

21 For it is from within, out of a person's heart, that evil thoughts come--sexual immorality, theft, murder, 22 adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. 23 All these evils come from inside and defile a person." - Mark 7:21-23 NIV

Jesus gives us a list of evil thoughts that spring from our hearts and defile us. At first glance we might think we wouldn't find ourselves thinking such things because, after all, "I don't murder and steal". But included with adultery and murder are deceit, envy, arrogance and even folly!

What are some commonly accepted practices that would fall under these categories (e.g. deceit-cheating on your taxes, slander-spreading rumors about a politician from an opposing party)

Our pride resists admitting where we fail. But allow yourself to honestly examine this list to identify any areas you struggle with even subtly. And then spend time confessing and repenting as you invite the Holy Spirit to transform your heart.

WRAP-UP

As Jesus ministered in Gennesaret, some Pharisees and scribes traveled from Jerusalem, not to learn, but to find fault. Threatened by His growing influence, they were offended when His disciples ignored traditional rituals passed down by earlier teachers. In response, Jesus challenged their focus on external behaviors and human traditions, highlighting that true defilement comes not from what enters the body but from what resides in the heart. He rebuked them for prioritizing man-made rules over God's commands and reminded them—and us—that genuine worship and holiness begin with inner transformation, not outward compliance.

MEMORY VERSE

And he continued, "You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions! - Mark 7:9 NIV

Challenge –

Take a heart check as you go about your normal practices like prayers, bible reading or worship to see if you are seeking to please God first rather than anyone else.

That Which Defiles Gospel of Mark Ch. 7 - Week 1

INTRODUCTION

As Jesus was ministering in the region of Gennesaret some of the Pharisees and Scribes came from Jerusalem on a fact-finding mission, or more accurately a fault-finding mission. Jesus was generating a rapidly increasing following, and this threatened the power of those teachers of the law. It was their job to know what the scriptures said and explain it to the people. Over time they became known as experts in interpreting the Law of God, and not only defined but expanded it and added to it. So, as they observed Jesus and His disciples, they took offense when the disciples didn't follow the rituals and rules which had been set up by earlier teachers of the law; "the traditions of the elders". In a public confrontation Jesus identifies the source of the issue- we aren't defiled by what is outside of us, but by what is in our hearts.

Ice Breaker

What is the most difficult thing you have ever tried to clean up? (e.g. gum stuck in your child's hair, a dog sprayed by a skunk???) And do you know any hacks for cleaning something? *Did you know you can remove tea stains from China teacups with baking soda?*

Key Passages

Nothing outside a person can defile them by going into them. Rather, it is what comes out of a person that defiles them." - Mark 7:15 NIV

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Traditions of Men

5 So the Pharisees and teachers of the law asked Jesus, "Why don't your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders instead of eating their food with defiled hands?" - Mark 7:5 NIV

8 They [Levites] read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people understood what was being read. - Nehemiah 8:8 NIV

Most of us were raised in a culture where every home had access to a bible, either physical or more recently, digital. But in Jesus' day the people relied on their religious leaders to read the sacred scriptures and interpret their meaning. As we see in Nehemiah it was the Levites who, in serving God, clarified and gave meaning to God's word. And the scribes and Pharisees enthusiastically took up that task later. But they went too far, not only describing God's Laws, they defined it, expanded it, ended up adding to it, making it no longer about God but about human things.

Are there any religious traditions or habits in your life that you follow more out of routine than devotion to God? Why do you think people are attracted to quantifiable rules to live by? What is the best way to judge if something you are doing is right in God's eyes?

Historically we have seen controversies in church about things like the style of worship music, the method of baptism, and the exercise of spiritual gifts. What begins with the good intention to follow God's law, turns into a point of division and certainly must break God's heart.

2. Underlying Motivation

Jesus immediately identified the reason for the Pharisees' question in verse 5.

'So the Pharisees and teachers of the law asked Jesus, "Why don't your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders instead of eating their food with defiled hands?" He replied, "Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written: "These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules.' You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to human traditions." - Mark 7:5-8 NIV

Although they were experts in God's Law, they had lost sight of God's intent and instead were focused on the rituals and traditions that had developed around God's laws. Jesus quotes Isaiah and calls them hypocrites because God is more interested in our heart than our actions.

Jesus says their worship is in vain (gr. matēn) meaning without purpose, and producing no fruit. What would you say is the purpose of worship? What does Jesus say they held fast to as they disregarded God's commandments? Can you think of anything we might do more for the benefit of those around us than to please God?

Jesus gave this example of substituting man's rules in place of God's commandments. And Paul warned the Colossian church against looking for the answers to life's questions (philosophy) based on man's traditions, rather than on Christ.

9 And he continued, "You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions! 10 For Moses said, 'Honor your father and mother,' and, 'Anyone who curses their father or mother is to be put to death.' 11 But you say that if anyone declares that what might have been used to help their father or mother is Corban (that is, devoted to God)-- 12 then you no longer let them do anything for their father or mother. 13 Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that." - Mark 7:9-13 NIV

8 See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ. - Colossians 2:8 NIV

Have you ever prioritized convenience, culture, or people's expectations over what God has commanded? Are there areas in your life where you may have rationalized disobedience to God?

3. It's What's Inside That Counts

14 Again Jesus called the crowd to him and said, "Listen to me, everyone, and understand this. 15 Nothing outside a person can defile them by going into them. Rather, it is what comes out of a person that defiles them." ... 17 After he had left the crowd and entered the house, his disciples asked him about this parable. 18 "Are you so dull?" he asked. "Don't you see that nothing that enters a person from the outside can defile them? 19 For it doesn't go into their heart but into their stomach, and then out of the body." (In saying this, Jesus declared all foods clean.) - Mark 7:14-15, 17-19 NIV

Jesus didn't want the people misled by the pharisees and so He told them clearly, we are not defiled (made impure) by what goes into us. The work of cultivating purity takes place on the inside.

Are there any thoughts, words, or actions that have recently come out of you that reflected something in your heart you'd like to change? How do we allow God to transform our heart?

Take a moment to read aloud and agree together with this prayer "Lord, reveal to me any area where I've valued tradition over truth, appearance over heart, or rules over a relationship with you. Cleanse me from the inside out."