

Clean Hands and Defiled Hearts

Mark 7: 1-23

It has been a while since we've heard from the scribes and Pharisees, but they were a continual nuisance to the Lord as He ministered among the people. It appears they followed Jesus as often as they could, seeking any means to accuse Him and discredit His ministry.

As we have discussed before, there will always be those who seek to hinder the work of the Lord. Jesus dealt with them; the disciples dealt with them; Paul dealt with them, and so shall we if we are committed to honoring the Lord. The Pharisees were known for their adherence to the Law and legalistic traditions, but in reality they were hypocrites. As they criticized their perceived faults in the Lord and His work, they completely ignored their lack of obedience to those aspects of the faith that genuinely pleased the Lord. Outwardly they looked good, but within they were defiled and corrupt.

These truths have not changed. Like the Pharisees of old, our lives are measured by what is in our hearts, instead of the life we portray before men. It is possible to have a form of righteousness, but actually have a defiled heart. As we examine the [lessons](#) in the text, I want to consider: [Clean Hands and Defiled Hearts](#).

I. The Accusation of the Jews (1-5) – Our opening verses reveal another controversy brought about by the unjust accusation of the Pharisees. Notice:

A. The Examination (1-2) – As we have learned, the Pharisees kept a close watch on Jesus and the disciples, seeking any means to accuse them. At this particular moment, they had witnessed the disciples eating bread without washing their hands. (The enemy will see to it that our motives and actions will be called into question by those outside the faith. He knows he is defeated, and our Lord is eternally victorious. While he can't defeat Christ, he can work to bring accusation to those who desire to serve the Lord and proclaim the Gospel.)

B. The Tradition (3-4) – Mark revealed that the Pharisees held strict traditions, passed down through generations. They were forbidden to eat unless they washed their hands. There were many traditions regarding the washing of cups, pots, brass vessels, and the tables upon which the food was served. While there is absolutely nothing wrong with cleanliness, these traditions were kept while they ignored the greater aspects of the faith. They exercised great care for outward cleanliness and yet neglected the needs within their hearts.

- Traditions are fine in a proper context. There is nothing wrong with washing one's hands or properly cleaning cups and pots, but these and other traditions must not be held in higher regard than the fundamentals of our faith. Tradition cannot replace or exceed biblical mandates. The modern church is often willing to ignore biblical mandates if it goes against long held traditions.

C. The Confrontation (5) – Having stood on the sideline as long as they could, the Pharisees confronted Jesus about the disciples disregard for long held traditions. They were appalled that these men would dare to eat without first washing their hands.

- The enemy and those who promote his agenda are never afraid of confrontation. Some within the church are even quick to confront those who fail to honor certain traditions and rituals that are held in high regard. If you are committed to serving the Lord, you might as well prepare to deal with confrontation. Someone will eventually take issue with your practices.

II. The Proclamation of Jesus (6-13) – As He had done in the past, Jesus immediately responded to the accusation of the Pharisees. However, rather than chastising the disciples for failing to honor tradition, He questioned the motives of the Pharisees and rebuked their agenda. We find that:

A. He Condemned their Hypocrisy (6-9) – I don't think the Pharisees were necessarily shocked by Jesus' response, but He challenged them publicly regarding their continued hypocrisy. Jesus quoted a prophecy from Isaiah that was being fulfilled at that very moment. These sought to honor God with their lips and their actions, but their hearts were not right with the Lord. These held to traditions that were passed down and demanded, but they ignored the commandments of God. Their righteousness was all an outward show, a front that lacked real substance. In essence Jesus rebuked the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. According to Warren Weirsbe, "*Rabbi Eleazer said, 'He who expounds the Scriptures in opposition to the tradition has no share in the world to come.'* *The Mishna, a collection of Jewish traditions in the Talmud, records, 'It is a greater offense to teach anything contrary to the voice of the Rabbis than to contradict Scripture itself.'*"ⁱ

- Unfortunately such practices continue today. Our world is filled with those who hold to religious traditions and certain practices, but their hearts are not right with the Lord. They give great attention to performing that which is expected by the religious establishment and yet fail to honor the Lord by living according to the dictates of Scripture.

B. He Condemned their Delinquency (10-13) – Here Jesus addressed another grievous error many committed all while seeking to justify it according to the faith. In that culture, and in most today, one was expected to care for their aging parents. Jesus reminded them of the commandment to honor their father and mother. However, the Jews had devised a way to avoid their responsibilities and justify their neglect. When their parents made a request, the rebellious son would declare that his available monies were “*Corban*.” This is a term that meant the money was dedicated to God and could be spent for no other purpose than the needs of the Temple or sacred duties. These neglected their responsibilities through false pretense and were bold enough to declare the money was reserved for the Lord.

