

Inside Out

Mark 7:1-23

True holiness is a matter of inward purity, not outward behavior. It involves our motives and intentions, rather than our compliance to ritual and tradition.

The traditional approach to holiness focuses on external behavior (1-5)

Some Pharisees and law teachers come to investigate Jesus. They critically observe that Jesus' disciples eat food with "unclean hands" and don't follow the ritual practice of washing.

The observance of the ceremonial washings became part of the identity and authority of the religious leaders. The practice reminded the Jews they were God's special people and not to be contaminated by the outside world. However, it degenerated into empty rituals and religious isolationism.

The traditional approach to holiness looks for loopholes (6-13)

Jesus quoted Isaiah 29:13 and applied Isaiah's critique of his contemporaries to his questioners whom he called hypocrites. They were hypocrites because they made an outward show of worship but had no worship in their hearts.

The religious leaders were clever at sidestepping God's law in order to observe their own traditions. Jesus provides a case in point by exposing how they treated the fifth commandment—honoring your father and mother.

Jesus quoted a scribal tradition whereby a person could declare all their possessions dedicated to God and absolve themselves of all responsibility to their parents.

True holiness is inside out (14-23)

Jesus explained the true nature of defilement. He looked at it from a moral standpoint, not a medical one. A person is not defiled morally by what he eats even if his hands are not ceremonially washed.

A person is defiled morally by what he thinks in his heart, even if he may observe outward purification rituals. True obedience results from a love of God from the heart—not the outward acts of keeping the rules.