

JESUS: THE SERVANT AT WORK

VOLUME TWO

STUDY FIVE

The Day Jesus Took Off the Gloves

Mark 7:1–13

If the US had not resisted, we would still be living under tyrants. If a school does not resist bullies, the playground is ruled by bullies. If a church doesn't stand against legalism, legalists rule.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

IN an era in which Christ-followers are called bigoted and arrogant for holding certain convictions, out of touch for thinking it's wrong for a man and woman to live together apart from marriage, and cranky and unloving for confronting someone in error, we tend to shrink back when we hear someone speak the unvarnished truth—even though we know in our hearts that the truth sets us free.

Jesus did not shy away from confronting the sin in His culture. “Full of grace and truth” (John 1:14 NASB), Jesus knew exactly what to say and how to say it. Truth offered with grace flowed from His inmost being as naturally as pure water flows from a mountain spring. His words of forgiveness and healing quenched the thirsty soul of anyone whose heart was open to receive them.

Some hearts, however, were bolted shut. They belonged to the Pharisees and scribes. Jesus invited them to repent of their pride, greed, and covetousness and experience inner cleansing. But they preferred to polish their external life through religious rituals. Rather than admit their sin, they put on a show of righteousness by conforming to a strict set of dos and don'ts—and forcing everyone else to do the same.

Jesus was not intimidated by these legalists. Their mission was to cut off the grace supply so that people would stay in bondage and they would stay in power. In the passage for this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study, sparks flew when Jesus confronted them with grace and truth. Jesus said what they needed to hear—and what we need to hear when we are caught up in a web of legalism. To pull us out, we need Jesus' lifeline of grace spoken truthfully. It's the only thing that can set us free.



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SEARCHING
THE
SCRIPTURES
BIBLE STUDIES

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PREPARE YOUR HEART

Express in your own words your desire for the grace and truth of Jesus so that you may continue to walk in freedom as you study Christ's words.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

By keeping people in religious bondage, the Pharisees held on to power. With gavels in hand, they walked around in judges' robes, evaluating people against the standard of their own laws. Only people who were pure in their eyes were worthy of the kingdom of God. Jesus, however, flung open the gates of God's kingdom to anyone who believed in Him.

The Pharisees' legalistic message and Jesus' grace message were in direct conflict. Clashes were inevitable. Jesus' confrontation of them seems harsh in Mark 7, but it was long in coming!



Observation: Jesus and the Pharisees and the Scribes

Let's observe [Mark 7:1–13](#) by reading it carefully and in various translations to find out what it says.¹ Notice the setting and the situation. Picture the Pharisees with their long beards, dressed in their religious garb. Hear their accusing and angry tone.

The Observation of Religious Leaders—Mark 7:1–2

In Mark 7:1–2, what did the scribes and Pharisees observe when they got there?

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The Crux of Their Criticism—Mark 7:3–5

Summarize Mark's explanation of how the Jews held firmly to the tradition of the elders in Mark 7:3–5. What question did the Pharisees and scribes ask Jesus about His disciples' conduct?

*“Hey Jesus, what’s going on here? Where are the pots? Where’s the clean water?”
Don’t think for a moment that they’re coming just to get information. They’re coming to confront. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

The Reaction of Jesus—Mark 7:6–13

What do you observe in Jesus' response to their criticism in Mark 7:6–13? What passage did He use to confront them?

The Crux of Jesus' Reaction—Mark 7:13

What important principle or truth did Jesus stand for in Mark 7:13?

*There is nothing in the Law regarding “Corban” [a gift dedicated to God].
It’s a man-made twisting, spinning of the truth. Jesus nailed them on it.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

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Interpretation: The Lord Versus the Legalists

The Pharisees noted that some of Jesus' disciples were eating with their hands unwashed in [Mark 7:1–13](#). Look up 7:1–5 in your own Bible-study tools. Pastor Chuck's commentary, [Insights on Mark](#), is an excellent resource, or consult [Constable's Notes](#) online at [netbible.org](#) to find out the significance of the words *unclean* and *tradition*. What is the meaning of this ritual washing? Why did they ask Jesus for an explanation of His disciples' failure to wash properly?

