy disciples according to the tradition of the elders? But they eat bread with unwashed hands.

And he answered and said unto them, Well hath Isaiah prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoreth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups, and many other such like things ye do.

And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own traditions. For Moses said, Honor thy father and thy mother, and whoso curseth father or mother, let him

die the death. But you say, If a man shall say to his father or mother, It is Corban, that is to say, A gift by whatsoever you might profit, he shall be free.

And ye suffer him no more, should you ought for his father or his mother, making the word of God of no effect through your traditions, which you have delivered, and many such like things you do. And that's it. Let's pray.

Father help us. It's so easy for us to get caught up in traditions. To develop traditions, the traditions of man.

And to become so zealous in the keeping of the traditions, at the same time ignoring your commandments. Help us Lord to put a greater emphasis upon your commandments. In keeping them, in obeying them.

That we might truly be sons of God, obedient in all things to our Heavenly Father. Bless, we pray, this time of discussion in your word. Let your Holy Spirit open our hearts now to receive the things that you would have for us this day.

In Jesus name, Amen. You may be seated. I wonder how long it's been since you've taken communion.

We don't have communion on Sunday morning for several reasons. One is time consideration. So we have set the first Wednesday night of the month for the church to gather together and to observe the Lord's Supper.

And it isn't an important event in the life of the believer. It's when we do show the Lord's death as he said till he comes. We do it in remembrance of him.

And if you haven't had communion in a while, I would encourage you to come on out this Wednesday night as it is a part of the Wednesday night service of just communing together with the Lord around the Lord's table and receiving of those emblems that remind us of his love for us. Tonight Pastor Skip will be leading us in the study of Jeremiah chapters 34 and 35. The Lord has been blessing these evening studies with Pastor Skip.

He's an excellent teacher and we've been blessed and enjoyed very much his teaching ministry and we would encourage you. Read over these chapters. Read through the Bible.

Read the whole Bible and read through it and then come and study as we get rich background to the scriptures that we have read. I know you'll enjoy the studies through the Bible. This morning I'd like to draw your attention to Jeremiah chapter 35 as Jeremiah deals with this interesting family group known as the Rechabites.

It was a family in Judah and they were nomads. They lived in tents. They did not plant vineyards.

They didn't plant gardens. And one of the distinguishing factors of this family was they did not drink wine. When the land of Judah was being invaded by the Babylonians because they lived out in the fields, they had no real defenses and so when the Babylonian army was approaching they came to the city of Jerusalem that they might have the safety of the walled city.

Jeremiah was told by the Lord to bring them into the temple and to set them down and to set before them these flagons of wine. But when Jeremiah said, drink, they said, Oh no. We don't drink wine.

Our father Jonadab said to us, Sons, never drink wine. Don't live in the cities. Don't plant vineyards.

Don't plant gardens. And so we are obedient to our father Jonadab. Well Jonadab had been dead for many years.

But here was a family still carrying on with the traditions that were established by their father Jonadab so many generations before. Holding on to traditions. And so the Lord then spoke to Jeremiah to speak to the men of Judah and to say to them, Why is it that you will not receive instruction and you won't listen to my words? And Jeremiah spoke to them about this family of the Rechabites.

How that they were keeping the traditions that had been established by their father years ago by Jonadab. And he had told them not to build the houses or to drink wine, not to farm. And they were still obedient unto him.

Yet God says, You haven't been obedient to my commandments. I've spoken to you, God said, but you won't obey me. And so he said the Rechabites are witnesses against you.

They were obedient to their father, but you are not obedient to my commandments. It's interesting what a strong power traditions can hold in a family. Each of our families have its own family traditions and they develop within the family and we seem to hold to the traditions.

There are many traditions that we had in our family concerning our celebration of Christmas. And it's interesting how you just sort of follow these same traditions that are there. They're sort of ingrained into the very fiber of your being.

As we read in Mark's gospel this morning, they had developed certain traditions. Traditions concerning the washing of hands. Now when the Pharisees were getting after Jesus for the fact that his disciples did not wash their hands before they ate.

It wasn't that they didn't wash their hands. They did not wash them according to the traditional way that you are to wash your hands. They developed a certain tradition in washing hands.

