

Tradition! (Part 1)

Mark 7:1-13

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When someone saw the title of the message tonight they asked me if I was going to rehearse the famous musical. And the truth is, that is where I intent to start. Most of us have heard or, at least, heard about the famous musical, *Fiddler on The Roof*. The story is set in 1905 in a Jewish community in Czarist Russia. The lead character of the musical is a Jewish man named Tevye. He's a father, a milkman, simply trying to eek out a living in the village of Anatevka. Tevye believes that he has a personal relationship with God, and so he confides everything in God, as the musical goes along its way. And he strives very hard to keep up the traditions of his faith, and of his race, and of his culture. And it is there that he faces his greatest challenge. His life, and the lives around him, are completely framed by tradition. The musical begins with the famous song in which he acknowledges the sort of vice-like grip of tradition over all of their lives. If it's tradition, then it must be done.

Although *Fiddler on the Roof* is a very entertaining musical, the hold of tradition over human lives is not. It was this very issue that enslaved so many Jewish people in the first century, and it's the very issue which put Jesus and the religious leaders of Israel on a collision course, a collision that occurs in Mark chapter 7. I invite you to turn there with me this evening; Mark chapter 7.

As we continue our journey through this wonderful gospel, we get to see our Lord again, interacting with, in this case, His enemies. Let me read it for you. The passage begins in verse 1, and, in a very real sense, it continues down through 23, but really verses 14-23 are kind of a separate point and a separate discussion, so I'm going to handle it as a unit, beginning in verse 1 and going down through verse 13; you follow along:

The Pharisees and some of the scribes gathered around Him when they had come from Jerusalem, and had seen that some of His disciples were eating their bread with impure hands, that is, unwashed. (For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they carefully wash their hands, thus observing the traditions of the elders; and when they come from the market place, they do not eat unless they cleanse themselves; and there are many other things which they have received in order to observe, such as the washing of cups and pitchers and copper pots.) The Pharisees and the scribes asked Him, [that is Jesus] "Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat their bread with impure hands?" And He said to them, "Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: 'THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME. BUT IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING AS

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DOCTRINES THE PRECEPTS OF MEN.’ Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men.”

He was also saying to them, “You are experts at setting aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition. For Moses said, ‘HONOR YOUR FATHER AND YOUR MOTHER’; and, ‘HE WHO SPEAKS EVIL OF FATHER OR MOTHER, IS TO BE PUT TO DEATH’; but you say, ‘If a man says to his father or his mother, whatever I have that would help you is Corban (that is to say, given to God),’ you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or his mother; thus invalidating the word of God by your tradition which you have handed down; and you do many things such as that.”

As Mark unfolds this really remarkable account, it goes to the heart of the difference between Jesus and the religious leaders of Israel, He does so in two marked points. The first is this, the external nature of legalism, in verses 1-5. He sort of puts on display just how obviously external the things that these people were into, are about. It’s all about the outside of the cup, to use a metaphor Jesus would use later, and they’re not worried about cleaning the inside of the cup at all.

So there’s the external nature of legalism, and then the second part of this passage, we have Jesus’ personal diagnosis of legalism, as He explains what’s really going on behind the scenes. So let’s take these in order as they come, beginning with the external nature of legalism; look at verse 1. “The Pharisees and some of the scribes gathered around Him when they had come from Jerusalem.”

Now we’ve already met these guys several times in the book. The Pharisees arose from a group in a time of Antiochus Epiphanies, during the inner-Testamental period, that 400 years between the Old and the New Testament, and they were called the Hasidim; it means “the separated ones.” The Pharisees arose originally to oppose efforts to introduce Greek and pagan elements into their Jewish culture. They were the most conservative of Israel’s leaders, and the Pharisees were primarily scribes. Think of it like this, the “Pharisee,” that was their religious association, “scribe” was their occupation.

The scribes had as their task to copy the Scripture and to teach it. Their responsibility was to interpret the Law that God had given, the oral tradition that had come down, to teach the Law, and to apply God’s Law to the circumstances of the day. In their zeal, they made hedges around God’s Law; in fact, the Mishnah – now you’ll hear me use that expression several times tonight, let me just define that for you.

