

JESUS: THE SERVANT AT WORK

VOLUME TWO

STUDY SIX

Getting to the Heart of Our Defilement

Mark 7:14–23

We look holy—we think—because we keep certain rules and regulations, but in fact, down deep inside the confines of our heart, all kinds of wicked things are going on.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

A red apple looks perfect on the outside. However, with one bite, we quickly discover the quality of the fruit. Its shiny skin might conceal a rotten core—we can't tell just by looking at the outside. Similarly, we can't tell the quality of a person's inward spiritual condition simply by observing his or her polished appearance.

Though we wear our best clothes, say the nicest things, and do good deeds to help those in need, rottenness or corruption might lie within. A real problem might reside in our minds and hearts—looking upon the success of someone with jealousy, desiring what belongs to another, or thinking of ourselves as being above others. It all sounds very familiar.

Our journey in the gospel of Mark brings us to Jesus' latest encounter with the Pharisees and scribes, who were renowned for their showy observance of the Mosaic law and their oral traditions. They judged everyone by their standards and, on multiple occasions, had accused Jesus and His disciples of not measuring up. In the passage for this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study, Jesus points to the central issue: *defilement is a matter of the heart*.



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SEARCHING
THE
SCRIPTURES
BIBLE STUDIES

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PREPARE YOUR HEART

*May the words of my mouth
and the meditation of my heart
be pleasing to you,
O LORD, my rock and my redeemer. (Psalm 19:14)*

Ask God to purify your spoken words and inner thoughts, making them acceptable to Him. Tell God that He is your source of strength and deliverance as you turn your attention to His precious truths.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

In the Old Testament, God gave the nation of Israel rules and rituals to guide them as His covenant people. Their obedience was supposed to flow out of their love for the God who had set His affection on them. Obedience was always a matter of the heart, not merely a matter of going through the motions.

However, Israel struggled to remember that one's inner life is what counts to God. "People judge by outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7). When the Pharisees and teachers of religious law criticized Jesus' disciples for eating without first performing the hand-washing ceremony, Jesus exposed their hypocrisy with the words of the prophet Isaiah:

*"These people honor me with their lips,
but their hearts are far from me." (Mark 7:6)*

The religious leaders skillfully sidestepped God's law to hold on to their own tradition, canceling God's Word to enforce their own (Mark 7:9–13). After Jesus made it clear that they had a heart problem, not a hands problem, He "called to the crowd to come and hear" (7:14). What followed were some of the most revolutionary words Jesus ever spoke on earth (7:14–23).

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Observation: Jesus Teaches About Inner Purity

With careful observation, you'll discover timeless truths for transformation and freedom in Jesus' message. Pay close attention to the details as you read aloud [Mark 7:14–23](#) in various translations to find out what the passage says.¹ Put yourself in the place of the Jews who heard Jesus in the original setting and think about how radical Jesus' words were.

What was Jesus' emphatic opening line in 7:14? What did He say about external diet and internal defilement in 7:15?

Note that the footnote at the end of 7:15 tells us that some manuscripts add 7:16. In 7:17–19, what did Jesus' disciples later ask Him? What was Jesus' response? What parenthetical note did Mark give as the implication of Jesus' answer?

I think the disciples must have said to themselves, “All of them. All foods are clean.” “Peter, did you hear that?” “Yeah, all of them.” “Andrew, got it?” “Yeah.”
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Summarize Jesus' statements in 7:20–23. How would you define these sins?

Let it sink in. There is something within all of us, men and women, humanity, that's defiled. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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Interpretation: The Heart of Every Human Being

Let's take the step of interpretation to grasp the intended meaning of [Mark 7:14–23](#) as the original readers would have understood it. Use your Bible-study resources to define the key terms and concepts.

In 7:14–15, Jesus challenged the crowd to understand that nothing outside a man or woman defiles him or her, but a man or woman is defiled by what comes from his or her heart. Consult *Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology* at biblestudytools.com, and read the section “The New Testament” in the article “[Clean, Unclean](#).” Why were Jesus' words revolutionary to first-century Jews?

