

The Question of Purity (15:1–20)

(Mark 7:1-23)

“This is the last substantial episode of Jesus’ public ministry in Galilee...before Jesus sets off across the lake and northward to Caesarea Philippi, from where the journey to Jerusalem will begin.”¹

Mark begins with some material not found in Matthew.

“Now when the Pharisees gathered to him, with some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem, they saw that some of his disciples ate with hands that were defiled, that is, unwashed. (For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands properly, holding to the tradition of the elders, and when they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they wash. And there are many other traditions that they observe, such as the washing of cups and pots and copper vessels and dining couches.)” (Mark 7:1–4, ESV)

Matthew 15:1 Then Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem and said,

from Jerusalem.... This was not a 30-minute trip across town. Walking distance would be on the order of 68 miles. Average adult walking pace is about 4 mph, so the journey would need 17 hours or more. Actually, 4 mph is really hard to sustain for more than a few hours. On the Oregon Trail, 15 miles per day was considered to be fantastic. At that pace, 15 miles a day, it would require more than 4 days for the journey.²

To take this trip, both ways, would require some considerable effort. Why do it? “...they were probably a quasi-official deputation (cf. John 1:19) and a source of Jesus’ most virulent opposition.”³ So, it would seem that the religious leaders in Jerusalem were getting nervous. They did not like what they were hearing. They made this trip with one goal in mind, to discredit Jesus in the eyes of the crowds; to put a stop to this troublemaker.

Matthew 15:2 “Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat.”

“Now I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions even as I delivered them to you.” (1 Corinthians 11:2, ESV)

“So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter.” (2 Thessalonians 2:15, ESV)

“Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us.” (2 Thessalonians 3:6, ESV)

¹ France, R. T. (2007). *The Gospel of Matthew* (pp. 574–575). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co.

² <http://www.oregontrailcenter.org/HistoricalTrails/ADayOnTheTrail.htm>

³ Carson, D. A. (1984). Matthew. In F. E. Gaebelin (Ed.), *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke* (Vol. 8, p. 348). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

They are not criticizing Jesus' behavior but that of his disciples. It is interesting that "the behavior of the disciples is taken as an index to Jesus' own teaching and expectations, since it is assumed that they will behave as their teacher has instructed them."⁴ That is a reasonable assumption both then and *now*.

break⁵.... "...to act contrary to established custom or law, with the implication of intent—to disobey, to break the law, to transgress, disobedience, transgression."⁶

the tradition of the elders.... "The "tradition of the elders," the "tradition of men" (Mark 7:8; Col 2:8), "your tradition" (Matt 15:3, 6; Mark 7:9, 13), and the "traditions of the fathers" (Gal 1:14) refer to the great corpus of oral teaching that commented on the law and interpreted it in detailed rules of conduct, often recording the diverse opinions of competing rabbis. "The Pharisees had passed on to the people certain regulations handed down by former generations and not recorded in the Laws of Moses."⁷

"This tradition in Jesus' time was largely oral and orally transmitted; but the Pharisees, though not the Sadducees, viewed it as having authority very nearly equal to the canon. It was later codified under Rabbi Judah the Prince (c. A.D. 135–200) to form the Mishnah...."⁸

wash⁹.... At this point in his story Mark says, "and when they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they wash. And there are many other traditions that they observe, such as the washing of cups and pots and copper vessels and dining couches." (Mark 7:4, ESV)

The word Mark uses that is translated wash is *baptidzo* which means to immerse in a liquid for an undetermined period of time or refers to the result of such an immersion. It is the idea of *result* that is common to New Testament baptism. The result is ritual cleanliness. As far as mode of baptism is concerned: "There are many modes of baptism illustrated in Greek literature. Some of them would be: flowing, placed, pushed, plunged, jump, setting, dropping, marched, advances, falling, sinking, push down, force under, and throw down. The only one not present is dip!"¹⁰

The use of *nipto* by Matthew and *baptidzo* by Mark, both translated wash, shows that either word was capable of describing what people were doing, which was ritually purifying hands, and also in Mark, ritually purifying cups, pots, vessels and dining couches. They were doing this by pouring or sprinkling water on these objects. But,

⁴ France, R. T. (2007). *The Gospel of Matthew* (p. 578). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co.

