

Matthew 15:20

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

These are the things which defile a man: but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man.

Analysis

Jesus concludes: 'These are the things which defile a man: but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man.' This revolutionary teaching shifts focus from ceremonial to moral purity. Defilement is fundamentally spiritual and ethical, not ritual. Reformed doctrine sees here the transition from Old Covenant ceremonial law to New Covenant spiritual reality. While external religion appears impressive, God judges the heart. This verse anticipates the gospel going to Gentiles, who wouldn't observe Jewish purity rituals.

Historical Context

This teaching prepared disciples for the Gentile mission by relativizing Jewish ceremonial law. Peter's vision in Acts 10 builds on this foundation. The early church struggled with this issue (Acts 15), ultimately recognizing that Gentiles need not adopt Jewish rituals. Jesus' teaching here laid theological groundwork for this decision.

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. What external religious practices have you emphasized over heart transformation?
2. How does Jesus' teaching free you from legalism?
3. What does true spiritual purity look like in daily life?

Interlinear Text

ταῦτά	ἐστιν	τὸν	κοινοῖ	τὸν	ἄνθρωπον
These	are	the things which	defile	the things which	a man
G5023	G2076	G3588	G2840	G3588	G444
τὸν	δὲ	ἀνίπτοις	χερσὶν	φαγεῖν	οὐ
the things which	but	with unwashen	hands	to eat	not
G3588	G1161	G449	G5495	G5315	G3756
τὸν	ἄνθρωπον				κοινοῖ
the things which	a man				defile
G3588	G444				G2840

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