

Book of Mark Chapter 7

The chapter can be divided into 4 distinct portions :-

1. [Verses 1-13 Finding fault](#)
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1. Finding fault

1.1. Men seeking to find fault with the Lord

The Lord is here joined by the Pharisees and by certain of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem. They came not to meet the Lord or to learn from Him. They came with the express purpose of finding fault with the Lord's disciples and therefore with the Lord Himself. The particular issue here in Mark 7 was that the Pharisees had seen the Lord's disciples eating with defiled, that is with unwashed hands. But many other issues were raised during the Lord's public ministry.

Throughout the four gospels, there are perhaps as many as 30 different occasions when men tried to find fault with the Lord or with His disciples. It underlines the verse which says of Him – "He endured the contradiction of sinners against Himself" (Heb 12:3). "Contradiction" means literally the "speaking against" of sinners. There were those who constantly spoke against Him. The devil is called "the accuser of the brethren" (Rev 12:10). During the Lord's lifetime, the devil had lots of "little helpers" who tried to accuse the Lord. If they could find fault with Him, then the salvation of God was at an end. Satan Himself sought to tempt the Lord in the three great temptations in the wilderness, but the attacks were sustained during the following three and a half years. The Lord suffered all these things, which in itself was an evidence of His grace. Contrast this with the experience of Elisha in 2 Kings 2:3-5. When the children of a certain town came out to mock the Lord's prophet ("Go up thou bald head"), Elisha cursed them in the name of the Lord and two she bears came out of the woods and killed 42 of them. Think too of Shimei who taunted David when he had to flee from Absalom. Shimei escaped punishment from David, but was later put to death by Solomon.

But in the life of the Lord Jesus men were allowed to taunt Him and to challenge Him with apparent impunity.

The wonderful thing about the Lord in all these instances is the quiet dignity in the way in which He responded to His accusers. Peter tells us that, "when He suffered, He threatened not. When He was reviled, He reviled not against". He never replied with angry words or with a heated exchange of words. He never sought to be arrogant or proud. Sometimes, as before Pilate and Herod, He maintained a dignified silence. More often though, on those 30 different occasions, He did make a response. Sometimes it was by way of a miracle as in the case of the palsied man in Matt 9, let down through the roof by his friends. Sometimes, it was by quoting the scriptures as in the temptation in the wilderness. Sometimes it was by telling a parable as in the 500 pence and the 50 pence debtors. We can't do miracles, but when people oppose us, we can always quote the scriptures. We must never get involved in arguments, especially when trying to speak to those who are not saved. People who are involved in an argument have long since ceased to listen to the other person's point of view. They are only thinking of what they themselves are about to say next.

We see a lovely example of how to deal with those who oppose us in Phil 1. Paul was in his prison cell, but news was coming to him of those who preached "Christ out of contention and strife, not sincerely, hoping to add affliction to my bonds". Here it seems were converted Jews, perhaps incensed by Paul who was teaching the truth of the Mystery ie that Jews and Gentiles were now on common ground as one body, one new man. The privilege of the Jew had been lost when God broke down the middle wall of partition . Would it not be men like this who were out to stir up trouble for Paul. So how would Paul respond ?. In anger ?. In vindictiveness ?. No Paul replies, " Christ is preached, and I therein do rejoice". Paul had a big heart, just like the Saviour.

So what were the taunts of men against the Lord and against His disciples?

We can sum them up as follows :-

1. Accusations of blasphemy
2. The friend of publicans and sinners.
3. Questions regarding the law
4. Questions regarding the Sabbath
5. Attacks upon His Person and work.
6. Questions about His authority
7. Political questions
8. Questions about resurrection
9. Questions about worship
10. The taunts at Calvary

No wonder then that the Bible speaks of "the contradiction of sinners against Himself". On about 30 different recorded occasions in the gospels, the Lord is the object of the questioning and the denials of men. Not just Him, but His disciples also. Even those who were healed by Him, like the man by the pool of Bethesda who carried his bed on the Sabbath day (John Ch 2), and the man born blind who was cast out of the temple in John 9. Likewise the disciples were criticised for not washing their hands before eating, and for plucking the ears of corn.