⁵ *break* παραβαίνω "To transgress, violate. In the NT, it always has a moral sense (Matt. 15:2, 3; 2 John 1:9)." Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000).

⁶ Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains*. New York: United Bible Societies.

⁷ Nolland, J. (2005). *The Gospel of Matthew: a commentary on the Greek text*. New International Greek Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans.

⁸ Carson, D. A. (1984). Matthew. In F. E. Gaebelin (Ed.), *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke* (Vol. 8, p. 348). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

⁹ *wash* νίπτω "...to wash a part of a body, usually the hands or feet...."⁹ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 522.

¹⁰ Ralph E. Bass Jr., *Baptidzo*, Greenville, SC: Living Hope Press, 2009, 130.

they were not dipping them in water—dinning couches? “...it is clear that the frame of reference for the concern is that of ritual purity.”¹¹

However, there is no Old Testament law that required one to wash hands before eating (although as every mother knows, it is a good idea). The washing they were promoting was founded in a “tradition of the elders” (or the elder’s mothers) and not on the Bible. “...handwashing which, however important to the Pharisees, was not a matter specifically regulated by the OT law as the matter of clean and unclean food was.”¹²

Verses like this one would be used to justify their teachings.

“Anyone whom the one with the discharge touches without having rinsed his hands in water shall wash his clothes and bathe himself in water and be unclean until the evening.” (Leviticus 15:11, ESV)

But this verse does not address their concern which was eating; it is an unwarranted stretch of the verse.

Another passage they took out of context was Exodus 30 by which they required the same practice of common people as of the priest when making sacrifice.

“You shall also make a basin of bronze, with its stand of bronze, for washing. You shall put it between the tent of meeting and the altar, and you shall put water in it, with which Aaron and his sons shall wash their hands and their feet.” (Exodus 30:18–19, ESV)

This was what the priest were to do after making sacrifice, not what the people were to do before meals.

eat.... “...the implied view of the question is that unclean hands will affect the food (i.e., render it ritually unclean), and this unclean food will in turn cause the person eating it to become ritually unclean”¹³

The position of the Pharisees is an unfounded extension of the Old Testament laws of ritual purity. There simply is nothing in the Old Testament that justifies their criticism of eating with unwashed hands. However, the Jewish traditions that grew up around the Law did demand these ritual purifications; but they were not actually in the Old Testament.

Matthew 15:3 He answered them, “And why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition?”

Jesus does not respond by explaining how this practice is not found in the Old Testament, instead he directs his response to some bigger than this. It is their willingness to destroy the teachings of scripture in order to maintain one of their add-on traditions.

¹¹ Nolland, J. (2005). *The Gospel of Matthew: a commentary on the Greek text*. New International Greek Testament Commentary (p. 611). Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans.

¹² R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (The New International Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007), 575.

¹³ Nolland, J. (2005). *The Gospel of Matthew: a commentary on the Greek text*. New International Greek Testament Commentary (p. 612). Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans.

“Before he addresses the specific concern of those who question the behaviour of his disciples, Jesus will make an attack on the general credibility of those who are challenging him.”¹⁴ They accuse him of breaking the traditions of the elders, he accuses them of breaking the law of God, a much more serious offense. He does this with an illustration of their behavior.

Matthew 15:4 For God commanded, ‘Honor your father and your mother,’ and, ‘Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.’

God commanded.... In fact it was Moses who said this; this shows the high view of scripture held by all at this time; Moses spoke the words of God (Mark 7:11).