There was a great oral tradition of how the Old Testament should be interpreted; it was transmitted orally for many, many years. In the time of Christ it was still oral; it had not been written down. Later, after Christ, it was codified, it was written down, in two documents, one of them was the Mishnah, the other the Gemara, and together those two documents made what are

called the Talmud; perhaps you've heard that name. The Talmud is the sort of codification of all of that oral interpretation of the Old Testament; and we'll talk more about that in a moment.

But the Mishnah, then, part of the Talmud, said that tradition is a fence around the Law; they made fences to keep people from breaking God's Law. That sounds like a worthy goal, but let me show you how ridiculous it got. They said, "All right, the Bible, the Old Testament Scripture says, that you are not to work on the Sabbath. So let's think about how to protect people from breaking that commandment." One of them for example, was that if you were a tailor, you did that for a living, you couldn't carry a needle in your clothes on Friday, for fear that you left it in on Saturday, the Sabbath, and that would be working. So there was a rule about that. There were other rules; for example, looking into the mirror was forbidden on the Sabbath. The reason for that was that, I'm sure this never happens to you, but if you happened to see a gray hair you might be tempted to pull it out, and that would be work. It'd also be discouraging. You could spit on the Sabbath, but if it landed on dirt, and you accidentally kicked that dirt and spittle with your sandal – and I'm not making this up – that would be cultivating the soil, that would be working on the Sabbath, and so that was forbidden.

You see how it goes. In their attempts to keep people from breaking God's Law, and putting fences between the people and God's Law, they actually created an artificial system of rules and regulations that had almost nothing to do with God's commandments. Those are the scribes and Pharisees; busy interpreting the Law, to try to keep people from breaking it, and creating a system, that has almost no resemblance, to the Old Testament Scriptures.

It's interesting, because it's from this group the opposition to Christ comes. If you go back to chapter 1, Christ had almost no opposition in His initial ministry in Galilee; but when you get to chapter 2 the opposition begins and it comes from the religious leaders of Israel. Their hostility against Christ becomes more and more obvious. The issues that sort of provide the spark for their opposition to Christ are clear in a series of encounters. They really resent Jesus' claim to forgive sins in chapter 2; they resent Jesus' companionship with sinners. He's hanging around people He shouldn't hang around. If He were really a righteous man He wouldn't do that. They resented Jesus' unwillingness to keep their traditions, and in chapter 2 it's all about fasting. They fasted twice a week; it was compulsory, and Jesus didn't march by their rules.

Another problem they had with Jesus had to do with His treatment of the Sabbath and their own regulations for the Sabbath. Jesus wouldn't, again, play by their rules. Specifically, they resented the fact that Jesus' disciples picked and ate grain on the Sabbath, and that Jesus actually healed somebody on the Sabbath; those were the things that sort of stirred the people of the Jewish leaders against Christ. The last time we heard from these two groups, the scribes and Pharisees, the Pharisees, in chapter 3 verse 6 went out and immediately began conspiring with the Herodians, those who were connected to Herod, against Jesus, as to how they might kill Him, they might destroy Him. And in chapter 3 verse 22, the scribes who came down from Jerusalem

were accusing Jesus of being in league with Satan and actually being possessed by the devil himself.

Why such animosity and vitriol? Well the reason the religious leaders were opposed to Jesus was first and foremost about losing their power and influence. We saw that back in these sections. Now, in chapter 7, this same group comes the 90 miles north from Jerusalem up to Capernaum, but this time with a different tactic. Instead of coming to Jesus and coming at Jesus with the issue of the Sabbath, they come looking for another way to trap Him. They've set on a mission, no doubt, from the leadership in Jerusalem, to catch Him in something, and it doesn't take long for there to be a potential issue that arises. Notice verse 2; they come and they "...had seen that some of His disciples were eating their bread with impure hands, that is, unwashed." Notice it wasn't even all the disciples. This doesn't appear to have been an official meal, they were just hungry; you remember several times we've discovered in the Gospel of Mark, they were so busy they didn't even have time to eat, and so apparently, at some point in the busyness of the day, perhaps while Jesus was teaching in the Capernaum synagogue there, the message on the bread of life that we saw last time, they glance over and on the other side of the room there are a couple of disciples trying to grab a quick snack, and they had not ceremoniously cleansed themselves.