Thus, those who attacked and criticised Him were many and varied.

- Satan
- Pharisees
- Pharisees and Herodians
- Sadducees
- Sadducees and Pharisees
- His brethren
- His kinsmen
- His own disciples
- The men of Nazareth
- The thieves on the Cross
- The soldiers at the Cross

We must see to it that we never unduly criticise our fellow believers. There is nothing more uplifting than praise, and nothing more dispiriting than criticism. People with negative thoughts and feelings drain the energy and enthusiasm from those around them. Let us take on board the words of Paul in Romans 14:19 – "Follow after the things that make for peace".

From verses 1 to 5, The Pharisees were seeking to find fault with the Lord's disciples. But now in verses 6 to 13, the Lord finds fault with the Pharisees. He does it in a general way in verse 6 and 7, then takes up a specific charge against them in verses 8 to 13.

1.2. The Lord finds fault with the Pharisees

In verses 6 to 7, the Lord calls the Pharisees "hypocrites" ie men who were simply acting out a part which did not reflect their true inner self. It is a great danger for every believer

of every age. We can read the bible and see how we ought to behave. We can even do the things which the bible – in public at least. But our private lives can be very different. The Lord reminded the Pharisees of the words of Isaiah the prophet (Ch 29:13), "This people honour me with their lips but their heart is far from me". We can only hear the words that men speak, but the Lord can look into the heart. Isaiah went further, challenging their worship and their teaching. They claimed to be worshippers of God, but God was saying "In vain do they worship Me". Their worship was empty and vain. It was worthless. They professed to be teachers of the law, but Isaiah added, "Teaching for doctrines the commandments of men". It is not something that we in our day are totally innocent of. Anything that has no scriptural foundation is simply a man's opinion. It is the job of the teacher to break down the word of God and make it plain for Christians to understand. We are not there to express our opinions, however right we might think them to be. Anything else could simply be the "commandments of men". Sometimes I hear things said from the platform which I do not believe to be true. But they are accepted as true by the majority, perhaps because they have been repeated so often. If something is repeated often enough, then it must surely be true.

In verse 8, the Lord gives them a specific example of their tradition – the washing of pots and cups. They had added a myriad of little rules and regulations to the law. Sometimes these very traditions stood in contrast to the commandment of God and from verse 10 to verse 13, the Lord gives them an example. In verse 10, Moses said, "Honour thy father and mother". This is a quote from Exodus 20:12, and was one of the Ten Commandments. "Honour thy father and mother : that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee". This is described as "the first commandment with promise". Deut 5:16 repeats almost exactly the same thought - " Honour thy father and thy mother, as the Lord God hath commanded thee : and that it may go well with thee, in the land which the lord thy God giveth thee". Honouring one's parents came with a blessing, but here in Mark 7, the Lord reminded them of the results of cursing father and mother – "let him die the death". This now is a quotation from Exodus 21:17 – "He that curseth his father or mother shall surely be put to death". Now the Pharisees might say, "But we have not cursed either father or mother, so we are not guilty in this respect." They might also claim that they had not failed to honour father or mother. It was simply a matter of choice. If it comes to choosing between supporting one's parents financially or giving money to the temple, then the Pharisees chose the latter. They even coined a word for it. It is " Corban" ie a gift, "by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me". It all sounded very right and proper to support the temple, even it meant depriving one's parents. But the Lord condemns them. They made the word of God of none effect by their tradition. They should have given equally to their parents and to the Lord, or if they could not do both, then the parents should have taken priority. The same principle remains true in Christianity. We need to devote time and resources both to family matters and also to the Lord's things. We cannot neglect one thing because of the other. In the New Testament, Paul taught, " If a man know not how to look after his own, he is worse than an infidel".