Jesus creates a contrast between “God commanded” and “your tradition” (15:5). They are not in harmony. “The contrast is made even clearer by what follows: what “God said” is set over against what “you say” (v. 5), thus categorizing scribal tradition as a matter of “merely human rules” (v. 9) over against the divine revelation in the law.”¹⁵ Here is what the scripture said:

“Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.” (Exodus 20:12, ESV)

“Whoever curses his father or his mother shall be put to death.” (Exodus 21:17, ESV)

Honor¹⁶ In English we get the word honorarium from this Greek word, a term that refers to a payment for a service. “The following argument assumes that the “honor” which is commanded is more than verbal, and includes making appropriate provision for one’s parents in old age.”¹⁷ It is this “appropriate provision” that the Pharisees in their greed and self-centeredness attempted to retain for their own use to the detriment of their aged parents.

Matthew 15:5 But you say, ‘If anyone tells his father or his mother, “What you would have gained from me is given to God,”

Matthew 15:6 he need not honor his father.’ So for the sake of your tradition you have made void the word of God.

Again, Matthew establishes a contrast between what ‘***God commanded***’ and what ‘***you say***’.

given to God.... “The concept of vowing or dedicating unneeded resources to God was called “*corban*” or “under the ban” (cf. Mark 7). This vow thereby made these

¹⁴ Nolland, J. (2005). *The Gospel of Matthew: a commentary on the Greek text*. New International Greek Testament Commentary (p. 616). Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans.

¹⁵ France, R. T. (2007). *The Gospel of Matthew* (p. 579). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co.

¹⁶ *Honor τιμάω*.... “In general *timé* means “worth,” “evaluation,” “honor,” then “price.” Specific meanings are “appraisal,” “assessment,” “honor,” “dignity,” “honorarium,” “honors.”” Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich, and Geoffrey William Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1985), 1181.

¹⁷ France, R. T. (2007). *The Gospel of Matthew* (p. 580). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co.

resources legally unavailable to be used to help aging parents (though they might be used for other personal reasons).”¹⁸

“But you say, ‘If a man tells his father or his mother, “Whatever you would have gained from me is Corban” ’ (that is, given to God)—” (Mark 7:11, ESV)

“Jewish law allowed individuals to earmark their service or property as “dedicated to God,” thus removing it from profane use and giving it the character of an offering intended for God.... In Mark 7 Jesus chastises the scribes because, theoretically, a son could exclude his parents from gaining any benefit from his estate by declaring his property “corban to them.” This in effect nullifies the fourth commandment (see Ex 20:12), setting rabbinic traditions against the Law of Moses.”¹⁹ **In this way he is able to keep and use all his wealth on himself while his parents suffer neglect and go without—to the glory of God!**

made void²⁰.... The word “void” is “a technical term for legal invalidation (cf. Gal 3:17) which graphically expresses the perverse effect of their failure to put first things first: they have actually dared to rule the “word of God” to be unlawful!”²¹

Matthew 15:7 You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said:

Hypocrites.... “A hypocrite, one who acts pretentiously, a counterfeit, a man who assumes and speaks or acts under a feigned character.”²² The hypocrite was an actor pretending to be one person while in fact actually another.

Isaiah....

“And the Lord said: “Because this people draw near with their mouth and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me, and their fear of me is a commandment taught by men,” (Isaiah 29:13, ESV)

“...the Jews of Jesus’ day thought of themselves as preserving ancient traditions; but Jesus said that what they were actually preserving was the spirit of those whom Isaiah criticized long before.”²³

The behavior of legalists and their commandments taught by men is an empty profession of piety. Manmade rules take priority over divine revelation.

¹⁸ Robert James Utley, *The First Christian Primer: Matthew* (vol. Volume 9; Study Guide Commentary Series; Marshall, TX: Bible Lessons International, 2000), 133.

¹⁹ Elwell, W. A., & Beitzel, B. J. (1988). *Baker encyclopedia of the Bible*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House.

