

MARK — Jesus the Fulfillment of the Law and the Cleaner of Impurities

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Mark 7:1-23

The Pharisees and some of the teachers of the law who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus and saw some of his disciples eating food with hands that were defiled, that is, unwashed. (The Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they give their hands a ceremonial washing, holding to the tradition of the elders. When they come from the marketplace they do not eat unless they wash. And they observe many other traditions, such as the washing of cups, pitchers and kettles.)

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.”

And he continued, “You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions! For Moses said, ‘Honor your father and mother,’ and, ‘Anyone who curses their father or mother is to be put to death.’ 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)—then you no longer let them do anything for their father or mother. Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that.”

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.”

After he had left the crowd and entered the house, his disciples asked him about this parable. “Are you so dull?” he asked. “Don’t you see that nothing that enters a person from the outside can defile them? 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.)

He went on: “What comes out of a person is what defiles them. For it is from within, out of a person’s heart, that evil thoughts come—sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and defile a person.”

The New International Version (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Mk 7:1–23.

Initial Clarifications

The pharisees are the bad guys and there is a happy ending — this text is not about this. The pharisees are so disturbed by the ritual washing because they are the primary voice of Judaism. People trust them to answer questions about scripture because the Pharisees devoted their whole lives to understanding the Torah. In this gathering, they're just doing their job because they are supposed to be covenant watch dogs, and Jesus' disciples are not following the traditions set in place by the Pharisees.

Rituals, Rituals, Rituals

Ritual Washing

This practice or tradition, to eat after washing hands, creates a huge controversy among the Pharisees because

When we encounter ancient literature, there is an invitation to lean in and discover what is going on here?

But we need to slow down and let the text and the surrounding context of this moment translate it instead. A great way To understand this further, is to to step into the ancient Jewish world for a second, “how they think and understand the world?” What is the theoretical framework that dictates how they operate in life? How do they understand purity and impurity?

What are their societal operational guidelines?

First, God has structured the world in a variety of ways, but perhaps most fundamental for Israel's existence is its structure around two binaries(pairs): the holy and the profane (profanus or common), and the pure and the impure. The central text for this map came when God consecrated Israel's priests— setting them apart from other Israelites. At that time, God informed the priests of their essential role in Israelite society: *“You are to distinguish between the holy and the profane, and between the impure and the pure”* (Lev. 10:10).” — Thiessen 2020

So the two societal operational guidelines are:

1. The Holy and the profane (common)
2. The Pure and impure

Notice that Holy is not the same as Pure and Profane/Common is not the same as impure.

HOLY — or holiness is oftentimes mistakenly associated to moral uprightness. That is not true, our moral uprightness is nothing, not even close to what is Holy. It is inadequate, what the Bible even says is like filthy rags, Isaiah 64:6

“All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags”

So What is Holiness? It has to do with proximity to YHWH.

Holiness has to do with proximity to Yahweh. The Hebrew word for holy is *kadosh*, which can describe a person, place, or thing that

has been brought into proximity or dedicated to the service of Yahweh. Holiness refers to the unique, one-of-a-kind status of Yahweh, who is the source of all life, goodness, beauty, and light. However, Yahweh is generous, and he wants to share his own life with others, so God creates another being to share his life. Humans are considered “common” (*chol*) because they are made from the earth, but we have the unique opportunity to transcend our common origins and become holy.

— Tim Mackie



Holiness is an exclusive, one-of-a-kind status of YHWH. But because he is generous, he wants to share his holiness with us.

Humans however, are common. No matter our status or skin tone, we are all common. But God gifts us the ability to transcend our commonness to become holy.

For example, we can be dedicated to the purposes of God. We have to be in the presence of God. But only God has the power to make common things holy.

Humans can only take something holy and defile it.

Ritual Purity

Ritual purity is required in order to access the holiness of God. Purity alone does not make us holy. Even moral purity — moral purity does not make one holy. We need both ritual and moral purity to be enabled to be close to God’s holiness.



On the flip side, moral purity can be attained without presence of God. The Christian background is not enough. God can show up in someone with an atheist background just as powerful if not more than someone from a Christian background.

Christians fail to connect moral uprightness to God's holiness, and this causes a real view that Christians are hypocrites among those who are not God fearers.

Ritual Impurity

The Bible states three main sources of ritual impurities:

1. Leprosy or any type of skin disease
2. Bodily discharge
3. Corpse or exposure to corpse

Ritual purity is steps to help the Israelites when they are impure, exposure to common (profanity) and steps to become pure, not holy. **Ritual impurity is not inherently sinful.**

The first person that Jesus touches and heals in Mark 1 is the leper, he healed a woman with a flow of blood, and many other diseases, and lastly, bringing to life a corpse. Jesus is not going to be contaminated by the impurity, but transfers his purity to them.



His purity transfers to us. Jesus is the one who can make us ritually clean. His contagious holiness transfers to impurity and makes us fit to be close to God.

So if Jesus knows the purity laws, why are his disciples not following them?

Hypocrisy

Jesus' response to the question of the Pharisees was to quote scripture at them:

"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.' "*

Jesus accuses the Pharisees of hypocrisy, that their lips that make the traditions honor the Lord but in reality, their hearts are far from YHWH. They worship God in vain. Their teaching is reduced to human rules; *"you have a fine way of ignoring the law..."* They managed to become experts at the law and loop-holed their way out of having to follow the law.

Israel was religious in form but far from God in heart. Are we the same way still today?

Well, good for you. You get rid of God's command so you won't be inconvenienced in following the religious fashions! Moses said, 'Respect your father and mother,' and, 'Anyone denouncing father or mother should be killed.' But you weasel out of that by saying that it's perfectly acceptable to say to father or mother, 'Gift! What I owed you I've given as a gift to God,' thus relieving yourselves of obligation to father or mother. You scratch out God's Word and scrawl a whim in its place. You do a lot of things like this.

How many other traditions do we follow that excuse us from having to follow God's law?

Ria shared a story about how she masked her former alcoholism with ritual purity. She also admitted her self-centered righteousness, not treating her siblings well, acting pretentious, and hid in the shell of her moral purity to hide from God.



When Jesus cleansed us from our impurities, he meant for us to walk with him in his presence and share his holiness. He fulfilled all purity and righteousness required of us so that we could access his holiness.

Jesus' Final Answer

After he had left the crowd and entered the house, his disciples asked him about this parable. “Are you so dull?” he asked. “Don’t you see that nothing that enters a person from the outside can defile them? 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.)

He went on: “What comes out of a person is what defiles them. For it is from within, out of a person’s heart, that evil thoughts come—sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and defile a person.”



The source of our defilement exists inside of each of us. We are inherently impure to the core. Washing hands doesn't ultimately work to bring us into God's presence. The problem isn't washing hands, the problem is what's deep inside of you.

In Jesus, moral purity is possible. Because we have his purity. He can change a heart of stone into a heart of flesh; he can bring dry bones to life.

Jesus, the Son of God, who embodies the holiness of God, cleanses us from ritual impurities and saves us from moral impurities. His purity transfers to you.

Mt 22:28-34

One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?"

"The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."

"Well said, teacher," the man replied. "You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him. To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices."

When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him, “*You are not far from the kingdom of God.*” And from then on no one dared ask him any more questions.



As ministers of the gospel, we are not here to lead people just to ritual or moral purity, but to Jesus, who cleanses us from our ritual and moral impurities and transfers his purity to others. As you respond today, look to the one who can cleanse you from your impurities and transfers his holiness to you so that you can access his presence.