This attempt to amend the word of God was first seen in the words of Eve to the Serpent in Gen 3. Eve was no doubt instructed by Adam regarding the tree etc but in her repetition of those words to the Serpent she does the following

- Deletes from the word of God
- Changes the word
- Adds to the word
- Casts doubt on the word

God had said to Adam, "Of every tree ye may freely eat. Eve omitted the word "freely" in her account. God was a liberal, bountiful God, and by her omission she is suggesting otherwise. Indeed, the Serpent takes up this very point when he replies, "God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof ye shall be as gods, to know good and evil". In other words, God is holding something back from you. Eve also was less than specific when she spoke only of the tree in the midst of the garden. God specifically said, "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil". Eve then added to the word of God when she said, "Neither

shall ye touch it". Finally, she cast doubt on His word when she said, "Lest ye die". God was quite specific when He said, "Thou shalt surely die".

2. Things that defile a man

In this section, there is a change of emphasis. The Pharisees had claimed that a man was defiled by eating food with unwashed hands or with unwashed pots and cups. But the Lord is now teaching that it is not things from outside that defile a man, but what comes from within.

Verses 14-16 are spoken to the people, and not to the Pharisees. "There is nothing from without a man, that entering into him can defile him, but the things which come out of him, these are they that defile the man". "If any man ears to hear, let him ear".

That does not mean, particularly in our day, that we cannot be influenced by external forces. There never was a generation like that of today which is so exposed to newspapers, magazines, TV, radio, and now the internet. That is why we need the word of God to cleanse our way. "That He might sanctify and cleanse it by the washing of water by the word". (Eph 5:26). That is why we have an Advocate with the Father (1 John 2:1). But these things were not present when the Lord spoke to the people.

Some things on the list are worth a mention - evil thoughts for one. Evil thoughts may not just be immoral thoughts. They could be thoughts of envy, jealousy etc. How can we avoid such thoughts. Paul speaks of bringing every thought into captivity unto Christ" ie by making every thought a prisoner. We need to positive in our thinking. In Phil 4, we are fill our minds with things that are pure, honest, of good report etc. Paul tells Timothy regarding spiritual things, "Meditate upon these things. Be wholly in them, that thy progress may be seen of all". The blessed man of Psalm 1 was to have his delight in the law of the Lord. "In His law doth he meditate day and night".

Adulteries and fornications are also worth mentioning, not to suggest that believers should ever be involved in them but simply to distinguish between them. The fact that they are mentioned side by side tells us that they are indeed different. Adultery takes place within marriage, fornication outside of marriage. This therefore does away with any idea of an "exception clause" giving grounds for divorce and re-marriage in the case of adultery. The exception clause was for fornication, which takes place outwith ie before marriage. The classic case was that of Joseph who was minded and therefore permitted to put away Mary before they came together as man and wife.

In verse 17, the Lord leaves the people and enters into a house where his disciples ask him concerning "the parable". But this was no parable, but rather straight talking from the Lord. Hence the rebuke from the Lord. "Are ye so without understanding also". The Pharisees cavilled about being defiled by eating meat with unwashed hands or unwashed pots and cups. But says the Lord, it is what comes out of the heart that defines a man. Verses 21 and 22 give us a list of no less than 13 things which come from a man's heart.

"The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked". All the evil things that men do begin in the heart and only later are they expressed openly. These are the things that defile a man.

3. The woman of Canaan

From verse 24 to 30, the Lord now has dealings with a certain Syrophoenician woman. He enters into the borders of Tyre and Sidon, and goes into a house. He wanted to remain in secret, but verse 24 concludes - "He could not be hid". His reputation had gone before Him. Even though had come for the lost sheep of the house of Israel, there were times when He went to the Samaritans and now here to the Canaanites. It is a picture of a future day, when the salvation of God will reach out to all the nations of the earth. This section of the chapter speaks hugely of the Gentiles. The place is the borders of Tyre and Sidon. She was a Greek, a Syrophoenician. She is the land of the Philistines, the age-old

enemy of the people of Israel.