²⁰ *made void* ἀκυρώ “to refuse to recognize the force or power of something—‘to invalidate the authority of, to reject, to disregard.’” Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains* (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 682). New York: United Bible Societies.

²¹ France, R. T. (2007). *The Gospel of Matthew* (p. 581). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co.

²² Zodhiates, S. (2000). *The complete word study dictionary: New Testament*. Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers.

²³ Carson, D. A. (1984). Matthew. In F. E. Gaebelin (Ed.), *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke* (Vol. 8, p. 349). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

Matthew 15:8 “ *This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me;*

Their **lips** would refer to their apparent outward confession; their **heart** would refer to the reality of the inner person. This is why Jesus called them **hypocrites**, the two did not correlate. They were pretending to be something they were not.

Matthew 15:9 *in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’ ”*

vain²⁴.... Their worship is without effect with God—he’s not listening. “The burden of the Scripture Jesus quotes is that the Pharisees and teachers of the law have displaced the true religion of the heart (v. 8), of the entire personality and will, with a religion of form. Therefore their worship is vain (v. 9) and their teachings [are] their own with nothing of God’s authority behind them.”²⁵

worship²⁶.... Their worship is useless because they do not understand the difference between their opinion and God’s. In fact, in practice it is their opinion that is of greater importance. The lesson here is that proper worship is based on a proper understanding of the Bible. Ignorance of the Bible can result in ignorant and useless worship. **In our own day one such failure to understand the scripture is illustrated by those who refuse to go to Church saying “I can worship God in nature.” In fact, to truly worship God, we must do so exactly as he prescribes in the Bible--“not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some....” (Hebrews 10:25, ESV). So the result is a conflict between God’s revelation on how we must worship and man’s opinion on how we worship. Almost inevitably man’s opinion wins out.**

commandments of men.... The commandments of men would refer to their traditions. Over the years, they developed a literature that fleshed out the commandments of God into daily rules. Because they never really understood the Bible, their rules were simply their foolish opinions, not divine revelation. This is true as it applies to the obligations to care for parents and by analogy to ritual purity. In both cases the Pharisees “made up” rules that they liked, even though these rules blatantly violated the Law.

“You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men.” (Mark 7:8, ESV)

Matthew 15:10 *And he called the people to him and said to them, “Hear and understand:*

Here Jesus stops talking to the Pharisees and instead speaks directly to the people. Of course the Pharisees can hear him and will be greatly offended by what he says to them. He is in effect undermining their authority.

²⁴ *vain μάτην* “In a causal sense, meaning groundless, invalid; and in a final sense, purposeless, useless, futile; and according to circumstances it may be both idle and vain. Falsely, fruitlessly....” Zodhiates, S. (2000). *The complete word study dictionary: New Testament*. Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers.

²⁵ Carson, D. A. (1984). Matthew. In F. E. Gaebelin (Ed.), *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke* (Vol. 8, p. 349). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

²⁶ *worship σέβω* “...to express in attitude and ritual one’s allegiance to and regard for deity—‘to worship, to venerate.’” Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains*. New York: United Bible Societies.

Hear and understand.... At first reading “hear and understand” seem to be an unnecessary comment. We casually hear and understand every day. However, in saying this Jesus is asking his audience to think deeply and carefully about what he is about to say. This is a thought process that takes time and mental interaction with the words. A casual understanding will never grasp the essence of the message.

Matthew 15:11 it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but what comes out of the mouth; this defiles a person.”

Eating with ritually unclean hands does not defile a person; talking from an unclean heart does.

“As far as Jesus was concerned, so much defilement in people’s lives was created by the inner life and moral choices that lay behind their words and deeds that to focus one’s energies instead on extending the boundaries of ritual purity was to fiddle while Rome burnt. Not what people encounter externally but what they generate from within constitutes the major purity issue.”²⁷

Jesus said something very similar to this earlier.

“Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad, for the tree is known by its fruit. You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil. I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless [workless] word they speak, for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.”
(Matthew 12:33–37, ESV)

“After this dialogue the breach between Jesus and the scribal establishment is irreparable.”²⁸

Matthew 15:12 Then the disciples came and said to him, “Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this saying?”

the disciples came and said to him.... Here, neither the crowds nor the Pharisees are present, just the disciples. It appears that the disciples are upset, perhaps afraid. Jesus has offended some very important people. They draw this to his attention, thereby suggesting that he be more discreet and show some deference to these, the powerful leaders of the nation.

Clearly, the Pharisees understood that in the recent exchange they had come up looking badly. As is so often the case, they attempted to add their rules to burden innocent men and women while relieving that burden from the shoulders of those who blatantly defied God’s law. They saw that, the crowd saw that, and they responded with offense. It wasn’t the only response possible; they could have responded with repentance.

²⁷ Nolland John. (2005). *Preface. The Gospel of Matthew: a commentary on the Greek text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (p. 621). Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans.

²⁸ France, R. T. (2007). *The Gospel of Matthew* (p. 575). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co.

Interestingly, it appears that Jesus went out of his way to say and do things that resulted in this type of response.

Matthew 15:13 He answered, “Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be rooted up.

Jesus responds to the disciples by recounting several metaphors that addresses Israel’s spiritual condition and that of the leaders of the nation. First, Israel is portrayed in the Old Testament as a planting by God.

“Your people shall all be righteous; they shall possess the land forever, the branch of my planting, the work of my hands, that I might be glorified.” (Isaiah 60:21, ESV)

Jesus will soon give another parable on planting that addresses this same context.

““Hear another parable. There was a master of a house who planted a vineyard and put a fence around it and dug a winepress in it and built a tower and leased it to tenants, and went into another country.” (Matthew 21:33, ESV)

What Jesus is saying in Matthew 15 is that this cream of the religious crop was in fact, not the crop that the Father planted. They were the weeds.

“but while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away.” (Matthew 13:25, ESV)

rooted up.... “The imagery is that of the removal of weeds or other self-sown plants.”²⁹

“Let both grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.’ ” (Matthew 13:30, ESV)

What Jesus is saying is that “the Pharisees, the leaders of the Jewish people, are not truly part of God’s planting.”³⁰ And because they were not planted by God, they will be uprooted. Obviously, they were violently offended by this.

Matthew 15:14 Let them alone; they are blind guides. And if the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit.”

The second metaphor in Jesus response to the disciples compares the spiritual leaders of the nation to blind men which he will use again in Matthew 23:16 and 23:24, and Luke uses in 6:39.

Let them alone.... In doing kingdom work, one can get overly involved in debate and denouncing evil to the point of actually neglecting the ministry of the word. In general, it is often best to ignore the liberal and cultist. But—this is not always the case, for some

²⁹ Nolland John. (2005). *Preface. The Gospel of Matthew: a commentary on the Greek text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (pp. 622–623). Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans.

³⁰ Carson, D. A. (1984). Matthew. In F. E. Gaebelin (Ed.), *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke* (Vol. 8, p. 350). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

there is a powerful ministry of apologetics, one which we all benefit from. However, on a daily basis, ministry of the word can best be done by focusing on the positive of the gospel, not the negative of error.

blind guides.... The Jews with great pride identified themselves as guides to the blind and instructors to the foolish.

“and if you are sure that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of children, having in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth—” (Romans 2:19–20, ESV)

Like Jesus, Paul saw them as breakers of the law and therefore unqualified to lead others.

“You who boast in the law dishonor God by breaking the law.” (Romans 2:23, ESV)

“Its bearing here is obvious: if these leaders of Israel have themselves missed the way in their understanding of what it means to be the people of God (as vv. 7–9 have powerfully alleged), their influence on other Jews can only lead them into the same “ditch” of distorted religious values. It is to draw people away from that damaging influence that Jesus has launched his appeal over their heads to the crowd (v. 10)....”³¹

Matthew 15:15 But Peter said to him, “Explain the parable to us.”

