

## WATCH WHAT YOU SAY AND DO

Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23 Text vs. 14-15 Text vs. 14-15 *“Again Jesus called the crowd to him and said, “Listen to me, everyone, and understand this. Nothing outside a person can defile them by going into them. Rather, it is what comes out of a person that defiles them.”*

Do you remember the time when your Momma called out, “Dinner’s ready. Go wash up.” She wasn’t talking about spiritual washing. She was talking about getting your hands clean. It was about personal hygiene!

And in our lesson this morning, Jesus faced a similar issue about purity and defilement. And to fully grasp the significance of what Jesus meant, you need to understand the circumstance in which He said it. The Pharisees and teachers of the law had strict rules about ceremonial cleanliness. They stressed the routines and traditions of how Jewish people washed their hands and what Jewish people ate.

So, Jesus called their attention to this by telling them the true source of defilement. It’s the human heart! In other words, *watch what you say and do*. Pharisees were a group within Judaism which after 2,000 years of church history we have a negative picture of in our minds. When we hear the word “Pharisee” we know how they responded to, and treated Jesus. It wasn’t good!

But to people back then, Pharisees were the heroes. Not the “bad guys.” The Pharisees were lay people. Not a priest among them! They were a reform movement who wanted to help ordinary Jews in Israel learn how to live out their devotion to God. They believed every detail of the Old Testament law was to be applied to everyday life. Pharisees believed every Jew should try hard to have the same level of godliness that God required of Jewish priests who served in the temple in Jerusalem. (Jacob Neusner, *The Idea of Purity in Ancient Judaism*, p. 65). They believed if Israel was to be a nation of priests, as the Old Testament claims, then God required all Jews in Israel to live by the same standards He required of Jewish priests.

So, the Pharisees expected a higher level of obedience and commitment among the Jewish people than the Old Testament required of them. For example, Pharisees believed eating with unwashed hands made a person unclean. And that’s true! But it wasn’t about hygiene! It was about religious purity. Traditionally, Jews are required to wash their hands and say a blessing before eating any meal that includes bread or unleavened bread. By using a two-handled cup, or any will do, the customary practice is to pour water twice on the right hand followed by twice on the left and is reversed for those who are left-handed. The custom of pouring three times on each hand using the non-dominant hand to pour first, which can feel unnatural or awkward, shows that the washing is done for ritual rather than practical purposes. And the tradition is unrelated to personal hygiene. Still, a person is required to perform this ritual even if his or her hands are clean. And it’s customary not to speak following the blessing while washing until saying the blessing for bread and eating it. Jesus challenged this by pointing out that external things don’t defile a person. It’s the heart that does it! What they think and do.

He began by telling the crowd to listen carefully to Him and try to understand what He was saying. That’s the point! Often, you hear, but you’re not listening. Jesus wanted His audience’s full attention so they could get hold of the deeper truth He was about to reveal, because He wasn’t talking about dietary laws. He was pointing to a deep spiritual reality when He made this radical statement: *“Nothing outside a person can defile them by going into them. Rather, it is what comes out of a person that defiles them.”* That shifted the focus of what He was saying from external actions to internal motives. Your thoughts. Your words. Your actions that come from your heart is the condition of your heart that determines your purity or defilement. Since the heart is the seat of emotion, desires, and will, it’s from the heart that evil thoughts, intentions, and actions come. Jesus explained this to His disciples later. It’s from a person’s heart that evil thoughts come. And He named them off: sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, hatred, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance, foolishness. (Mark 7:21-22) All those come from inside a person to defile a person.

So, how carefully do you watch what goes into your mouth compared to what comes out of it? For example, do you follow a low-fat diet? Do you track the grams of fat going into your body? Do you count the number of calories you consume? Do you avoid refined sugars? Limit your caffeine? Shun high fructose corn syrup? Do you buy organic milk? Organic fruit? Organic soap? Do you use sea salt instead of table salt? Purchase only beef that’s produced without the use of growth hormone? Cook with olive oil instead of Crisco? Drink only bottled water. Well, you can do all of those things, and you’ll still die! Their value is limited. They may make you a little healthier. And definitely a little poorer. But their value is temporary! None of the foods you avoid, or limit can defile you. They can’t soil you spiritually. They can’t make you any less pleasing to God. So, what’s a person to do?