This incident then is all the more remarkable when one considers the activities of the Philistines in the Old Testament. The book of Judges is a history of a constant struggle between the Jews and the Philistines. Men like Samson fought against the Philistines throughout all the years that he judged Israel. He even died fighting them. Think too of 1st Samuel. Again it is a record of the constant struggles that first Saul and then David had with the Philistines. They were the sworn enemies of the people of God. So can the Philistines ever be reconciled ? Well here in Mark chapter 7, who better to answer this question than the Lord Himself.

The woman also had links with the Syrians. She was a Syrian of Phoenician origin. If the Philistines were the early foes of Israel then the Syrians were the chief enemy in the days of Elijah and Elisha and in the days of Ahab the king. Do you remember the story of the four leprous men at the gate of Samaria. The city is under siege – from the army of the Syrians.

It is true that the Lord's ministry was aimed almost exclusively at the people of Israel. He came to His own. Yet is good to see in the gospels that He did make the occasional exception to this rule. Thus in John 4, He meets a woman of Samaria by Jacob's well. The woman had three disadvantages :-

1. She was a woman
2. She was a Samaritan,
3. She was immoral

You might think I'm being sexist, not politically correct, when I say that her first disadvantage was being a woman. But I take this thought from John 4 itself. The Lord was alone with this woman and when the disciples joined them, they marvelled that He spoke with a woman. The AV says the woman but I believe the true sense is a woman. It was not common practice for a man to engage in conversation with an unknown woman.

Her second disadvantage was in being a Samaritan. The Samaritans were the remnants of the 10 northern tribes who had been led off into captivity by the Assyrians. Those who were left had a form of religion akin to Judaism but a perverted form of it. Their centre of worship was in Mount Gerizim and not in Jerusalem. Sometimes one's most bitter foe is the one who is nearest. The Jew despised the Gentile – perhaps they despised the Samaritan even more. There is no more bitter rivalry than that between neighbours. Ask a Scotsman what he thinks of the English. The Samaritans were not just geographical neighbours – they had a form of religion which borrowed much from Judaism yet was still distinct. When men wanted to insult the Lord Jesus, the worst thing they could say about Him was, "Say we not well, thou art a Samaritan and hast a demon." Even this woman acknowledged the differences. "How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest a drink of me, a woman of Samaria. For the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans." The Lord agrees with her, at the same time dismissing her religion. "Ye worship ye know not what. We know what we worship for salvation is of the Jews.

If this wasn't enough, the Lord goes on to reveal her immorality. "Thou hast had five husbands, and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband."

Is she then a hopeless case ? Not for the Lord for he now offers her a well of water, springing up into everlasting life. He has already offered everlasting life to the Pharisee and teacher of Israel, Nicodemus, in the previous chapter. Now He offers the same to an immoral woman of Samaria. Not only so, it is to such a woman that the Lord for the first time reveals the true character of Christian worship. No longer would it be confined to one nation or to a particular temple in a particular city. The true worshippers would worship in spirit and in truth. And the Father, not Jehovah the God of Israel, seeketh such to worship Him. Thus on this occasion, the Lord was prepared to go beyond the boundaries of Israel.

And of course, He stayed two days still in the city of the Samaritans, so that the citizens said to the woman, "Now we believe, not because of thy saying but we have heard Him

ourselves and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world”.

We read of another Samaritan in Luke chapter 17. There the Lord meets 10 lepers and sends them to show themselves to the priest. As they went they were healed. Nine continued on their journey, but one turned around and came to the Lord Jesus. He fell at His feet to give God the glory. The Lord though is disappointed. “Were there not ten cleansed, and where are the nine. Is there only one returned to give God the glory”. The Bible adds most distinctly about the one who did return, “And he was a Samaritan. Here was a man who was doubly despised. He was not only a leper – he was a Samaritan leper. But the Samaritan becomes a worshipper.