- Such activity remains today in some form or another. Folks may not tell their parents their money is reserved for the Lord, but they seek to justify their actions through a mandate or expectation of the church. They are willing to neglect the needs of those closest to them in order to continue their efforts of self-righteousness. Many children have been turned from the faith because of the legalistic demands of their parents, all while seeing the utter hypocrisy in it.

III. The Clarification of Jesus (14-23) – Following His encounter with the Pharisees, Jesus offered clarity to the disciples and those gathered around Him. Consider:

A. The Admonition (14-16) – Jesus called them to listen closely and understand the truth He shared. While the Pharisees worried so much about dirt and uncleanness from without, Jesus declared those things cannot defile a man. It isn't about what we take in by mouth that defiles us, but what comes out of our mouths and the actions of our lives that defile. These are both prompted from within. Our heart will dictate our words and our behavior. We should be much more worried about the condition of our hearts than the dirt and filth without.

B. The Explanation (17-19) – After coming together with the disciples in a private setting, they desired further clarification. Jesus declared that those things consumed by us cannot defile us. They are taken in through the mouth and soon enough pass through the body. The Pharisees had placed all this effort and concern about what was taken in, and yet failed to comprehend the condition of the heart. (Jesus does not imply that we are to be foolish or careless with our eating habits. Improperly prepared food can make us sick, and even cause death. He is emphasizing a greater spiritual truth. Rather than focusing solely on the physical aspects of life, and making provision for them alone, we need to ensure our hearts are healthy spiritually!)

C. The Illustration (20-23) – Again Jesus emphasized the great truth of that which comes out of the man defiles, (his words and behavior,) not that which is taken in through the mouth. He goes on to provide a list of evil behaviors that are prompted by a defiled heart. He speaks of:

- **Evil Thoughts** — This is the root of all that follows. When an evil heart conjures up evil intentions, the evil person will carry them out.
 - **Adulteries** — Illicit sexual activity by married persons.
 - **Fornications** — This word translates the Greek word “*porneia*” and it refers to any illicit sexual activity. The origin of sexual sin is not in the body, it is the result of a defiled heart!
 - **Murders** — The taking of another's life. By the way, you are guilty of murder if you have hatred in your heart toward another person, [1 John 3:15](#).
 - **Thefts** — Taking that which belongs to another for your own use. This covers a lot of territory, even the tithe, [Mal. 3:8-9](#).
 - **Covetousness** — An insatiable craving for that which belongs to another.
 - **Wickedness** — This word means “*malice*” and it refers to all the ways that evil thought manifest themselves in a person's life. It is deliberate acts of meanness!
 - **Deceit** — This word refers to cunning maneuvers designed to ensnare someone for one's personal advantage. It is the idea of someone trying to work undercover to bring someone else down. Sneaky, deceptive people fall into this category.
 - **Lasciviousness** — This word refers to unrestrained, shameless behavior. It is an attitude that says, “*I will do as I please and I do not care what anyone thinks about it!*”
 - **An Evil Eye** — This is a Hebrew expression that speaks of envy and jealousy. It looks at the blessings of another and desires them for itself. It is envious when others prosper.
 - **Blasphemy** — injurious or defaming speech directed at either God or man. Gossip and cursing fall into this category.
 - **Pride** — The boastful exalting of oneself. It's the attitude that says, “*Look at me, see what I have done. No one is as good or as great as I am.*” This is an overbearing attitude that is the opposite of humility.
 - **Foolishness** — This word refers to those who are morally and spiritually desensitized. They cannot see their sins; neither can they sense the Lord working in and around them. With this kind of person, there is no spiritual illumination. There is no spiritual discernment. They do not know God and there is no desire to know Him. ⁱⁱ
- Surely we all would agree that such behaviors are much more defiling than eating with unwashed hands. We must ensure our hearts are right with the Lord and we are living in a way that honors Him above all else.

Conclusion: The Pharisees spent much time on tradition and little time on the condition of the heart. The heart of man's problem is always a problem within the heart. We can put on a religious

front, honoring the Lord with our lips, and even pretend through our actions, but our hearts reveal the truth of the matter. Are there needs in your life today? Have you responded to the call for salvation through repentance and faith? Whatever the need is within the heart, Jesus can provide the help and solution you need.

ⁱ The Sermon Notebook - The Sermon Notebook – Mark.

ⁱⁱ Ibid