Explain...to us.... The fact that Peter, and the other disciples, asked for an explanation speaks to the effectiveness of the Pharisaic teachings that eating with unwashed hands was a violation of Law. From their youth they have been brainwashed with these rules and understandably are having a hard time distancing themselves from them. In Acts 10, Peter is still struggling with issues of ritual uncleanness.

Matthew 15:16 And he said, “Are you also still without understanding?”

It was only a few minutes ago that Jesus explained the teaching to them telling them to hear and understand.

“And he called the people to him and said to them, “Hear and understand:” (Matthew 15:10, ESV)

you also.... “Jesus’ exasperated question...reflects his expectation that at least the disciples (“you *too*”), as those to whom “it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven,” (13:11) should by now have been ahead of the crowd in grasping spiritual truth.”³²

Yet in some sense, they still didn’t “get it.” So, Jesus gives a more detailed explanation.

³¹ France, R. T. (2007). *The Gospel of Matthew* (p. 585). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co.

³² France, R. T. (2007). *The Gospel of Matthew* (pp. 585–586). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co.

Matthew 15:17 Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth passes into the stomach and is expelled (in a latrine)?

With greater simplicity and detail, Jesus explains the process common to eating—from the mouth, to the stomach, then expelled from the body.

expelled.... In the Greek text, the word “expelled” follows another word, the word **aphedrón** [ἀφεδρών] which means “a privy, a separate or private place where people sit to relieve themselves or empty their bowels...”³³ A latrine or toilet.

Matthew 15:18 But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person.

As the waste that passes from the body to the latrine defiles a person if the person comes into contact with it, so that which comes out of the mouth defiles the person if it proceeds from a filthy heart. It is a vivid illustration of what proceeds from both ends of the human body. They were most aware how human waste could defile a person but they were not in touch with how human waste proceeding from the heart could defile a person. **Jesus point is that Pharisaic teachings that add to or subtract from the Law are the real filth.**

“And he said to them, “Then are you also without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled?” (Thus he declared all foods clean.)” (Mark 7:18–19, ESV)

This was an incomprehensible statement to first century Jews. It would be awhile before even the apostles fully understood this (Acts 10; Galatians 2:11-14).

Matthew 15:19 For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander.

Matthew list 7 items here, Mark 7:21-22 gives 13 items. Mark leaves out Matthew’s “false witness” but adds seven more.

“For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness.” (Mark 7:21–22, ESV)

heart³⁴.... The condition of the heart is a major theme in Jesus’ teachings. We can see from these verses below that the heart is not used as the seat of emotions, as it is understood in our Western culture today, but instead in that Eastern culture it was generally used as the seat of a man’s thinking, very much like the way we use the word “mind” today. Read verses that use the word heart by substituting thinking, thoughts or mind for the word heart and you will get a much better idea as to what Jesus is saying. Much teaching, preaching and counseling is amiss because of the cultural shift in the

³³ Zodhiates, S. (2000). *The complete word study dictionary: New Testament* (electronic ed.). Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers.

³⁴ *heart καρδιά* “...the causative source of a person’s psychological life in its various aspects, but with special emphasis upon thoughts—‘heart, inner self, mind.’” Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains*. New York: United Bible Societies.

use of this word. We simply assume it means what our Western culture has told us it means—the seat of emotions.

evil thoughts³⁵.... “This list of sins is “introduced ... by the general category of “bad thoughts,” since **it is the thoughts entertained by the heart that give rise to the actions and words**—as Jesus has explained already in 5:21–28; cf. 12:34–35.”³⁶

“We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ,” (2 Corinthians 10:5, ESV)

murder³⁷....

