

# THE PARABLE ABOUT DEFILEMENT

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Mark 7:1-5 says, “Then came together unto him the Pharisees, and certain of the scribes, which came from Jerusalem. And when they saw some of his disciples eat bread with defiled, that is to say, with unwashen, hands, they found fault. For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, except they wash their hands oft, eat not, holding the tradition of the elders. And when they come from the market, except they wash, they eat not. And many other things there be, which they have received to hold, as the washing of cups, and pots, brasen vessels, and of tables. Then the Pharisees and scribes asked him, Why walk not thy disciples according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashen hands?” The entire basis of the Pharisees’ criticism of Christ’s disciples was their erroneous belief that spiritual defilement is caused by physical impurity. Jesus then taught a parable to refute their false doctrine.

## **The parable and its explanation**

The notion that physical dirt on one’s hands defiles a person before God could scarcely be further from the truth and reveals a total misunderstanding of and blindness towards what is most important of all. Jesus refuted this error in Mark 7:14-23 (and Matthew 15:10-20), showing that it is not what goes into a man that defiles him, but what comes out of him. We are not defiled by physical dirt that gets inside our physical body, but rather by spiritual wickedness that is within our spiritual heart. Jesus “called the multitude” to them in Matthew 15:10, and gave this teaching to them in a parable: “Hear, and understand: not that which goes into the mouth defiles a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defiles a man” (Matt 15:10-11). Later, Mark 7:17 tells us that “when he was entered into the house from the people, his disciples asked him concerning the parable.” The Lord then explained to his disciples the parable: “And Jesus said, Are ye also yet without understanding? Do not ye yet understand, that whatsoever enters in at the mouth goes into the

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(continued)

belly, and is cast out into the draught? But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: these are the things which defile a man: but to eat with unwashed hands defiles not a man” (Matt 15:16-20; see also Mark 7:18-23).

## **The inner man and spiritual sight**

Physical dirt does not defile a man before God, but the inner man, the heart, does defile a man before God. The Pharisees cleaned the outer man but not the inner man (see also Matt 15:10-20; 23:25-28; Luke 11:39-41), as they were utterly blind to the inner man (Matt 15:14; 23:26). We all have an outer man and an inner man (Luke 11:40; Rom 2:28-29). The outer man is only temporal, but the inner man is eternal (2 Cor 4:16-18). Our inner man contains our spiritual heart (Rom 2:29; Eph 3:16-17). It is the heart that is the source of all that we think, say, and do (Prov 4:23; Matt 15:16-20; Mark 7:18-23; Luke 6:43-45), and it is our heart that needs to be purified so that our actions will change (Acts 15:9; Jas 4:8). In Matthew 15:14, Jesus warned his disciples about the Pharisees: “Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch.” The context of this warning is about being formed in the inner man, in the heart (Matt 15:10-20), to be what God wants us to be and not be defiled in His sight. That is why Jesus warns us about blindness in Matthew 15:14. If we cannot “see” the spiritual heart and what pertains to it, then our heart will not be purified, and then we will not be able to do God’s will and then we will be spiritually defiled (Matt 15:10-20). The Pharisees were spiritually blind. They could not “see” the inner man at all, but only the outer man (Matt 15:14-20; 23:16-28). Therefore, their sin remained (John 9:40-41). If we follow that same way, we too will fall in the ditch. Therefore, we need to be able to see spiritually.