A third occasion was when the Jews came to intercede with the Lord regarding a certain centurion. Here no doubt was a Roman, a leader in the army of occupation which was oppressing Israel. Yet this centurion had found favour with the Jews. “He loveth our nation, and hath built us a synagogue”. The centurion is not looking for something for himself, but rather that the Lord would heal his servant. This in itself is remarkable that a man of authority should have feelings for a mere servant. We know the story. The centurion’s words were, “I am not worthy that thou shouldest enter my house. But speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed”. No wonder the Lord says of the centurion, “I have not found so great faith, no not in Israel”.

There is one thought that links together the healing of the Canaanite woman’s daughter with the Samariyan leper and the Centurion’s servant. They were all healed at a distance. There was no touch from the Lord required. He spoke the word and it was done. It is almost a picture of the Christian era when our blessings come, not from a man on earth, but a glorified man in heaven.

As Christians today, we know of course that God in His grace no longer makes distinctions between Jew and Gentile. They are both one body, one new man. God Himself has broken down the middle wall of partition. Eph 2:16 says – “And that He might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby.” It is said of the Lord Himself in this chapter, “He is our peace.” “So making peace”. “He came and preached peace” . What beautiful illustrations of these words are found in the three miracles involving Gentiles in the gospels.

So these meetings with these Gentiles are a picture, not only of this age, but also of a day yet future when the blessing of the Lord will go out to the Gentiles. We see a picture of this in John 12. There we see the Church of God, typified by the house in Bethany, then we see Israel typified by the disciples and the men of Bethany as they proclaim the Lord Jesus to be son of David, the king in all His glory. But then thirdly, Philip is approached by certain Greeks who say, “Sir, we would see Jesus”.

When the Lord returns in glory to this earth, it will first be to rescue the Jews from the siege of Jerusalem. His kingdom will be established in Israel, but ten men will take hold of the skirt of him who is a Jew, saying, we will go with thee for the Lord is with thee. The words of the old man Simeon will be fulfilled, “A light to lighten the Gentiles and the glory of thy people Israel.” The Gentiles will come up to Zion to worship the Lord.

Returning now to this woman of Canaan, in Matthew’s gospel, the woman makes a plea to the Lord Jesus (Matt 15:22), “O Lord, thou son of David, my daughter is grievously vexed with a demon.” The Lord answers her not a word. She comes as a Gentile seeking to make a claim upon the Son of David. The Lord does not respond. But the disciples go even further – “Send her away”, they said. They said the same thing about the multitude in the wilderness, but the Lord had compassion on the 5,000. They would have tried to prevent the mothers bringing their children to the Lord also. But the Lord here in Mark 7, while not responding to the words, “Thou Son of David”, cannot resist a mother’s desperate plea when she says in Matt 15:25 - “Lord, help me”. Now at least the Lord enters into conversation with her – “It is not meet to take the children’s bread, and to cast it to the dogs.” Dogs here would here mean the Gentiles who were regarded by the Jews as “dogs” ie unclean animals. But the woman is very persistent, and she accepts the place of the

little dog which eats the crumbs from the master's table. A mother's plea and a humble spirit at last move the Saviour's heart – "O woman, great is thy faith : be it unto thee even as thou wilt". God resisteth the proud but giveth grace to the humble.

4. The deaf and dumb man

In the final section of chapter 7, from verses 31 to 37, the Lord is introduced to a man who is deaf and has an impediment in his speech. We have now left Tyre and Sidon, the land of the Canaanites, and come into Galilee. This region is described in the Bible as "Galilee of the Gentiles, the people who dwell in darkness have seen a great light."

The Lord is about to heal this man but He is no glory hunter. He took him aside from the multitude, just as He does with the blind man in the next chapter. Verse 24 also adds, "And looking up to heaven". By so doing, He is attributing what He is about to do, not to Himself, but to His Father in heaven. He did the same in Matthew 14:19 – "And looking up to heaven, He blessed and brake, and gave the loaves to His disciples." By so doing, He was giving the Father credit for the miracle. Perhaps this was what caused men to ask, "What sign shewest Thou then, that we may see and believe." This was certainly the Lord's purpose, to deflect honour from Himself, when He said, "Many good works have I shown you from my Father." The Lord sighed as He looked up, perhaps grieved at the ravages that sin had made in God's fair creation of Genesis 1-3. So also He groaned in the spirit outside the grave of Lazarus in John 11. The Lord in His miracles not only demonstrated His power, but also His compassion.