“You shall not murder.” (Exodus 20:13, ESV)

adultery³⁸.... This refers to a sexual relationship with a married women. But lest someone think that this lets them off the hook, Jesus follows up with:

“You shall not commit adultery.” (Exodus 20:14, ESV)

sexual immorality³⁹.... “This is one of a number of places where 'adultery' [μοιχεία] and 'fornication' [πορνεία] both occur in a list of sins—it is clear that they are distinct in meaning...”⁴⁰ Adultery in scripture is a far more serious sin.

theft⁴¹....

“You shall not steal.” (Exodus 20:15, ESV)

false witness⁴²....

“You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.” (Exodus 20:16, ESV)

³⁵ *evil πονηρός thoughts διαλογισμός* “...the content or result of one’s thorough reasoning—‘what is reasoned, reasoning.” Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains*. New York: United Bible Societies.

³⁶ France, R. T. (2007). *The Gospel of Matthew* (p. 586). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co.

³⁷ *murder φόνος* “...to deprive a person of life by illegal, intentional killing—‘to murder, to commit murder.” Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains*. New York: United Bible Societies.

³⁸ *adultery μοιχεία* “...sexual intercourse of a man with a married woman other than his own spouse—‘to commit adultery, adultery.” Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains*. New York: United Bible Societies.

³⁹ *sexual immorality πορνεία* “...to engage in sexual immorality of any kind, often with the implication of prostitution—‘to engage in illicit sex, to commit fornication, sexual immorality, fornication, prostitution.” Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains*. New York: United Bible Societies.

⁴⁰ Pickering, W. N. (2013). Notes from the (EMTV) *The English Majority Text Version*. A Translation of Wilbur N. Pickering’s *Majority Text of the Greek New Testament*.

⁴¹ *theft κλοπή* “...to take secretly and without permission the property of someone else—‘to steal, theft.” Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains*. New York: United Bible Societies.

⁴² *false witness ψευδομαρτυρία* “...‘to testify falsely,’ the content of what is testified falsely—‘false testimony.” Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains*. New York: United Bible Societies.

slander⁴³ or **blaspheme** Slander is an extension of false witness; not telling an outright lie is adequate, slander equates to lying. “The list is made to begin and end with sins of the mouth, in order to reflect the focus of verse 11 on what proceeds from the mouth.”⁴⁴ “The point, as in 12:34–35, is that what a man truly is affects what he says and does.”⁴⁵

“You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil? *For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil.*” (Matthew 12:34–35, ESV)

Matthew 15:20 These are what defile a person. But to eat with unwashed hands does not defile anyone.”

“Starting from defiled hands, the Pharisees and scribes thought that the last state was worse than the first if food was consumed without washing the hands. Starting from a defiled heart, the Matthean Jesus suggests that the last state is worse than the first if the heart, not first purified, is given free rein (in part through the mouth) to allow evil inclinations to mature into violations of the Ten Commandments.”⁴⁶

“Jesus insists that the true direction in which the OT law points is precisely what he teaches, what he is, and what he inaugurates. He has fulfilled the law; therefore whatever prescriptive force it continues to have is determined by its relationship to him, not vice versa.”⁴⁷

Verses 2 and 20 deal with unwashed hands thus making these two verses inclusios marking off the material as one homogenous discussion.

⁴³ *slander βλασφημία* “...to speak against someone in such a way as to harm or injure his or her reputation (occurring in relation to persons as well as to divine beings)—‘to revile, to defame, to blaspheme, reviling.’” Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains*. New York: United Bible Societies.

⁴⁴ Douglas R. A. Hare, *Matthew* (Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching; Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1993), 175.

⁴⁵ Carson, D. A. (1984). Matthew. In F. E. Gaebelin (Ed.), *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke* (Vol. 8, p. 351). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

⁴⁶ Nolland John. (2005). *Preface. The Gospel of Matthew: a commentary on the Greek text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (p. 628). Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans.

⁴⁷ Carson, D. A. (1984). Matthew. In F. E. Gaebelin (Ed.), *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke* (Vol. 8, p. 352). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.