This isn't about their hygiene by the way. Mark explains it to us; Mark explains for the sake of his Gentile Roman audience, what's going on. Notice verses 3 and 4; here's the explanation – remember he's writing to the Romans, Gentiles, they wouldn't have understood this, just as we're removed from that culture, and so thankfully he explains it. "For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they carefully wash their hands, thus observing the traditions of the elders." What had started with the Pharisees had now become the expectation of, and practice of, all first century Jewish people who took their faith seriously. Notice he says, "Pharisees and all the Jews." All of those who took their faith seriously now did this; they never ate their food without first washing their hands. The Greek word translated "carefully" here in verse 3, literally means "with the fist," and there's a lot of conjecture about what that means, "with the fist." Some say it means you wash your hands with the fist of one hand and the palm of the other, some say it means up to the wrist, some say it means up to the elbow, some say it means with cupped hands, or with a handful of water; that's the most likely observation, it doesn't require a huge amount of water, remember this isn't about hygiene, this is about ceremonial cleansing of yourself. And so a handful of water is plenty, you can immediately practice that and be clean.

Whatever it meant, the meaning is clear, and that is, there was a ceremony before eating in order to render yourself clean before God. Now this was never required in the Old Testament of lay people. The priests were required to ceremoniously wash their hands before their service in the tabernacle. In Exodus 30 verse 19, "Aaron and his sons shall wash their hands and their feet" before their service. Exodus 40 verse 31, "From [this laver that was there on the tabernacle grounds] Moses and Aaron and his sons washed their hands and their feet. When they entered

the tent of meeting, and when they approached the altar, they washed, just as the LORD had commanded Moses.” So to serve as a priest, to approach God, meant that you ceremoniously cleansed yourself. But now they’re making everybody do it; why? Why was this necessary? Well notice verse 3 again, “observing the traditions of the elders.” This is about tradition. A couple of hundred years before Christ, this tradition had begun for every Jewish male. It had not been taught by the Bible, instead it had been taught by old, venerated rabbis. And so it passed down – tradition.

But it didn’t stop with hand washing before eating; it grows. Notice verse 4 again, “...when they come from the market place, they do not eat unless they cleanse themselves.” The market place was the most public place in any town; it’s where the vendors gathered and people came to buy and to look, it was often very crowded; in fact, if you’ve ever been to Jerusalem or seen pictures of Jerusalem, the market place probably looks very similar to this. This is from the old city in Jerusalem. Very crowded. And so when the Jewish people came home from that kind of environment, they could easily have touched someone or something, that rendered them ceremonially unclean. But for that kind of potential exposure to what was unclean, it wasn’t enough to wash your hands; the Greek word for cleanse here, when you come from the market, is the Greek word “baptizo” – you recognize it? Baptize – it means to immerse, it means to immerse under the water.

So if they went to the market place, when they got home, they needed to take a ceremonial bath, dip their whole body. This was huge in the first century. In fact, archeology has discovered that many Jewish people had what was called a “mikvah” in their homes. It was a ceremonial bath, it wasn’t about hygiene again, it was to practice cleansing of yourself so that you could go to the temple so that you could worship God. There were also public mikvah, or rich public ritual baths. In fact, near the southern steps of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, was found a building with numbers of these ritual bathing instillations, so that pilgrims were not allowed to go up onto the Temple Mount and into the temple grounds without being ceremonially pure. So these baths were there so that if you came to the temple you would immerse yourself under the water and come out, and then you would be ceremonially able to enter the temple to worship.

Today over 150 of these ritual baths have been found in Jerusalem, 60 of them in the area where the priests used to live. The western hill, 40 of them found near the southern side of the Temple Mount.

So, if you were going to eat, just in case you had somehow become ceremonially unclean, you washed your hands with a handful of water. If you went to the market and were exposed at that level, then when you got home, you had to bathe in this ritual bath, you had to immerse yourself entirely. Mark adds in verse 4, “...and there are many other things which they have received in order to observe.” Many other traditions that they must keep, and he gives us some examples, “...such as the washing of cups and pitchers and copper pots.” Cups are simply normal drinking containers, that out of which you drink; pitchers describe what you fill your cup with;

and copper or bronze pots has to do with larger vessels that are used for cooking in the kitchen. Thirty five pages of the Mishnah has to do with washing the various daily implements that you use, to make sure they are ceremonially clean. Ladies, you think you have a problem. I mean it was very detailed; they said that if a vessel, for example, that you used in your kitchen or home, had curves, or crevices, then it was far more likely that something that would make it ceremonially unclean would come in contact with it, therefore it had to be washed, as opposed to a flat surface that would not need to be washed. Porous surfaces like pottery had to be ceremonially washed, because they were, too, more easily rendered unclean, as opposed to hard surfaces like glass or metals.