You must examine your own heart. Are your thoughts and intentions pure? Do you hold any bitterness, envy, or meanness? True purity begins within a transformed heart! And only God can change hearts. For the Holy Spirit of God to work within you, you need to seek His help through prayer and reading His Word. What you do should flow from a pure heart. Don’t be like the Pharisees who focused on outward appearances but neglected any inner transformation. As every customer knows, manufacturers normally provide their customers with operating manuals. Whenever you buy something new, whether it’s a cell phone, a car, CD player, washing machine, TV or video recorder, a manual is given to you to show

you how to use it and ensure it works right. The manual tells you how the product works and what needs to be done to keep it working efficiently.

There's a story about a young man with a small Ford car while on his way to work the car broke down. It refused to restart. Suddenly, a well-dressed man pulled up beside him in a big car and offered to help. The young man didn't expect such a well-dressed man to know anything about his small Ford, but he was desperate. He let him have a look. The man looked at the engine and after a few minutes tinkering with it asked the young man to start the engine. He did. And it not only started immediately, but it sounded better than it did before it had quit. The surprised young man was full of thanks and asked the well-dressed man for his name and how he knew what was wrong with the car. "Well," the man replied, "my name is Henry Ford. I invented this car." . . . He knew all about the car because he made it!

And God knows everything about you because He made you! He knows what you need to make a success of your life. And He's met that need by giving you a "manual" containing the instructions of life. The Bible. Its instructions apply to everyone. You either obey them, or you disobey them. When you don't obey the Lord and keep all of His commandments and His laws, you can't enjoy His blessings. Instead, you come under a curse and will have a lot of difficulties in your life. If, however, you carefully obey the voice of the Lord your God, and carefully observe all His commandments, you will also enjoy His blessings. *"Nothing outside a person can defile them by going into them. Rather, it is what comes out of a person that defiles them."*

Guarding your heart against defilement is essential for maintaining your spiritual and emotional well-being. The phrase *"your eyes are the window to your soul"* means you can understand a lot about a person just by looking into their eyes. It's often said eyes can convey emotions and truths that words might not fully express. What you are on the inside determines what your attitudes and your thoughts become on the outside. Your character. What's inside a person always comes out. If they're sinful attitudes, they will come out as sinful actions. If they're godly attitudes, they will come out in Godly actions. When you're changed on the inside, your character also changes. And your actions will reflect the change. Without change on the inside, everything you do on the outside will merely be superficial. A transformation of the inner person draws you to the things of God, namely His Word. Prayer, fellowship and service makes you sensitive to the real needs of people.

Jesus' teaching in our text today (Mark 7:14-15) challenges you to look beyond external rituals and focus on the condition of your heart. True defilement comes from within. And only a heart transformed by God's grace can produce a pure heart. The commandments of life deal with the heart. Jesus was after a transformation of the inner person. He cares more about who you are on the inside, than who you are on the outside. He cares more about your inner person than your outward appearance. He cares more about your heart condition than your observance of rituals. Pharisees added hundreds of their own rules and regulations to God's commandments. And then tried to force people to follow those rules. They claimed to know God's will in every detail of life. And today, there are religious leaders who are sidetracked and add rules and regulations to God's Word, changing the message of God, and causing much confusion among believers. Changing the message of God is to change the God of the message.

And as Rev. A. W. Tozer, whose ministry spanned over 44 years with the Christian and Missionary Alliance (C&MA) and as a pastor in various congregations, most notably at Southside Alliance Church in Chicago for 30 years reminds us, *"the essence of idolatry is having thoughts about God that are unworthy of Him."* The commandments of God are for your benefit. By obeying them, you enjoy all that God has made available to you. Disobeying them, you miss God's power to transform your heart and your life. Enjoy life the way God has designed it for you by obeying His commandments. Seek to have a heart that's pleasing to God, that's filled with love, compassion, and righteousness by **WATCHING WHAT YOU SAY AND DO** Amen!