

EVIL THOUGHTS

(Matthew 5:21-22, 27-28; 9:4; 12:25; 15:18-19; 23:25-28; 6:3-6)

No one just falls into adultery for no apparent reason. The adulterer's heart is always shaped and prepared by lustful thoughts before the actual deed occurs. Jesus taught this truth when He was speaking to His disciples: "But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: These are *the things* which defile a man: but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man" (Matthew 15:18-20).

Jesus in this text was teaching that the real point of the Mosaic Law was the moral truth embodied in the external ceremonial requirements. Jesus downplayed the symbolic aspects of washing and abstaining from what is legally declared unclean. Instead, He emphasized the moral requirement of the law. Defilement is not primarily a ceremonial or external problem; what is truly defiling in the spiritual sense is the wickedness that emanates from the heart. The heart is the seat of the whole person – mind, imagination, affections, conscience, and will. Heart in the New Testament is often used as a synonym for the mind. In the verses of Matthew 15:18-20, Jesus was condemning the wickedness of an impure heart.

Over and over Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for their meticulous observance of the external, ceremonial law and their immoral neglect of the law's moral requirements. They were utterly preoccupied with appearing to be righteous. Yet they were willing to allow the grossest sins of the heart. They thought no one else could ever discover what was really inside them. But Jesus knew what was in their hearts. He could read the heart (mind) when no word was uttered: "And, behold, certain of the scribes said within themselves [this was not a verbal expression, but a thought within the mind], This *man* blasphemeth. And Jesus knowing their thoughts [knew what they were thinking] said, Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts" (Matthew 9:3-4)? "And Jesus knew their thoughts, and said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand." (Matthew 12:25). To sin in the mind is to desecrate the very sanctuary of our worship.

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