

Inside Out: What Truly Defiles a Person

In Mark 7, Jesus confronts religious hypocrisy head-on. The chapter opens with a clash between the traditions of man and the commandments of God, and it ends with the healing of a Gentile woman's daughter and a man who was deaf and mute. From beginning to end, this chapter challenges our assumptions about what pleases God and what truly defiles a person. It's a powerful reminder that spiritual life is not about rituals and appearances, but about the condition of the heart.

Verses 1–13: The Danger of Man-Made Traditions

Key Verse: *"This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men."* (Mark 7:6–7 NKJV)

The Pharisees and scribes traveled from Jerusalem to confront Jesus, not about deep theological issues, but because His disciples didn't follow their man-made rules about ceremonial handwashing. These weren't issues of hygiene, but of religious tradition—rituals developed over generations and later codified in documents like the Mishnah¹.

Jesus turns the accusation back on them, quoting Isaiah to expose their hypocrisy. They honored God outwardly, but their hearts were far from Him. Worse yet, their traditions had replaced God's commandments. For example, the tradition of *Corban* allowed someone to withhold support from their parents under the guise of dedicating the money to God, directly violating the command to honor father and mother.

Personal Application: It's easy to fall into the trap of valuing religious habits or cultural traditions more than God's commands. Ask yourself: Are there any "sacred cows" in your spiritual life—things you do out of habit or tradition rather than true devotion? Are there ways you justify disobedience to God's Word by clinging to what feels familiar or acceptable? God wants your heart, not your routine.

Verses 14–23: What Defiles a Person?

Key Verse: *"There is nothing that enters a man from outside which can defile him; but the things which come out of him, those are the things that defile a man."* (Mark 7:15 NKJV)

Jesus calls the crowd to Himself and drops a bombshell: It's not what goes into your body that makes you spiritually unclean—it's what comes out of your heart. To a Jewish audience steeped in manmade dietary laws and ceremonial purity, this was shocking. But Jesus wasn't disregarding holiness; He was redirecting it from the external to the internal.

He lists what truly defiles us: evil thoughts, sexual immorality, pride, deceit, and other sins. These things don't originate outside of us—they come from within. They reveal the condition of our hearts.

Personal Application: True holiness begins in the heart. Ask the Lord to search you and reveal what's inside. Are you more concerned about outward appearance or inward purity? Confess

¹ The Mishnah is not Scripture, but it is considered highly authoritative in rabbinic Judaism. It's now a written collection of what had previously been oral law—the teachings and interpretations that Jewish rabbis passed down for generations. The Mishnah is a flawed human attempt to explain how to apply the Scripture in daily life. Jesus often confronted the "tradition of the elders" (e.g., Mark 7), which later became part of the Mishnah. He rebuked the Pharisees for elevating man-made traditions above God's commands (Mark 7:8–13).

anything that defiles you from within. The gospel isn't about outward reform but inward transformation.

Verses 24–30: The Faith of a Gentile Woman

Key Verse: *"Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs under the table eat from the children's crumbs."* (Mark 7:28 NKJV)

Jesus travels to the region of Tyre and Sidon—Gentile territory. A Gentile woman begs Him to heal her demon-possessed daughter. Jesus responds with a parable about not throwing the children's bread to the little dogs. This wasn't an insult, but a test of her faith. Her humble, faith-filled reply reveals a deep understanding: even crumbs from Jesus are enough to heal.

Personal Application: God honors humility and persistent faith. This woman didn't argue for her rights; she simply trusted in Jesus' mercy. Do you come to Jesus with that kind of humility? No one deserves His grace—but those who believe receive more than crumbs. They receive full access to the riches of His mercy.

Verses 31–37: The Deaf and Mute Man Healed

Key Verse: *"He has done all things well. He makes both the deaf to hear and the mute to speak."* (Mark 7:37 NKJV)

Back in the Decapolis region, people bring Jesus a man who is deaf and has a speech impediment. Jesus takes him aside, touches his ears and tongue, and says, *"Be opened."* Immediately, the man can hear and speak clearly. Once again, Jesus tells them not to spread the word, but the news travels fast.

Personal Application: Jesus meets us where we are, in our brokenness. He took this man aside privately, ministered to him personally, and healed him completely. Whatever your limitation—physical, emotional, or spiritual—Jesus is able to meet your need. Have you let Him touch that part of your life that's still deaf to His Word or silent in worship? Ask Him today to open your ears and loose your tongue so you can praise Him fully.

Conclusion: Mark 7 challenges us to move beyond religious performance into sincere faith and inward transformation. Jesus shows us that true defilement begins in the heart, and true healing comes by His grace through faith. As you reflect on this chapter, ask: Am I clinging to tradition, or am I rooted in truth? Am I trying to clean the outside of the cup, or am I letting Jesus change me from the inside out?

Prayer: *Lord, cleanse me from the inside out. Free me from empty traditions and help me live in genuine obedience. Open my ears to hear Your Word and loosen my lips to praise You. I believe that even a crumb of Your grace is more than enough for me. Amen.*