You had to hold your hands out in front of you and down sort of lower so that they would then pour the water over the top of your hands as you rub them together, about a cup of water. And you wanted to be careful that the water didn't run down your arm because then your arm would be unclean because of the water that came off your hands. Then you would hold your hands in a downward position.

They'd pour another cup of water as you rubbed your hands together. And that was their traditional way of washing their hands. If you just put them under the, you know, the water and rubbed them, that wasn't really washing your hands.

And so they had developed these traditions. And they were getting after Jesus because the disciples weren't following the traditional way of washing their hands. But Jesus spoke to them about their traditions.

How that they were holding traditions higher than the commandment of God. And in their traditions they were actually nullifying some of the commandments of God. God commanded that you honor your father and your mother.

And that if you would swear to your father that you would be put to death. But they developed a tradition. If before cursing your father you would say, this is for your benefit.

This is a gift to you. I want you to know you are a, and you go ahead and just tell your dad off. Okay.

Because it's a gift. You said it was a gift to him. He needed to know this.

And thus they totally nullified the law by just this little phrase. This is Corban. This is a gift to you.

And so Jesus was rebuking them because of the way they were holding to their traditions. It was interesting that Jesus was actually crucified because he violated their tradition of it is not right to heal on the Sabbath day. That constitutes a work.

And you're not to do any work on the Sabbath day. And so because Jesus was healing people on the Sabbath day, they determined they needed to put him to death. He violated their tradition.

Didn't really violate the laws of God. The law of God was to do good. And Jesus was doing good in healing even on the Sabbath day.

But it violated their tradition. It is interesting how strong and how powerful traditions hold our lives and what a powerful hold they can have over our lives. There are what they call wakes, a tradition.

The reason why wakes were established is in the exhuming of some of the graves. As they opened up the grave, they found scratch marks on the tops of the caskets where people evidently had been buried and they came to and they were trying to get out. And so were the scratches on the tops of the, on the inner side of the coffins.

And so they started holding wakes to let the body just lie there in the house for a few days in the coffin to make sure that they were really dead before they would bury them. And that was how the tradition of holding wakes came to pass. But even now, you know, we still have wakes so we can know scientifically that a person is actually dead.

We hold on to this particular tradition. You see the monasteries, the monks going around with their little peaked kind of hats or bonnets or whatever they are, and they, when they first started wearing these robes with this little hood on it, this was the common dress of the peasants and they had taken their vows of poverty and as a peasant. And because this was the common garb of the peasant, they wore these robes with the little pointed hoods.

Long ago the peasants changed the way they dressed, and yet it became a tradition and they still hold to that tradition. So in the monasteries, the monks still go around dressed like the peasants did back in the 13th century. The not eating meat on Friday.

That was started in order to help the fishing industry and to help the fishermen out. So they had this tradition that they developed, it's wrong to eat meat on Friday. You should eat fish on Friday.

And it's interesting how powerful that hold can get on a person. Well, no, it's Friday, I don't eat meat, I'll have fish today. But it was just something that was started as a tradition, but they have a powerful hold and many times we are held more strongly by tradition than we actually are by the commandments of God.

And so here are the Rechabites. By tradition they wouldn't live in a city, but they were nomads, they were much like the Bedouins of the present day. Not drinking wine, not planting vineyards, but just living off the land and it was just tradition and yet they held it tenaciously.

Here are people that are God's people. God has given them commandments and the laws and they are not keeping the laws of God and thus the Rechabites with their traditions and holding to their traditions were a witness against Judah, the people of God. Now God told Jeremiah to speak to the people and give them the message that basically God gave through all of the prophets.

Number one, turn from your evil ways. We are living in a very evil age. Paul wrote to Timothy, evil men and seducers are going to get worse and worse.

As we look at our world today you wonder just how bad can it get before God intervenes. Just this past week in the state of Illinois their legislature passed a new law. It was pushed through by the ACLU and it was an amendment to their Human Rights Act.

It was signed into law by the governor. A law that allows no exemptions for people or institutions with religious convictions against sodomy, cross-dressing, adultery, sex changes, pornography, incest, group sex, or bestiality. Thus if you were say an employer and maybe you had a children's day school and someone applied for work, obviously a male but he wore a tutu and had makeup and a big bow in his hair and he is applying for a job.

