

Week of February 19-25

This week's devotional-writer is Mark Kiburz. Mark serves on our Board of Elders and is currently pursuing his ministerial credentials with the Assemblies of God.

TRUE PURITY

Scripture Reading: Read Mark Chapter 7

Before a woman placed a roast in a pan, she cut off its ends. She was asked why she did this, to which she replied, "Because that's what my mother did." Upon asking the woman's mother why she did this, she replied, "That's what my mother did." When the grandmother was asked why she did it, she responded, "Because my roasting pan was too small". A generational tradition followed with a reason no longer present.

In the devotional on Matthew 15, Pastor Ray explained that one of the big traditions that the Pharisees held to dealt with ceremonial hand washing. Mark 7 mentions the same practice and the response of the Pharisees to Jesus' neglect of the traditions of the elders. No doubt, the tradition of hand washing started as a legitimate practice and flowed out of the teachings in Leviticus on purity. Unfortunately, over time, the practice became more important than the reason for the practice. Also, it became more and more laborious, ritualistic, and time-consuming. For example, rules were developed on how much water to use, how the water was to be poured, how the hands were to be washed, etc. It became a full-time occupation that only the "elites" could follow. Sadly, the Pharisees were no different than the women "cutting off the ends of the roast" because their mothers did. The religious leaders were carrying on a practice without a genuine purpose. Even worse, they were so obsessed with the little things that they missed the greater and weightier matters of the law. Jesus brings the rules back into perspective. He reminds them in verse 15, *"Nothing outside a man can make him 'unclean' by going into him. Rather, it is what comes out of a man that makes him 'unclean.'"*

The laws of clean/unclean in the Old Testament certainly had some practical relevance for a people traveling through the wilderness where hygiene was not fully understood. God's laws would protect them in terms of their health. However, it was more than that. The rules of clean/unclean were to remind them that God is holy and that he desired not just external "purity" but internal holiness of the mind and heart. Once it was there, it would show up in all of life. The Pharisees missed it. They were depending on outward actions as signs of purity instead of inward quality and a transformed life. They were bound to their traditions, continuing to cut the ends of the roast off, so to speak, for no necessary reason. Jesus challenged them to go deeper and to let go of "stinkin' thinkin'" that could create a wedge between them and the Lord.

Action Step: Take a day this week to focus your mind on Jesus' love and forgiveness

Prayer Focus: Ask God to show you any areas in your mind that keep you from a deeper relationship with Jesus. Ask God to help you create a godly mindset.

Take-a-way: As we invest our lives in Jesus, our hearts and thoughts will change from worldly thinking to kingdom living.