All this washing was a whole system that was required by the legalists of the first century. If you didn't fall in line, they took you to task. No one, it seemed, had the courage to confront them regarding their legalism until Jesus came.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

What is the significance of Jesus' use of Isaiah 29:13 and Exodus 20:12 in His response (Mark 7:6–7, 10)? Look up 7:6–13 in [Constable's Notes](#) at [netbible.org](#) to explore Jesus' contrasting the words of Scripture with the Pharisees' human-made traditions.

The Greek term *hypokrites* originally referred to an actor wearing a mask onstage. Why did Jesus call the Pharisees “hypocrites”? How are His words relevant today?

On the basis of God's Word, Jesus calls them what they are, “hypocrites,” which is true of every legalist. They rarely have anybody look at them and say, “You know what? You are nothing more than a hypocrite. Not even you can live up to all the rules you have for me to live up to.” That's the description of a hypocrite. Lips saying one thing, heart revealing another. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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Correlation: God's Truth Sets Us Free

God calls His children to walk in true freedom—which only occurs when we walk in God's truth by the power of His Spirit.

How does abiding in God's Word lead us to know the truth, which then sets us free from the bondage of sin according to [John 8:31–32](#)? How does this passage correlate with [Psalm 119:9, 11](#); [2 Corinthians 5:6–10](#); and [Galatians 5:1–13](#)? What should be the goal of every believer?

My goal in life is to please my heavenly Father through Jesus Christ my Lord. And if He writes it in His Word, that's not legalism. That's something I need to obey. Don't misunderstand that. This truth is written for me to follow.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Compare [Mark 7:1–13](#) with [Colossians 2:1–10](#). Why should we believers stand firm against teachings that substitute human-made traditions for God's Word? How do passages like [2 Samuel 12:1–15](#) and [Galatians 2:11–20](#) highlight how we can easily see others' failures and overlook ours? What crucial role did the truth play in both passages? Which one touched you more?

If it's not in God's Word, and some denomination or some hierarchy or some religious bully playing king of the mountain tells me I need to do it, I stand against them. And so must you if you want to enjoy the liberty that is yours.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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Application: Stop . . . Look . . . Listen!

Let's apply this passage to our lives. Pastor Chuck refers to the signpost next to a railroad crossing to help us remember our application: Stop, Look, and Listen.

First, stop before criticizing legalists. Second, look in a mirror before calling someone else a hypocrite. Jesus was justified in calling the Pharisees hypocrites, but we stumble in many ways and are in constant need of His truth and grace too. In what areas do you wear masks? Do you find it difficult to speak truth or walk in truth? Why not request the Lord's strength and wisdom to tell the truth about your own struggles?

Some of you are busy wearing a mask around your non-Christian friends. They see through you. They see through me. One of the ways of winning them is to tell them the truth. "You know I struggle with these things too. I'm not the perfect One. I worship the perfect One. He alone is able to take my sin and do something about it." —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Third, listen to what all this says about being free. Jesus freed His disciples from human-made tradition. How can you continue to walk in freedom? How can you help others take the freedom walk? In what relationships—spouse, children, coworkers—might you need the Holy Spirit's guidance to help others breathe some fresh air of grace?

Are you free, really free? If you keep replaying that tape from somebody in your past, you're not free. If you're living under the gun of somebody's threat, you're not free. If you're letting some legalist play king of the mountain in your life, you're not free. People sometimes ask, "How come you're still in ministry at this age?" I tell them, "Because I don't let the legalists get to me." I used to. But it's marvelous to live free. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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A FINAL PRAYER

Heavenly Father, thank You for Jesus! Thank You for His bravery, His honesty. Deliver me from the big thumb of religious bullies. Deliver me from playing king of the mountain over somebody else's life. Give me freedom that is a joy to live. Help me to laugh freely, love freely, and speak to others freely. May I live in the truth that has set me free. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.

ENDNOTE

1. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, go to the web page "*How Does Pastor Chuck Swindoll Study the Bible?*" at [insight.org](https://www.insight.org).

For the 2026–2027 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study was developed by Mirlenda Noëlliste in collaboration with Bryce Klabunde, vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages. Copyright © 2010, 2026 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. All rights are reserved worldwide. Duplication of copyrighted material for commercial use is strictly prohibited.

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Insight for Living

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