It was compassion that often move the Lord to do what He did. Thus He had compassion on the widow of Nain as she followed the funeral procession of her only son. This compassion led Him to raise her son from the dead. It was compassion upon the 5,000 in the wilderness that caused Him to feed them. He saw them as scattered sheep having no shepherd. It was compassion for the leper that caused the Lord to touch him and heal him. The Lord's miracles were more than just displays of power – they also showed His compassion. That is why men said of Him, "Surely He hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows." He didn't just heal – He entered into the sorrows that were common to mankind.

The effects upon this deaf and dumb man are both remarkable and immediate. Straightway, his ears were opened and he spake plainly. We have all met deaf people who have a very limited speech ability. Here was a man whose deafness was cured, and he was able to speak plainly. He never had to learn how to speak as would a man who might receive his healing today. He could hear and speak, both instantly and perfectly.

The man had two problems, he was deaf and he had an impediment in his speech. The Lord deals with each problem separately. He put His fingers into his ears, then He spit and touched his tongue. It was the deafness that caused the impediment. There is a simple practical lesson in all this. What we hear and how we hear will determine how we speak. We see this truth in second Timothy. Paul reminds Timothy of what he had heard in II Tim 2:2- "And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also." Verse 14 continues with the same advice, "But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them". Knowing the character of the person who speaks is just as important as listening to the words that are used.

What not to listen to is described in verse 23 of the same chapter, "But foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strife".

If we hear properly, then we shall be able to speak properly also, like the man in our parable. In II Tim 4:2, Timothy is commanded, "Preach the word, be instant in season, out of season ; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine". The reason for this charge soon becomes obvious in the following verse. "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears". Spiritual deafness leads to wrong doctrine.

The hearing is also emphasised in the messages to the seven churches of Revelation. "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches". We have thus spoken about the importance of the ears. But scripture also has much to say about our lips. What we hear may determine what we have to say, but we must also take heed how we say it. Hence the Bible has these things to say about speaking :-

1. In love

The Lord has already condemned the Pharisees in this chapter. They worshipped God with their lips, but their heart was far from Him. That is in connection with our worship. But what about the teacher in the assembly today. In Eph 4:15 Paul says, "But speaking the truth in love". It is not enough the just to speak the truth. It has to said in love. No man should be speaking publicly if he does not love the Lord and also His people. In that great chapter on love, I Cor 13, Paul begins with, "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels and have not love, I am nothing". Thus truth and love are not extremes – they are interlinked. In Phil 1, Paul prays for the saints, "that your love may abound, in knowledge and in all judgement". Again in I Cor 13, "Love rejoiceth not in iniquity but rejoiceth in the truth".

2. Authority

We must be able to speak with authority. In I Peter 4:11, the apostle says, "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God". We should be speaking as though it was indeed the voice of God. This was what marked the Lord Jesus. In Mark chapter 1, the people were amazed at Him, for "He spake with authority and not as the scribes".

3. Not by eloquence, but by Spirit and in power

The Corinthians were great admirers of wisdom and eloquence and this gave rise to the schisms amongst them. Hence some were great admirers of Apollos, because he was an eloquent man. But Paul said about himself, "My speech and my preaching were not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and in power". Elsewhere, in Romans 16, Paul speaks of those "who by good words and fair speeches deceive the heart of the people". One of the greatest orators this world will ever hear will be the First Beast of Rev 13. "A mouth speaking great things".

4. With spiritual words.

We are to communicate spiritual things by spiritual words. The vocabulary of the preacher is not the vocabulary of the world. We are dealing with spiritual things, and they should be communicated with spiritual words.

No wonder, having considered all that has been said and done by the Lord in this chapter, men said of the Lord Jesus in the final verse, "He hath done all things well".