

Title: ENCOUNTERING THE HUMAN CONDITION

Text: Mark 7:1-8, 14-23

The Struggle for Acceptance

- The Religious Approach: Outside-In

- The Jesus Approach: Inside-Out

The Joy of Acceptance: Living Inside Out

Mark 7:1-8, 7:14-23 (ESV)

Now when the Pharisees gathered to him, with some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem, they saw that some of his disciples ate with hands that were defiled, that is, unwashed. (For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands, holding to the tradition of the elders, and when they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they wash. And there are many other traditions that they observe, such as the washing of cups and pots and copper vessels and dining couches.) And the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, "Why do your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?" And he said to them, "Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, "'This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.' You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men."

And he called the people to him again and said to them, "Hear me, all of you, and understand: There is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him, but the things that come out of a person are what defile him." And when he had entered the house and left the people, his disciples asked him about the parable. And he said to them, "Then are you also without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled?" (Thus he declared all foods clean.) And he said, "What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person."

CONVERSATION STARTER

- Describe a time when you felt like you had to earn someone else's trust, respect, or acceptance. What did you do or avoid doing to gain their approval? Did you ever feel like you "succeeded," or did you continue to feel insecure about the relationship?
- Read Mark 7:1-9 and 14-23. Why do you think the Pharisees and scribes care so much that Jesus' disciples did not follow the tradition of the elders? Why does Jesus respond so critically to their question in verses 6-9? How does Jesus' understanding of defilement differ from that of the Pharisees and scribes? Why do you think Jesus includes the vice list in verses 21-22?
- Read Matthew 23:25-28. Why does Jesus consider the Pharisees and scribes to be hypocrites? In verses 25-26, what is the relationship between the inside and outside of the cup in Jesus' illustration? What about between the inside and outside of the tomb? Why do you think Jesus addresses the Pharisees specifically with the language of "clean" and "unclean" in this passage?
- Read the excerpt below. Have you ever found yourself believing in Manning's "God of the legalistic Christian"? When and how so? How did that understanding of God affect your ability to follow Him wholeheartedly? When you go through seasons of legalism like this, what is it that finally wakes you up to the gospel of grace?
- When are you most tempted to try to earn God's acceptance? Why? Do you ever struggle to believe that God accepts you unconditionally in Christ? How so? How should God's unconditional acceptance impact our motivations and desires? How does it inform the way we accept and treat other people? How would our relationships change if we valued heart transformation over outward presentation?

EXCERPT FROM: *The Ragamuffin Gospel*

BY: Brennan Manning

This is the God of the gospel of grace. A God who, out of love for us, sent the only Son He ever had wrapped in our skin. He learned how to walk, stumbled and fell, cried for His milk, sweated blood in the night, was lashed with a whip and showered with spit, was fixed to a cross, and died whispering forgiveness on us all.

The God of the legalistic Christian, on the other hand, is often unpredictable, erratic, and capable of all manner of prejudices. When we view God this way, we feel compelled to engage in some sort of magic to appease Him. Sunday worship becomes a superstitious insurance policy against His whims. This God expects people to be perfect and to be in perpetual control of their feelings and thoughts. When broken people with this concept of God fail – as inevitably they must – they usually expect punishment. So they persevere in religious practices as they struggle to maintain a hollow image of a perfect self. The struggle itself is exhausting. The legalists can never live up to expectations they project on God.