

THE GREATEST

BALANCE

Unless you're very afraid of heights, scan the QR-code to watch the 2-minute video of Spencer Seabrooke setting the longest free solo slackline ever.



Seabrooke crossed a 64-meter (209') slackline with no harness or safety line at all. He walked the tightrope over 950-feet in the air. If he fell, he would have had over 7-seconds to consider his life-choices before hitting the ground. Although it's terrifying to consider, Seabrooke made it look quite easy.

Throughout history, Christians have had difficulty practicing a balanced Christian life. Some people make it look easy, but for the majority of people, we err on one of two sides. On one side is "legalism" on the other is "lawlessness." Legalism sticks to a set of rules to find favor with God. Lawlessness assumes that a person can't be perfect so it's not worth the pursuit or that it doesn't matter regardless.

Mark 7 shows an interaction with legalistic religious leaders. Our passage today shows Jesus teaching in response to that legalism. Interestingly, on the other side of our passage Jesus interacts with a Gentile (usually equated with lawlessness). However, as we'll see, God loves surrendered obedience and a transformed heart.

MARK 7:9, 14-23, 28-29

⁹And he said to them, "You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to establish your tradition!

¹⁴And he called the people to him again and said to them, "Hear me, all of you, and understand: ¹⁵There 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." ¹⁷And when he had entered the house and left the people, his disciples asked him about the parable. ¹⁸And 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, ¹⁹since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled?" (Thus he declared all foods clean.) ²⁰And he said, "What comes out of a person is what defiles him. ²¹For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, ²²coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. ²³All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person."

²⁸But she answered him, "Yes, Lord; yet even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." ²⁹And he said to her, "For this statement you may go your way; the demon has left your daughter."

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

"Oh I do not deserve it, I'm too far from worth it. You're the only one who ever could be perfect. Every day I fall short but you still say I'm Yours. Amazing grace how sweet the sound. That saved a wretch like me. I once was lost, but now I'm found. Was blind, but now I see"

Legalism or lawlessness is a misunderstanding of grace. Grace is amazing because we're hopeless without it. It can't be earned, only received through Christ our Lord. Scan the QR-code to praise the Lord for his Amazing Grace.



DISCUSSION

Why do you think it's so easy to (wrongly) reduce Christianity down to a list of rules?

1. How did Jesus describe the relationship between God's commandments and the Pharisee's tradition? (9)

2. What did Jesus conclude about what and how things are consumed? (15a, 18-19)

3. What did Jesus say actually defiles a person and what examples did he provide? (15b, 20-23)

4. How does Jesus response to the woman illustrate what God truly values? (29)

5. How should you/do you practice a true heart for the Lord rather than just focusing on outward appearance? (aka, just doing the right things.)

We all run the risk of placing cultural values on Christ. We treat Christ like he should celebrate what I celebrate and condemn what I condemn. That's not the case. Talk to your Coach today!

ICEBREAKER

OBSERVATION

INTERPRETATION

APPLICATION

THE GREATEST

STUDY NOTES

A TALE OF TWO

Now when the Pharisees gathered to Jesus, with some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem (7:1), they saw something that infuriated them. It's the second time teachers of the Law came the 90-miles "from Jerusalem" and chafed over Jesus' growing influence as a rule-breaker (see Mark 3:22). What did they see? Apparently, Jesus' disciples were eating with "unwashed hands."

This charge wasn't a matter of hygiene, it amounted to the ritual of the religious leaders. It's not that the disciples hadn't washed their hands, it's that they didn't do it right according to the standard of the Pharisees.

Jesus used this charge as well as another example to throw down, "**You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to establish your tradition!**" It may not seem too bad to us, but them's fightin' words.

After God had punished Israel in the Old Testament for their repeated and willful sin (lawlessness), eventually people started getting the message—obedience is better than disobedience. They wanted to keep God's Law. They wanted to keep it so much that they actually started establishing rules so they wouldn't even get close to breaking it. Eventually, this "fence" around Law started being treated on equal footing *with* the Law (legalism). The religious leaders got mad at Jesus, not because he broke God's Law, but because he wouldn't bow to their traditions around the Law.

The most important aspect of the Law wasn't the rules themselves. The "rules" merely reflect God's heart and character. Jesus didn't just obey the Law's rules, instead he lived out God's heart. The master-storyteller, Mark, put these religious leaders in stark contrast to the interaction that followed with a lady known only as "the Syrophenician Woman."

In between these two interactions, Jesus taught the crowd what really mattered—that it's not what's outside that defiles a person, but what's inside. This nobody, Gentile woman illustrated Jesus' words far more than that posh and polished religious leaders.

JESUS IS GREATER THAN TRADITIONS

After his encounter with the Pharisees, Jesus **called the people to him again and said to them, "Hear me, all of you, and understand: 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."**

Again, we see the disciples getting a little more behind the scenes teaching when they **asked him about the parable**. Jesus replied, "**Then are you also without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled?**" Mark notes for the audience a pretty significant change brought about in the book of Acts, **(Thus he declared all foods clean)**.

Jesus' point is that food comes in then leaves. Food that leaves the body is a physical, stinky, dirty product, the vileness of which pales in comparison to the product of the human heart. **For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person."**

JESUS DEFINES CLEAN HEARTS

We might not struggle with all the sins listed, but all of us struggle with some of them. The Pharisees were no exception. Jesus' point? *All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God* (Romans 3:23). Clearly, the arrogance of the religious leaders chafed Jesus because in all their rule-keeping they missed God's heart.

In the next encounter, the Syrophenician Woman tried to get Jesus to heal her daughter. She begged Jesus, but he initially refused saying, "**Let the children be fed first, for it is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs.**" We don't really know why Jesus initially refused, presumably because his ministry was to the Jewish people first (Romans 1:16). However, this woman expressed the kind of humility and surrender the Pharisees missed. **She answered him, "Yes, Lord; yet even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs."** Jesus **said to her, "For this statement you may go your way; the demon has left your daughter."**

We can never achieve a clean heart on our own. The best we can achieve is legalism, but that won't gain us any favor with the Lord. Instead, in our sin we are as desperate as this woman seeking help for her child. We do not deserve the scraps from the Lord's table, and yet, he has given his complete love in the form of sending his Son that we might have a relationship with him. The offer has been extended, it is ours to receive by faith. The only way to have a clean heart is through surrendering to the Gospel of Jesus Christ so that he might heal our hearts and clean the filth.