You could not consider him because of the way he dressed, because he feels more comfortable in a dress or in a tutu than he does in pants. And you could be fined if you would not hire him because of the lifestyle that he has chosen. They are trying to pass this same kind of law here in the state of California.

Now I would think that our legislators, our legislator here, legislations here, they should be more interested in some of the real problems that we're facing in the state of California. I would think that they would be more interested in the problems that we're having say with gangs and trying to solve the problem that we have with gangs and gang killings. I would think that they would be more interested in say the budget and the deficit in our California budget than they would be in these kinds of issues that they are spending days and weeks debating there in Sacramento and trying to push through this kind of legislation.

This isn't the kind of legislation that we need in the state of California. We would need really legislation that might benefit the state and help the state and help the employer. To tell you what kind of a person you have to hire is not good for business.

And that's quite obvious. And so these are laws that are hindering and yet they are there. It's evil.

And God is saying to the people, turn from your evil ways. Secondly, God said, amend your ways. God is always calling on sinful men to turn from his path of self-destruction.

Change your way. The path you are on is leading you to destruction. You are destroying yourself.

Change. Amend your way. Through the prophet Ezekiel God said to the people, As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked would turn from their wicked way and live.

Turn. Turn. Turn from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel? And so here is God saying, amend your ways.

Turn from your ways. Why do you destroy yourself? Why will you die, O house of Israel? God does not want to see you doing those things that are self-destructive, that will bring pain and misery and sorrow to your life. We read that Jesus, as He approached Jerusalem, wept over Jerusalem because He knew that they would reject Him as their Messiah.

And He knew the consequences of that rejection. He knew that the Roman army would be coming and destroying the city, killing the children, ravaging the women, taking what survived as captives back to Rome. And Jesus wept because He saw the folly, their refusing to amend their ways.

God can see the horrible consequences of your continuing in the path of sin. He calls on you to change, turn, amend your way. You're going down the wrong path.

It's leading you to pain, to death, to destruction and to hell. And we're told that God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should change. The third thing God said to them was, do not go after other gods to serve them.

Who were some of the other gods that they were going after? Well they were going after the goddess Ashtoreth. She was the goddess of pornography. And they were getting caught up in pornography.

They were going after the god Molech. He was the god of pleasure. And their lives were becoming mastered by their desire for pleasure.

They were going after Molech. And he was the god of power. And they became obsessed with power.

And God says, don't go after these other gods. Turn from your evil. Amend your evil ways.

Don't go after these other gods. But then Jeremiah was to tell them the good commandment that God would do for them if they would keep the commandments of the Lord. The Lord said, you will be able to dwell in the land that the Lord had given them.

Now it's interesting that even at this late date, they had gone so far down the road to destruction. God is still holding out His hand of mercy and grace. Even at this juncture, as far as you've gone into the depths of sin, even now will there be forgiveness.

If you will only turn from your evil way. If you will only amend your ways and not follow after these other gods, even now you can know forgiveness, and pardon, and cleansing, and you can remain in the land. But they were getting very close to the point of no return.

But even at this point, the door is still open. But they ultimately crossed that line. They went too far, and they were destroyed.

And those that were survivors of the Babylonian invasion were taken back to Babylon as slaves. God tried so hard to keep them from that horrible fate, but they just wouldn't listen to God. Oh how people misunderstand God.

He warns. He pleads. He calls on us to turn from our evil ways, to amend our ways.

He tells us of the consequences of continuing the path of sin. He tells us of the misery that can follow when you take that path. And yet people won't listen.

They won't obey God. They continue to rebel against God until they find themselves captives. They find themselves in miserable conditions.

And then the weird thing, in these miserable conditions, they want to blame God for it. They say, if He's a God of love, why does He allow me to experience so much pain and so much suffering and so much misery if He's a God of love? He did all that He could to keep you from the misery that you're experiencing. He warned you over and over again you wouldn't listen.

And that was God's main complaint to Judah at this time. You're going to be taken captive. You're going to be living in miserable conditions.

Turn from that path. Turn from your evil. Amend your ways.

