

The Inside Is What Matters

- Ron Stullenbarger -

Shopping for a good watermelon is difficult because no matter how good it looks on the outside, it's hard to tell what it's really like on the inside. We can tap it, thump it and squeeze it, only to take it home and discover that the inside is not edible.

On one occasion when Jesus' disciples did not wash their hands before eating, the Pharisees became extremely irritated because it violated one of their man-made traditions. *"The Pharisees and some of the scribes gathered around Him when they had come from Jerusalem, and had seen that some of His disciples were eating their bread with impure hands, that is, unwashed. (For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they carefully wash their hands, thus observing the traditions of the elders; and when they come from the market place, they do not eat unless they cleanse themselves; and there are many other things which they have received in order to observe, such as the washing of cups and pitchers and copper pots.) The Pharisees and the scribes asked Him, 'Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat their bread with impure hands?' And He said to them, 'Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: 'THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME. 'BUT IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE PRECEPTS OF MEN.' Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men'"* (Mark 7:1-8, NASB).

Jesus immediately challenged them by saying: *"You are experts at setting aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition"* (verse 9). He went so far as to call them *"hypocrites"* (verse 6) and explained that what comes from the inside of an individual is what *"defiles"* him, not the other way around (Mark 7:14-23).

If we're not careful, we can become so absorbed with looking good on the outside, that we forget what really counts. In fact, when we get to the place where we think *"we've arrived,"* we may become proud of ourselves and judgmental toward others. Harboring bitterness, clinging to critical attitudes, and thinking too highly of ourselves are the kind of defiling things that make us guilty of Jesus' charge of being a *"hypocrite."*

The point is this: It's the things on the inside of our heart — our thoughts and attitudes — that really matter to the Lord.