

The Common Man and the Bible

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At any given moment, God views each of us as either common ... or uncommon.

When the scribes and Pharisees challenged Jesus about His disciples eating with unclean hands, this was part of His response. *“There is nothing outside the man which, going into him, can **defile** him; But the things which proceed out of the man are what **defile** the man”* (Mk 7:15). Later, the disciples questioned Jesus about this. He added, *“That which proceeds out of the man, that is what **defiles** the man. For from within, out of the heart of man, proceed the evil thoughts and fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, envy, slander, pride (arrogance) and foolishness. All these evil things proceed from within and **defile** the man”* (Mk 7:20-23). The primary word of interest here is the word translated, “defile.” The verb is koinoo, and the noun is koinos. Before giving you the definition, let me give you a clue.

The Greek of the New Testament

For a long time, many believed the Greek of the New Testament was a new language from God - heavenly, undefiled, and holy. But archeological digs began unearthing shopping lists and land deeds written in the same Greek – in the same time period! Bible scholars soon realized the Greek of the New Testament was actually the *common* language of the day. So, New Testament Greek is now called *Koine* Greek – or Common Greek – with “Koine” coming from, “koinos” (n).

Many words in this Greek are morally neutral. Context determines if they are to be understood as positive or negative. For example, Jesus told His disciples, *“I have earnestly **desired** (epithumeo) to eat this Passover with you before I suffer”* (Lk 22:15). But elsewhere, *“everyone who looks on a woman **to lust** (epithumeo) for her has committed adultery with her already in his heart”* (Mt 5:28). One context is positive, the other negative. Such is the case with, koinoo (v), koinos (n). In a more positive light it means, *“universal, generic, widespread ... common.”* Again, *Koine* Greek ... the common Greek of that era. But in a negative context it means, *“inferior, profane ... defiled”* – as in the Mark 7: 15, 20-23.

Our Common State

From cover to cover, the Bible teaches that our natural, universal state – our common state - is one of moral defilement. *“What man is there among you, when his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, he will not give him a snake will he? If you then, **being evil**, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give what is good to those who ask Him?”* (Mt 7:9-11). To be defiled - evil - is the common state of man.

The world has its own definition of what makes one common or uncommon. Fame makes one uncommon. Power makes one uncommon. Wealth makes one uncommon. But a heart that exudes *“evil thoughts and fornications (porneia – sexual immorality of any sort), thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, envy, slander, pride (arrogance) and foolishness”* ... resides in a Commoner. Fame or power or wealth surrounding such a heart does not move God into changing His assessment of that heart. Such a person to Him is still common. To some scoffing Pharisees, Jesus said, *“You are those who make yourselves righteous in the sight of men, but God knows your hearts; for that which is highly esteemed among men (literally, high before men) is detestable in the sight of God”* (Lk 16:15). This is a great encouragement because one’s station in life

(fame, power or wealth) does not effect God's assessment in this matter. So, based upon behavior, at any given moment, God views each of us as either common ... or uncommon.

I wish I could say I have arrived at the position of being uncommon in God's sight, meaning not doing any of those things in Mark 7:20-23. But in this age, I do not think any of us attain and permanently reside at that level. Sin - that abounding, common element - constantly pounds inside ... and outside us all. When I sin - whether by action or reaction - God looks at me and sees ... a common man. Anyone could do what I just did. Sometimes sin deceives me, and sometimes it blinds me. But many times, I just decide to participate with it. Too often, I make myself a Commoner.

This life is one of continual process, change ... and challenge. Ultimately, God alone determines our commonness, or uncommonness, event by event. Oftentimes, we do not know how we fared (or are faring) in a given situation. But, He has given us some tools (like Mark 7:20-23), so as to substantively assess ourselves in most circumstances.

Conclusion

Yes, at any given moment, God views each of us as either common ... or uncommon. Let's look one final time at the passage in Mark, and translate "*koinoo*"(v) and "*koinos*"(n) with the word, "*common*" ... instead of "*defile*". Here is how it reads: "*There is nothing outside the man which, going into him, **can make him common**; But, the things which proceed out of the man are what **common** the man ... That which proceeds out of the man, that is what **makes him common**. For from within, out of the heart of man, proceed the evil thoughts and fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, envy, slander, pride (arrogance) and foolishness. All these evil things proceed from within and **common** the man*" (Mk 7:15 , 20-23). I do not want to stay a Commoner. I want God to be able to assess me as more and more uncommon. I want to live in such a way that He might even say to those around Him, "*Have you considered my son, Robin? Have you seen how uncommon he is?*" This matter rests in our hands.

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