So you see how the thing just builds, and there was this endless amount of regulation and rules to keep. Not one of these rituals came from the Old Testament Law; instead they were all drawn from a growing body of the scribe's interpretation of the Law. What was strictly oral tradition in Jesus' time would later be codified, as I said, to the Talmud, made up of the Mishnah and the Gemara.

You know it's hard for us to even consider what this was like, because it's so foreign to us. One of the commentators, James Edwards, describes or suggests that this whole distinction between clean and unclean, is perhaps best illustrated to us who live in 21st century America, by thinking of how things were and still are under Communism. Imagine, for a moment, that you lived in a completely Communism-oriented culture, where there is authoritarian government, and where any hint of suspicion taints you and perhaps even condemns you. Now how would it be if you were person living in that culture and that society, and you knew someone else, someone around you, was under suspicion for being a spy or being anti-government; what would you do? You would avoid any contact with that person, for fear that contact would render you unclean in the sight of the government, that you would be caught up in the suspicion. It would taint yourself and threaten your own position. That was the whole system of the Pharisees, because being clean was everything; that meant you could go to the temple, that meant you could go to the synagogue, that meant you could interact with other people in your town and in your city; you could do business. But if you were unclean you couldn't. So it was a package, and it was a repressive set of rules. So that was the situation.

In light of all of that, and by the way, here are a couple more mikvahs that I mentioned; these are all in the Temple Mount area, and even a large one like that where they would go and dip themselves. But in light of all of that situation, notice what the Pharisees say to Jesus, verse 5, "The Pharisees and the scribes asked Jesus, 'Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat their bread with impure hands?'" Now, you can almost hear the insinuation of guilt in that question, can't you? "How could any legitimate rabbi not have known about these traditions, not have taken them seriously, and not have passed them on to his disciples? What were you thinking?" Well, Jesus didn't keep the tradition either; Luke tells us, in Luke 11:38 on another occasion, "When the Pharisee saw [what Jesus had done,] he was

surprised that Jesus had not first ceremonially washed before the meal.” So Jesus didn’t bother with their tradition either.

Now why is all this important? Why does it matter? Understand this: if you lived in first century Judaism, you could be excommunicated, you could be put under the ban, for not ceremonially washing yourself, which meant you couldn’t have any real relationship with your family, with any business partners, with the temple, with God; you were cut off from the society. You might as well move somewhere else in the world. In fact the Mishnah puts it like this: But whom did they place under the ban (in other words excommunicate)? Eleazar ben Enoch. Why? Because he cast doubt on the tradition of the elders concerning the cleansing of hands.

They’re after Jesus, and here’s a little point of contention; here’s a crack in the armor. Jesus isn’t playing by their rules. Understand this, the main point here isn’t this one particular circumstance of hand washing, or washing ceremonially, the problem is much more fundamental than that; and that brings us to the second part, and we’re just going to begin this part tonight, because there’s much to learn here from what Jesus says. But let’s look at Jesus’ personal diagnosis of legalism.

Jesus now responds. We know what’s going on, we know the question has been posed to Him; how does Jesus respond? The reason Jesus and the religious leaders clashed is very clear; listen carefully, it had to do with the source of authority. Notice how it’s put. The key issue, the source of authority, verse 3, “the tradition of the elders”; verse 4, “many other things which they have received in order to observe”; verse 5, “Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders...?”; verse 7, Jesus says, You teach “...as doctrines the precepts of men”; verse 8, “neglecting the commandment of God, hold on to the tradition of men”; verse 9, “You are experts at setting aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition.” In verse 13, You invalidate “the word of God by your tradition which you have handed down.”

Now notice the difference in emphasis and in focus, between Jesus and the Pharisees. Notice what the Pharisees are into here: tradition, things received, precepts of men, tradition of men, your tradition which you have handed down. That’s what they’re into. Notice what Jesus is into; it comes in two expressions: the commandment of God, the Word of God. This is all about the source of authority. In fact I could put it like this: the primary message of this entire account is this: the spiritual bankruptcy of substituting human tradition for divine revelation. That’s what’s really going on here. Jesus wanted them to know just how utterly incompatible His teaching was with what Judaism had become in the first century.