And quit worshipping these other gods. The question is often raised, how could a God of love send a man to hell to suffer forever because of his sin? Let me say that I do not believe that God has ever sent a man to hell. I believe that God has done everything possible short of violating that man's free will to keep him from going to hell.

God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked. God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. A man goes to hell by his own stubborn resistance to the pleadings of God over and over to turn from that path of destruction.

Turn from your evil ways. Amend your ways. Quit worshipping the other gods.

Years ago my brother and I traveled across the United States. It was between my junior and senior years in Bible college. And we were holding meetings in churches across the United States.

We ended up in Toledo, Ohio. Up on the north side of Toledo, Ohio. The pastor took us down to meet the chief of police of Toledo, Ohio.

And he warned us of, he was glad that we were there to minister, but he warned us of this gang there in North Toledo. It was one of the real problems that they had with the police department. They were a real rough gang.

So as my brother and I were walking down the street from the church, this car pulled up and these gang members came out. And the leader of the gang was with them. And they came up and said, Are you the guys from California? And we said, Yeah.

I told Paul, I said, I'll take the one guy there. You take the other. And you know, we'll see how long we can last, you know.

And so they said, Do you guys play ball? We said, Yeah. And they said, Well, we're short a couple of players and we're playing another gang this afternoon. Would you guys mind playing with us? And we said, No, we'd be glad to.

So we went over to the school ground where they were playing and my brother pitched. I caught for him and he got a couple of homers. I got one.

And we beat this other team pretty soundly. And first time they'd ever beat them. Well, we became instant heroes in the eyes of this gang.

And so we suggested, Well, why don't we have a beach party? And so we rented a truck and we went on up to Monroe, Michigan. There on the shore of Lake Erie. And we built this big bonfire to have a hot dog roast and a beach party with this gang.

As the fire began to blaze, big bonfire, these bugs, I don't know what kind they were, but they began flying into the fire, attracted by the flames. And by the hundreds, these bugs just were coming and going into the fire. Well, the kids were standing around the fire.

And as the bugs were coming, they were beating them. They were slapping them, trying to keep them from going into the fire. And you'd see the bug there in the sand sort of, you know, wiggling a bit and then getting up and just flying right back into the flame.

And in spite of all these kids could do, they couldn't keep these bugs from destroying themselves by flying into the fire. Well, that gave me a tremendous opportunity to share with these kids about how people are attracted by sin. Sin that destroys.

And how God has done all that He can to keep us from destroying ourselves. But, you know, we get a little energy and right back into the fire. And how God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

The whole gang knelt down to accept the Lord. And I sort of remarked to them, and they said, well, you play ball with us. We want to play ball with you, you know.

And so, but an interesting, interesting experience. And how true that is. God has done everything He possibly can, as I said, short of violating your will to keep you from destroying yourself.

He sent His Son to die for your sins that you might have forgiveness through Him. He has warned you over and over again. He has promised you the rich blessings if you will only but serve Him.

He calls on you to turn from your evil, to amend your ways, to forsake the other gods, and to begin to obey His commandments, the commandments that will bring eternal life. To get to hell, you must trot underfoot the Son of God. You must count the blood of His covenant, wherewith He was sanctified, a worthless thing.

You have to despise the Spirit of grace. Jesus, so to speak, stands at the gate of hell to stop you from going in. And you have to push Him aside in order to get there.

And that's not easy, because He doesn't just give in easily. He's trying to keep you from destroying yourself. But if you're stubborn enough, determined enough, and stupid enough, you can go to hell.

But you'll be fighting the promptings of the Spirit of God every step of the way. God's not willing that you should perish, but that you should come to repentance. So if you should end in hell, please don't shake your fist at God and say, how could you send me here? You went there by your own deliberate, willful rejection of the love that God is offering to you, and the forgiveness of your sins that He has made provision for by sending His Son to die in your place.

Let's pray. Father, we look at the Rechabites and their holding to the tradition, and we look at man, and how we are violating your commandments. Not obeying the things that you have told us that we should do.

Lord, we pray that today that message down through the years, that perennial message of yours might reach our hearts. That we would turn from evil. That we would amend our ways.

And that we would turn from the other gods, and worship you alone. Help us Lord, not to continue the path of destruction, but to turn to the path of life. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

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