

Date : 3 Aug 2025
Theme : Gospel of Mark
Topic : Serving God with a Pure Heart
Passage : Mark 7
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)

Introduction

In *Mark 7*, Jesus unveils a spiritual truth: that purity is not measured by rituals, appearances, or cultural norms - but by the condition of the heart. He warns against defilement.

To defile means to make impure, unclean, or spiritually unworthy before God. Jesus redefines its source - not from food or physical touch, but from what flows out of the heart: thoughts, words, and actions driven by inner corruption. It indicates a wounding and deforming of the heart through sin.

Jesus confronts us to uncover what purity really looks like. His message is convicting - and it prompts each of us to examine our own hearts. As followers of Christ, we are called to serve God with a pure heart, and extending kindness to people from all walks of life with humility and compassion.

1. Tradition vs Truth of God's commands: When religious forms defile our relationship with God (*Mark 7:1-23*)

One drop of ink in a cup of water transforms it into 'clouds of impurity'. Defilement is like that. The corruption in our hearts taints every act of worship.

Religious traditions make us critical of others' behaviour. In *Mark 7:5*, the Pharisees confront Jesus about His disciples eating without ritual handwashing - a tradition they elevated to sacred status. But Jesus doesn't indulge the debate.

(a) What dangers do outward religious forms pose?

(i) They take precedence over God's commandments for holiness (*Mark 7:1-9*)

“You have let go the commands of God and are holding on to human traditions... You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions.” (*Mark 7:8-9*)

- An example of ritualistic traditions: Ceremonial washings (*Mark 7:3-4*).
The core issue wasn't just dirty hands - it was dirty hearts.
 - The root is self-righteousness, so we judge others by our religious traditions. (*Mark 7:5*)
 - We focus on outward behaviours while neglecting the heart-level change that true holiness requires.
- Jesus said the Pharisees were wrong in thinking that they were acceptable to God just because they were clean on the outside.

(ii) They take over God's commandment for duty to parents (*Mark 7:10-13*)

- Jesus' example of *Corban* exposes how tradition allows them to shirk their responsibility to parents and undermines God's command to honour parents (*Exodus 20:12*).
 - People were allowed to dedicate resources to God to justify the neglect of care for aging parents.
 - By this man-made doctrine, they use God as an excuse to avoid helping their families.

(iii) Outward expressions that defile our hearts is not true worship

"This people honours Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me." (Mark 7:6)

- Giving God lip service without genuine devotion turns worship into mere performance.
- Jesus calls the Pharisees hypocrites. (A hypocrite is someone who says one thing but his heart is in another place.) Their worship is not motivated by honouring God but by a desire to appear holy before man.
 - With cold hearts they go through their religious rituals for show, but detached from true devotion to God.

(b) Why avoiding defilement matters

- Defilement is a serious issue: it undermines our worship, corrupts our service, and damages our relationship with God.
"In vain do they worship Me..." (Mark 7:7)
- When man-made rituals replace God's commands, worship becomes a façade – a mere show, it's not true worship. God desires purity because He is holy.

(c) Practical heart-check

As an illustration: Think of a garden path overtaken by weeds. The original path is buried. That's what happened with the traditions the Pharisees upheld - they paved over God's direct commands with man-made habits. Jesus' warning is that their hypocrisy is leading them to destruction and folly.

This passage invites each of us to examine our hearts by looking at our own habits and our talk. Our hearts are easily polluted by the world. We must guard our hearts diligently. How can we do so?

➔ Is a mindset change needed?

- Do I pay more attention to reputation than to character? ☐
- Do I spotlight my own goodness while magnifying others' faults? ☐
- Do I measure holiness by observing certain rituals rather than to a wholehearted relationship with God? ☐
- What traditions or patterns might need re-evaluation? ☐
 - Not all traditions are bad—Paul commends apostolic tradition (*2 Thessalonians 2:15*)
 - but when human customs conflict with God's Word, they're spiritually toxic.
 - Identify harmful traditions we have accepted without thinking.Do I follow certain religious practices while allowing my heart to remain distant from God. eg. Partaking the emblems of the Holy Communion as a ritual without considering what it means?

(d) What defiles a person?

"... nothing that enters a person from the outside can defile him... but the things which come out of him..." (Mark 7:15)

- What is a defiled heart?
It's a heart misaligned with God's will - overflowing with unchecked sin, corrupt motives, and self-exaltation. Defilement begins there and manifests in words and actions.