In fact, I want you to turn back to Mark chapter 2; it’s been a while since we looked at this text, but Jesus here responds to their question about fasting, and then after He responds to their question about fasting, in verse 18 of Mark 2, or rather they ask the question, and verse 19 Jesus answers their question, but in verse 21 and 22, Jesus follows up with two parables, two illustrations that are making the same point, and I want you to look at these again with me because they really bring us up to date with what’s going on in chapter 7.

Two parables making exactly the same point; the first one verse 21, “No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; otherwise the patch pulls away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear results.” And then verse 22, “No one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the wine will burst the skins, and the wine is lost and the skins as well; but one puts new wine into fresh wineskins.”

Now there’s really a lot you have to understand about that that I’m not going to take you back through; if you’re interested, I defended the view I’m going to present to you now, when I went through this passage, so go back and listen to it on the internet if you want to do that. But let me just remind you of the point Jesus is making here. The new cloth and the new wine represent the teaching of Jesus. The old worn out garment, and the old brittle wineskins represent not the Old Testament, but first century Judaism. What Judaism had become under the control and domination of the Pharisees. And Jesus said, attempts to mix the two would show them to be completely incompatible, just as the old cloth and the new cloth, the new wine and the old wineskins, and show them to be mutually destructive. Jesus was, here, calling for a faith that was entirely separate from first century Judaism. You can’t put them together. Again, remember, Jesus is not contrasting His ministry with the Old Testament; He’s contrasting His ministry with what Judaism in the first century had become; its distortion of the Old Testament.

And so Jesus says, “The faith that I bring could never be a reformed sect of Judaism.” Why? Because it’s like old worn out cloth or overused wineskins; first century Judaism has become worthless. Why? There’re two reasons; and one of them is now – turn back to Mark 7 – one of them is here in Mark 7; Judaism had substituted human tradition for divine revelation. Isn’t that what Paul said? In Galatians 1, he mentions that these traditions consumed him before Christ. Galatians 1:14, “...I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen, being more extremely zealous...” He doesn’t say for the Scripture, “...for my ancestral traditions.” That’s what I live for!

It was all about the laws of cleanness and uncleanness, and all of the regulations. When the Mishnah was eventually written, 25% of it, 186 pages, was about the issue of ceremonially cleanness. And the problem was the Pharisees had come to believe this oral tradition was as important as the Old Testament, as important as the Torah, the first five books of the Old Testament, the Law of God. They actually taught that at Sinai, God gave two laws; He gave the written Torah, that’s Genesis through Deuteronomy, and He gave the oral Mishnah, or the interpretation of the Law, and that was simply passed down all the way from Moses to the time it was eventually written down, after the time of Christ. The Torah taught what God commanded, but not how to do it; they said the oral tradition explained how God’s Law was to be lived out in real life. But Jesus would have nothing to do with it; for Him the commands of God contained in the Scripture, and the Scripture alone, were important; and as we’ll see next time, His own commands recorded as Scripture.

Now, folks, most of us are not tempted by the specific rituals of the Pharisees. But for us, today there are several crucial implications that come out of this account. Number one, make sure that the only source of authority you trust is the Scripture. Make sure that the only source of authority you trust is the Scripture. That's the point Jesus is making. Your tradition has nothing to do with God's Word or God's commandment. Let's go back to God's commandment, Jesus says, back to the Word of God. Make sure that's the only source of authority you trust.

Let me ask you tonight, what is your source of authority? On what do you stake your confidence? Is it additional books that are added to the Scripture, like the Mormons and their Book of Mormon, their doctrine and covenants, The Pearl of Great Price? Some book added to the Bible, to make it complete, to interpret it? Is it like Roman Catholicism with its traditional interpretations of the Church in the Magisterium, and the Magisterium carries equal weight if not more so than the clear statements of Scripture itself, because that's the Church's interpretation, just as the Mishnah was the interpretation of the rabbis? Is it like the Seventh Day Adventists who have simply added a long list of oral commandments of what Christians can't do, and that pleases God, you don't do these things? Or, maybe worst of all, is it simply your own thoughts about what's right and wrong? Are you your own authority? "Well I don't think..." "Well, I think..." "Well to me..." "Well my opinion is..."

