

The Passion of Jesus

How One Week Changed the World

Marilyn Kunz & Catherine Schell

Published by Q Place

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Religious Rituals

_____ What does Jesus say
is important?

What makes a person spiritually unclean or guilty before God, and what is the answer to such a problem? In Mark 7, the Pharisees and Jesus clash over this issue.

Read Mark 7:1-8

1. What reasons do the Pharisees find for criticizing Jesus' disciples?

What is their standard of moral purity here?

Note: This was not a matter of hygienic cleansing. The disciples were eating with hands that were ceremonially unclean.

2. What accusations does Jesus make about the Pharisees?

*Note: During the period between the Old and New Testaments, a class of legal experts called “the scribes” came into existence. They amplified the great moral principles in the first five books of Moses (the Law), and broke them down into thousands of rules and regulations, called **the tradition of the elders**, to govern every possible action and life situation. The Pharisees, religious leaders who meticulously tried to carry out the teaching of the scribes, were convinced that they had the correct interpretation of the Law, and by Jesus’ day these oral traditions had assumed a place of importance alongside Scripture in Jewish life.*

Read Mark 7:9-13

3. How does Jesus illustrate the accusation he makes in verses 6-8?

4. What contrast does Jesus draw between what Moses said and what they say?

*Note: When someone pronounced **Corban** on property or money, he dedicated it to God. This relieved him from using it to help anyone else, but he could keep it in his own possession until his death.*

5. What different things does Jesus say the Pharisees do with God’s commands and with tradition (verses 8-9, 13)?

In your own life, what do you tend to count as honorable and moral that really may come from tradition rather than from God?

When have you seen traditions become obstacles for getting at the heart of what pleases God?

6. How do the Pharisees judge their own and others' standing before God?

Read Mark 7:14-23

7. Jesus emphasizes the importance of this teaching by calling the crowd to ***Listen . . . and understand. . .*** In contrast to the Pharisees, what does Jesus say makes a person unclean?
8. What additional instruction does Jesus give the disciples about what makes a person unclean?

9. Why do you think *evil thoughts* are first on the list of what defiles a person? What is the meaning of each kind of evil that follows?

*Note: **Folly** (NIV) or **foolishness** (NASB) is treating sin as a joke.*

10. How relevant to your own life do you find Jesus' analysis of the human condition?
11. If outward religious actions cannot make a person clean, what do people need instead?

SUMMARY

According to Jesus' teaching here, what is every person's basic problem?

PRAYER

O God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, we recognize that being right with you cannot depend on external cleansing if we have inner contamination. We see that the cure for this must deal with the source of the problem—our own hearts.

Create in us clean hearts, O God, and renew a right spirit within us.¹ By your Holy Spirit enable us to think and do what pleases you. For Jesus' sake, amen.

¹From Psalm 51:10.