

In Jesus' day the Pharisees and scribes held that the man-made "traditions of the elders" were as binding as the Mosaic Law, even when the traditions contradicted it. Jesus pointed out the hypocrisy of these traditions when He was questioned about why His disciples didn't observe the elder's tradition of hand washing before they ate.

In this chapter Jesus exposes one of the components of mankind's rebellion against God: following our own wisdom rather than God's. We human beings are prideful and often consider ourselves smart enough to disagree with the way God does things. Our rebellion manifests itself even further when we decide to follow our own reasoning rather than to defer to God's superior wisdom and obey Him.

**Verses 1-13:** The Pharisees and certain scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem and demanded to know why His disciples did not follow the traditions of the elders that required that they ceremonially washed their hands before eating. Jesus responded by remarking how that Isaiah the prophet had predicted the behavior of the Pharisees and scribes when he wrote about those who honor God with their lips and yet their hearts were far from Him. Such people will keep the commandments of men while disregarding the commandments of God. Jesus pointed out that their tradition allowed a man to avoid his responsibility to honor his parents by declaring that the money that could have been spent to provide for their needs was a gift reserved for God. Jesus then stated that this was just one example of how their traditions had rendered the law of God ineffective.

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14 And when he had called all the people *unto him*, he said unto them, Hearken unto me every one *of you*, and understand:

The question concerning why His disciples did not follow the traditions of the elders was important enough that Jesus wanted to publicly point out the hypocrisy of the traditions to the people. He calls for the attention of all those within the sound of His voice to listen and understand what He is about to say so that they may learn the truth about these traditions. Jesus is exhibiting public defiance of the Pharisees and the scribes that have confronted Him about this question (v. 1-5).

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15 There is nothing from without a man, that entering into him can defile him: but the things which come out of him, those are they that defile the man.

**"There is nothing from without [outside] a man, that entering into him can defile him"** – This statement is a direct answer to the question of the ceremonial washing of the hands required by the traditions of the elders. The tradition was based on the idea that such washing cleansed their hands of any spiritual defilement so that the food would not be become defiled when they handled it and defile their bodies when they ate it. This washing had nothing to do with personal hygiene but was based totally on man-made ideas. Jesus rejected this idea and clearly stated that a man cannot be spiritually defiled by anything that he eats.

**"but the things which come out of him, those are they that defile the man"** – Jesus expands this statement by saying that it is not what goes into a man's mouth that defiles him but what comes out of his mouth. He does not explain this statement to the crowd but He does explain it to the disciples when they ask later in vs. 17-23.

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16 If any man have ears to hear, let him hear.

Jesus obviously did not mean that only men who had physical ears should listen to this truth since all men, with the exception of those with a congenital defect or injury, have ears. He seems to mean that anyone with spiritual understanding should listen to what He has said so that they can understand. The fact that Jesus did not explain His statement to the crowd is consistent with His use of parables when teaching publicly. Parables were designed to enlighten those with faith while leaving those without faith in the dark. **Matt. 13:10-16** *"And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables? He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath. Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive: For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear."*

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17 And when he was entered into the house from the people, his disciples asked him concerning the parable.

The disciples, despite being given the ability to see, hear and understand spiritual things, are still confused by this parable about what goes into and out of the mouth of a man. They ask Jesus to explain it once they have entered the privacy of the house.

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18 And he saith unto them, Are ye so without understanding also? Do ye not perceive, that whatsoever thing from without entereth into the man, *it cannot defile him*;

**"And he saith unto them, Are ye so without understanding also?"** – Jesus is surprised that these disciples are displaying no more spiritual understanding than those who have no faith. They are apparently using human reasoning rather than depending on the Holy Spirit to discern the meaning of the parable.

**"Do ye not perceive [to understand], that whatsoever thing from without entereth into the man, it cannot defile him"** – Speaking from a spiritual standpoint, there is nothing "from without" (outside) a man's body that can enter him that would spiritually defile him. A righteous man cannot become unrighteous by what he eats.

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19 Because it entereth not into his heart, but into the belly, and goeth out into the draught, purging all meats?

**“Because it entereth not into his heart, but into the belly, and goeth out into the draught”** – Jesus explains that what a man eats does not enter his heart where it might alter him spiritually. Instead, what he eats enters the digestive tract and eventually comes out the other end without affecting the spiritual state of the man, which is a matter of the heart.

**“purging [cleansing; purifying] all meats”** – It’s unclear if this “purging” is referring to the digestive process that extracts the nutritious content from the food a man eats and expels the rest as waste, or if this is a statement saying that all food is spiritually pure. Since the food we eat bypasses the heart and ends up as waste products, our digestive system effectively purifies all “meats” (food). On the other hand, Jesus may be saying that there is no spiritual component to “all meats,” all meats are pure and therefore cannot defile a man. The apostle Paul seems to have followed this principle when answering the Corinthians’ question about eating meats offered to idols (**1 Cor. 8:8** *“But meat commendeth us not to God: for neither, if we eat, are we the better; neither, if we eat not, are we the worse”*).

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20 And he said, That which cometh out of the man, that defileth the man.

In contrast to the impossibility that anything entering a man’s mouth could spiritually defile him, Jesus states that what does spiritually defile a man is that which comes out of his mouth. This is something that the Pharisees, scribes, and the traditions ignored for the most part. They looked at sin as the act to be committed rather than addressing the evil that is in the human heart. They saw a man as a thief because he steals rather than recognizing that a man steals because he is a thief. His actions come from what is in his heart, not the other way around.

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21 For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, 22 Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness:

When a man eats, the food goes into his belly. However, when he speaks, what he says does not come from his belly, but comes from his heart and reveals what is there. If a man has evil in his heart, he is defiled by it and his speech merely expresses the evil that has already defiled his heart. **Luke 6:45** *“A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil: for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh.”*

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23 All these evil things come from within, and defile the man.

These evil things that our Lord lists in vs. 21-22 come from the defiled heart within a man and when they come out as words and/or actions, they defile the man as a whole. Although Jesus does state that we are guilty of sin even if we do not commit the act if the desire is in our heart, there is still a difference between the desire to sin and the act of committing it. Wanting to kill someone is better than actually killing the person in a practical sense, but God considers the desire to kill be as much of a sin as the act of doing it since all we lack is opportunity.

**Matt. 5:28** *“But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.”*

**1 John 3:15** *“Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.”*

Jesus’ list of evil things can also be found in Paul’s list of the “works of the flesh” found in his letter to the Galatians: **Gal. 5:19-21** *“Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.”* These “works of the flesh” and “evil things” have their root in man’s sinful nature and come from his sinful heart.

**Verses 24-37:** Jesus goes into the region of Tyre and Sidon and tries to not draw attention to Himself, but a Syrophenician woman discovered that He was there and came to beg Jesus to cast the devil out of her daughter. Jesus stated that His ministry was to Israel alone, but the woman replied that even the Gentiles were allowed to partake of Israel’s leftover blessings. Jesus rewarded the woman’s faith and humility and the woman’s daughter was set free from the devil that had tormented her. Afterward Jesus returned to the Sea of Galilee and a deaf man was brought to Him that also had a speech impediment. Jesus put His fingers in the man’s ears and touched the man’s tongue and the man’s ears were opened so that he could speak plainly. Jesus stressed that news of this healing should be kept quiet but the observers did not listen and began proclaiming it publicly.