Our world is filled with that; people who are staking their lives and their eternity when they are the sole source of their authority. What is the source of your authority? Jesus said it should be one thing, the Word of God. That's what the Reformers meant when they used the expression "Sola Scriptura." I love the way the Geneva Confession in 1536 addresses this very issue. It says that, "First we affirm that we desire to follow Scripture alone, Scripture alone, as a rule of faith and religion, without mixing with it any other things which might be devised by the opinion of men apart from the Word of God, and without wishing to accept for our spiritual government any other doctrine than what is conveyed to us by the same Word without addition or diminution, according to the command of our Lord."

What's the source of your authority? Make sure it's only the Scripture.

There's another crucial implication for us as believers; be careful not to twist or distort the meaning of Scripture. That's what's happening with the Pharisees. As we'll see next time that we study this together; they supposedly were interpreting the Bible, the same book you and I hold, but those rules and regulations I gave you had nothing to do with it. How did that happen? They were careless in how they handled the Scripture. Be careful not to twist or distort the meaning of Scripture. God, through the prophet Jeremiah in Jeremiah 23 says, "For you will no longer remember the oracle of the LORD, because every man's own word will become the oracle, and you have perverted the words of the living God, the LORD of hosts, our God."

Peter puts it like this in 2 Peter 3:16: Paul, "as also in all his letters, speaking in some of these things, in which [in Paul's letters] are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and

unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction.” You and I not only have Scripture alone as our sole source of authority, but we have to be so careful to interpret it clearly and accurately. I love what Martin Luther says about it, of course he was such a champion for the “external Word” as he called it, the Word of God revealed; he says, “We should not be bold in dealing with the Word of God. You had better think, ‘I do not understand these words. But rather than alter them or take something from God’s words or add anything to them, I will let them alone and commit the matter to God.’ If you do not understand it, then honor it and say, ‘I shall wait until I do understand it.’ We should hear God’s Word with fear and study it with humility. We should not pounce upon it with our own notions of what is right, for there is no jesting with God’s Word. Weigh the words carefully, comparing that which is preceded with that which follows, and be intent on capturing the real meaning of any passage and not on fabricating your own dreams.”

If God has spoken in a book, then you and I had better not treat it lightly and mishandle it.

Let me just ask you very practically, are you at times tempted to take the Bible and with really no notion for the context pull that verse out of context and make it say what you want it to say? At that moment you are guilty of distorting the Word of God.

There’s a third crucial implication, third and final crucial implication, and that is, don’t let your conscience be bound by anything but the Word of God. Don’t let your conscience be bound by anything but the Word of God. Christ didn’t, did He? I mean He came back to what does God say? What is the commandment of God? What is the Word of God? And even though there was this incredible external pressure to conform, Jesus didn’t. He remained faithful to God by refusing to do what people around Him who were supposedly more spiritual wanted Him to do. May God give us the courage to live like that. May God give us the courage of Martin Luther at the Diet of Worms in 1521 when he said, “Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason that is from the Scriptures (for I do not trust either in the pope or in councils alone, since it is well known that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not retract anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. Here I stand, God help me.”

May God give each of us the courage to stand on the Scripture and the Scriptures alone and what that meaning has consistently been for 2,000 years, and brought out by godly men and women through that time. Tradition, or the Word of God; where’s your authority? Let’s pray together.

Father, help us to love Your book. Lord, remind us of the stand our Lord takes even in this chapter, where He will not be swayed by tradition. He will not be swayed by the pressure that’s on Him to conform; but He strictly commits Himself to the Scripture, and to You. Lord, help us to live like that. Lord help our authority to be in Your words and in Your words alone. And Father help us to be careful in how we handle it.

Lord, forgive us for sometimes treating it carelessly and making it say what we think it ought to say or what we want it to say, rather than being careful to see what You have actually said. And Father, I pray that You'd give us the courage not to let our conscience be bound by anything or anyone but the Word of God. Thank You Father, for Your Word. Help us to love it and to read it and to study it and to meditate on it and to live it, to teach our children, and to pass it on to the next generation after them. Father may we love Your truth as Christ loved it. And may we love Him, who is so clearly revealed in it. We pray in Jesus' name, Amen.