“***The Inside of the Cup***” by S. Finlan, at The First Church, August 3, 2025

**Colossians 3:2–10**

2 Set your minds on the things that are above, not on the things that are on earth, 3 for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory.

5 Put to death, therefore, whatever in you is earthly: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed (which is idolatry). . . 8Now you must get rid of all such things: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive language from your mouth. 9 Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have stripped off the old self with its practices 10 and have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator.

**Luke 11:37–42**

37 While he was speaking, a Pharisee invited him to dine with him, so he went and took his place at the table. 38 The Pharisee was amazed to see that he did not first wash before dinner. 39 Then the Lord said to him, “Now you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness. 40 You fools! Did not the one who made the outside make the inside also? 41 So give as alms those things that are within and then everything will be clean for you.

42 “But woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and herbs of all kinds and neglect justice and the love of God.

These passages have a lot to do with our inner nature, both the good and the bad, the divine image and the abusive practices. Colossians talks about the inner greed and impurity that leads to malice, slander, immorality, and abusive language. We are told to strip off the old practices as we have stripped off the old self, but to clothe ourselves with the new self, which has been “renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator” (3:10). The new self is in close conformity to the divine nature. A few verses later it tells us that the new self shows “compassion, kindness, humility . . . and patience” (3:12), and leads to forgiveness and love among people (3:13–14).

Someone who has moved from the old self and old behaviors to the new self and its behaviors will have no difficulty understanding Jesus’ saying about keeping the *inside* of the cup clean. Now why do we speak about the *inside*? Is it because we understand our motivations to be something that come from inside of us, while rules and social norms come from the outside? Is that just something that western intellectuals made up, or was it also part of a Middle Eastern Jew’s mindset?

Evidently it was part of the Jewish understanding, since we see this wording here and elsewhere in the Bible. We see it reflected in Paul’s statement in Romans, that “a person is a Jew who is one *inwardly*, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not the written code” (Rom 2:29). Motivations and purposes are recognized as something inward, *within* a person. Jeremiah speaks of people who “speak friendly words to their neighbors but *inwardly* are planning to lay an ambush” (9:8). A psalmist speaks of people who “take pleasure in falsehood; they bless with their mouths, but inwardly they curse” (62:4). They even say in a person’s *heart*, as we say, also. The Chinese religion, Taoism, also thinks of the heart as the seat of emotion and of the spirit. As Bernard Shannon writes, “The open heart reflects Heaven and Earth without bias . . . It is the spontaneous arising of compassion, which flows naturally from an unbound spirit” (“Opening the Heart” at medicalqigong.org/blog/opening-the-heart-a-daoist-reflection#:~:text=In %20the%20Daoist%20tradition%2C%20to%20“open%20the%20heart”,the%20 spirit%20that%20reflects%20the%20Dao%20within%20us).

“Heart” language is frequent in the Bible, especially in the Psalms, where the term occurs 150 times, often denoting emotions, motivation, or spirituality: “O Lord, you will strengthen the heart of the meek . . . Who may dwell on your holy hill? Those who speak the truth from their heart . . . let your heart take courage . . . Search me, O God, and know my heart . . . He heals the brokenhearted” (Pss 10:17; 15:1-2; 27:14; 139:23; 147:3). The word occurs fifteen times in Psalm 119 alone, as in this verse: “With my whole heart I seek you” (119:10). It also occurs 63 times in the Proverbs, 41 times in Isaiah, 57 times in Jeremiah, 96 times in Sirach, 18 times in Matthew, 24 times in Luke, and 15 times in Romans. No wonder we use the word “heart” in the way that we do today.

It is our motivation that is the key. The only language that God really hears is the language of sincerity. The Pharisees, according to Jesus’ criticism, followed outward rituals, but they didn’t clean the inside; they neglected justice and the love of God (Luke 11:42). Even with the most diligent of outward piety, it is possible to miss the whole point.

The German mystic Jacob Boehme said that Paradise “is still in the earth, but man is not in Paradise unless he be born again. In that case he stands therein in the New Birth, and tastes here and now that Eternal Life for which he has been made” (Underhill, *Mysticism*, 123). Such statements grow out of inward religious experience; in this case, mystical experience, which is a valid part of religious living, and can sometimes be described and may benefit others in the re-telling.

I have a little story I thought was nice. It’s about the author, Huston Smith, who wrote the famous book *The World’s Religions*, which provided many westerners with their first introduction to Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam. In his nineties, he wrote an autobiographical book called *Tales of Wonder*. After a very active life, in which he immersed himself for ten years in Hinduism, ten years in Buddhism, and ten years in Islam, living in India, Turkey, while remaining a loyal Methodist, and teaching in Massachusetts and California, he was now in a retirement home. He still loved life and was the happiest person in the rest home. He found everybody interesting.

He wrote that he had become a child again, in religious matters, and *that* thought made him recall an incident years earlier involving his seven-year-old and four-year-old daughters. The seven-year-old, talking about Huston and his wife, whispered “They talk so much about God. I don’t get it.” The four-year-old, Gael, said she understood. “They are saying God is everything. God is everywhere. God is in me” (*Tales of Wonder*, 111–12). To tie this back in to the Scripture, I’d say you sure *do* want to clean the inside of the cup, if God is inside the cup! If God is inside of you!

So: discover your new self, and keep rediscovering him or her as you live, and may you become a happy 90-year-old with a childlike faith. Be young at heart, ever renewing your faith daily.