

# The Evil Within

Things that defile men and women are not things that originate outside of us but what finds its origin in our hearts. The Lord used the occasion of the Jerusalem Pharisees' criticism about what the disciples were doing – or neglecting to do – to open to His disciples, and all who have ears to hear, an explanation of the true nature of sin, its source, and results.

## **A lesson of great importance**

We have remarked previously how diligently the Lord taught and prepared His disciples for their own apostolic ministry. We have seen Him teach them publicly and draw them aside privately, to expound His parables, miracles, doctrine and the disciple's own experiences in ways that helped guide their understanding and confidence. Here is another example. It is perhaps unwise for us to compare these lessons but surely this day's was amongst the first rank in the disciple's spiritual education.

## **Sin is more than skin deep**

Legalism is the rod of self-righteous Pharisees – then and now. Such people live a most critical existence, always finding fault with some act or facet of another person's life. It matters not to them what the sin is, so long as they can point it out to others and relish the fact that they were not guilty of committing it. This day it was neglecting to handwash. But the Lord who sees and knows the hearts of all men had something else entirely to say.

## **A matter of the heart**

Having rebuked the hypocrisy of the critics the Lord turns to the real source of sin in all our lives and teaches us how sin is not primarily what we do, but what we are. We are not sinful because we sin. We sin because we are sinful. Our sins are the outworkings of a corrupt heart, the fruit of fallen nature and the constant companion of every man, woman and child because they arise from within. The heart of man is deceitful and desperately wicked, says Isaiah.

## **Guilty before we act**

This lesson was so important to the disciples and to us because it teaches that regardless of what we do, or do not do, the problem of evil must first be addressed inwardly. Evil requires to be dealt with at its source where its rule over the passions and desires of a person's will must be broken. Every act of wickedness is conceived in our sinful nature and condemns us before our holy God before ever seeing the light of day.

## **Conversion required**

But it is not in human power to deal with this problem of an evil nature, despite what freewill preachers say. We have neither strength nor inclination to do so. It is not a reformation of conduct but a transformation of nature and a new heart that is required, and only God can make a soul clean and a heart new. Here the disciples were being taught the necessity of a new creation so that 'sin shall not have dominion over you'.

## **Conversion provided**

The glory of the gospel is its message of life changing power and spiritual transformation. God does freely what we never can. He deals with our sin by taking it from us and laying it upon the Lord Jesus Christ in His death, and He deals with our sinfulness by creating in us a new heart.

## **A new creation**

This is what David desired when he was led under conviction by the Holy Spirit to plead, 'Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me' (Psalm 51:10). And this is what God promised when He said to Ezekiel, 'A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh (Ezekiel 36:26).

## **A work of grace and mercy**

As a preacher I will do your soul no good if I point you merely to a moral code, or a standard of obedience, or any religious duty. Try as you might you will never accomplish a clean heart or achieve a new spirit. That takes a power much greater than you or me. But if I can point you to Christ, show you the cross and the work of the Saviour, share with you something of His power to cleanse and the righteousness He freely gives, then, by God's grace, I will have

served my purpose.