- Jesus lists 13 heart sins
 - Each a 'fruit' of inner corruption. If the root is rotten, the fruit will be, too.
 - Jesus shifts the focus to what flows from the heart - your attitudes, speech, choices.
 - The 13 signs of defilement (*listed in Mark 7:21–22*), is grouped into 6 categories and these parallel the violations of the Ten Commandments:

Evil from the Heart	Related Commandment
Murder	Do not kill
Adultery & Sexual Immorality	Do not commit adultery
Theft	Do not steal
False witness & deceit	Do not bear false witness
Pride	Do not have other gods – pride makes yourself one
Covetousness	Do not covet

2. When religious traditions hinder our service to reach out to others

Jesus doesn't just reveal inner defilement - He intentionally goes beyond cultural boundaries to show love in action. His journey into Gentile territory shows inclusivity and that true faith transcends boundaries.

(a) Jesus crosses ethnic boundaries to preach the gospel

As an illustration: Imagine yourself walking into a slum - not to preach from a distance, but to sit with the people, listen, and love them.

- Jesus enters places others tend to avoid, because He sees faith where others see exclusion and judgement
 - Jews do not associate with Gentiles, not even Samaritans. They will not go into a Gentile's home for fear of defilement.
- The faith Jesus highlights:
 - Bold, humble, persistent - what *Hebrews 11:6* calls "*faith that pleases God.*"
- In *Mark 7:24-30*, Jesus meets a Syrophenician woman - an outsider in every sense.
 - He engages her not with condemnation, but with a provocative metaphor: "*Let the children be filled first...*" (*Mark 7:27*). The traditional Jewish religious attitude is that God's blessings are first for Israel ("*the children*"), and Gentiles were outsiders ("*dogs*"). But the Lord Jesus said this as a test of her faith, not showing contempt for her.
 - The woman's humble yet persistent reply, "*Even the dogs eat the crumbs*" - reveals her persistent faith (that impresses Jesus). She doesn't argue for entitlement; she believes in grace that spills over. That the crumbs from a generous God is enough for her... and the Lord commended her and healed her daughter (*Mark 7:29*).

(b) Jesus Cares for the Individual from another ethnic group

In Decapolis (*Mark 7:31-35*), Jesus heals a deaf and mute man privately: "*He took him aside*" (*Mark 7:33*)... an intentional act of respect and sensitivity.

- Jesus puts His fingers into the man's ears and touches his tongue.
 - These physical gestures are deeply meaningful. They serve as *non-verbal communication*, understandable to someone who cannot hear or speak. Jesus enters into this man's world through a loving touch. Then He gives the command – "Be opened".

- **Lesson for us:**

- Love doesn't generalize - it personalizes.
- Jesus breaks through cultural biases to meet individual needs.
- In a society that often isolate people with disabilities, Jesus meets the man not just with power, but with empathy. His actions demonstrate:
 - Cultural awareness: Using methods the man could understand.
 - Emotional connection: Showing that healing is not just physical, but relational.

3. What are some barriers we need to overcome in order to emulate Jesus' example?

(a) Our perspectives need to change

Traditions act like foggy lenses. You need to re-focus your heart to see through the 'lens of Jesus', and see people in the right perspective.

(i) Begin to shift:

- From religious routine ➡ to relational reach
 - Jesus moved toward others, especially the forgotten and overlooked.
 - Ask: Am I going through motions, or reaching out with intention and presence?
- From guarded tradition ➡ to genuine love
 - Jesus often broke societal norms to love boldly.
 - Ask: Am I holding on to formality at the cost of empathy?

(ii) Begin to connect across social and cultural barriers.

- Race / Culture: Faith must transcend customs and comfort zones
- Class barriers: Am I hesitant to connect with people outside my comfort zone because of what others might think?
- Status: Jesus didn't just tear down walls - He built bridges. One person at a time

(b) Our serving needs to flow from a pure heart.

- True service reflects God's inclusive love
 - Jesus was accused of being "a friend of sinners" - but that's exactly why transformation happened. Acts of love cross boundary lines of race and religion.
- Confront sinful heart conditions
 - Are there attitudes in need of change - like pride of life, prejudices, jealousy - that distance our heart from God's mission?

Application

1. Learn about those you're called to serve
 - Learn their tradition and stories.

2. Pray for their specific healing needs and salvation.

3. Offer friendship, not just charity.

4. Replace judgment with compassion.