“Wait a minute. Not too fast, Jesus. You're telling me this piece of bacon, this slice of ham, this shrimp, are okay?” “I'm telling you they're okay. There's no defilement.” —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

The disciples saw Jesus' answer as a parable that needed to be clarified. In 7:17–19, we observed Jesus' response and Mark's parenthetical note that Jesus declared all foods clean. Look up 7:17–19 in [Constable's Notes](#) at netbible.org. What is the significance of Jesus' teaching for Christ-followers today?

Then, Jesus opened the human heart to reveal the specific sins that defile a person. Look at the list in [7:20–23](#) in the MSG translation. How would you explain the condition of every human heart?

You know the great thing about coming to a section like this? It puts all of us on the same level. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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Correlation: The Total Depravity of Humankind

Scripture in its entirety reveals that no matter how good people look on the outside, depravity has poisoned the core. For example, Cain offered sacrifices to God, yet the jealousy and anger in his heart drove him to kill his innocent brother, Abel, whose sacrifice God had accepted. How does Jesus' teaching resemble God's warning to Cain in [Genesis 4:1–12](#) and [Mark 7:14–23](#)?

Old sin nature: it's inside and it defiles. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Compare [Jeremiah 17:9](#) and [Romans 3:10–18](#). What do these passages teach about the sinful nature of the heart of every man and woman?

It's "beyond cure." You can't love your baby enough to take away that baby's impulse to do wrong. You can help that child know how to restrain, and by the grace of God we do that as parents. But we can't change the nature.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Compare our passage with [Romans 6:12–13](#) and [Galatians 5:24–25](#). How can we believers not gratify the desires of our sinful nature?

How can I change? The beautiful thing about the Bible is that it doesn't leave us in the pigsty. There's a reason that we're not all adulterers, murderers. There's a reason we're not all spiritually insensitive or full of malice or stealing from one another. It's called "the work of the Holy Spirit" in the believer's life.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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Application: Remember Your Depravity, Embrace God's Grace

This step in the *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method helps us internalize the passage by asking questions like “What warning should I heed?” or “What attitude should I change?”

Pastor Chuck shares three principles that help us apply Jesus' teaching. First, *facing the ugly truth of our sinful nature is a painful reality*. How does reminding yourself of this truth help you look more intently to Christ for strength?

Tell your kids that they have a sinful nature, that there's nothing in this ugly nature that will ever change within that nature. They're deep down inside depraved. That's an ugly truth, but it won't make you odd when you embrace it. It'll help you. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Second, *understanding the full extent of our sinful nature is a helpful necessity*. What has the Holy Spirit brought to your mind that reveals the extent of your sinful nature?

Third, *accepting the only cure is the essential remedy, meaning that Christ Jesus came to save sinners*. How does this truth accentuate your need of God's grace? What habits can you adopt to show your constant dependence on God's help and power?

Thankfully, your value to God does not depend on the condition of your heart. God measures your worth not on the scale of your inner purity or your good works but by the cost of His Son's sacrifice. The value of your soul was set by the price Christ paid to save it—which is incalculable! Praise Him! Live today in the security of His great love for you and the grace He offers.

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A FINAL PRAYER

Heavenly Father, thank You for Your Word that reveals to me the truth about my sinful nature. Control my thoughts, my actions, my motives. May my life glorify Your Son, Jesus. In His name, I pray. Amen.

ENDNOTE

1. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, go to the web page "*How Does Pastor Chuck Swindoll Study the Bible?*" at [insight.org](https://www.insight.org).

For the 2026–2027 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study was developed by Mirlenda Noëlliste in collaboration with Bryce Klabunde, vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages. Copyright © 2010, 2026 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. All rights are reserved worldwide. Duplication of copyrighted material for commercial use is strictly prohibited.

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Insight for Living

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