

Sermon outline and notes:

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Mark 7:14-23 “Jesus and Human Sin”

Intro. God is absolutely holy, pure, and righteous. Therefore, Ps. 24:3 says, “Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? Or who may stand in His holy place?” The answer is given in the next verse, “He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not lifted up his soul to an idol, nor sworn deceitfully.” A holy God demands holy living. A pure God cannot permit impurity in His presence. So a major concern of the Jews in Jesus’ day was this: How can I be clean and avoid defilement, impurity and sin? The question for *us* today is, “What defiles us, or makes us spiritually dirty?” This is a timeless concern that is always relevant. Jesus is going to answer that question in our text today.

The context of our text today is based partly on v.2, “Now when they saw some of His disciples eat bread with defiled, that is, with unwashed hands, they found fault.” Most Jews in that day believed that to eat with unwashed hands would literally defile your soul! The problem is they elevated their religious traditions above the Word of God. There was nothing in the written Word of God that said it was a sin to eat without going through the prescribed hand-washing ceremony. The only mention of anything close to that was the fact that they priests were to wash their hands and feet before performing certain duties (Ex. 30:19-21; 40:31).¹ So the requirement to wash hands before eating was just a religious tradition of the Rabbis. Though they found fault with Jesus and His disciples, the religious leaders had made a fundamental error. They misunderstood the nature of human sin and what truly defiles a person. They had come to believe that sin was primarily a matter of externals, what you eat, touch, wear, and so forth.

In our day people still believe that religion and sin is primarily a matter of externals. For many people religion is just an outward act you go through with prescribed prayers and religious rituals. Their focus is also on outward violations of religious traditions. Back in the 70s some churches made a big deal over how long a man’s hair was, or whether or not a woman wore slacks instead of a dress.

So today we are going to answer the question, “What makes us unclean in the sight of God? What is it that defiles us?” Or we can ask an even more basic question, “What is sin?” Is it the violation of some long-standing man-made religious tradition? Well Jesus is going to show us that sin is not physical dirt that contaminates our soul, but is an outgrowth of our own sin nature that rebels against God’s holy commandments in His Word.

Today we are going to see clear support for the classic Christian doctrine of the depravity of man. Man is born with a sin nature that cannot be cured with human religious efforts. Yet modern society has largely rejected this biblical doctrine, and even the biblical concept of sin. They have largely destroyed the concept of absolute moral truth. They say that if there is such thing as sin, it is relative to the situation. They not only deny the biblical teaching about sin, but they even celebrate and affirm what the Bible calls sin. And when people do bad things, they say it is due to external factors, like environment, or upbringing, social injustice, or lack of the right kind of education. Yet the Bible teaches that the fundamental problem with man is his own sin

¹ Lev. 15:11 mentions one other hand-washing requirement but it had nothing to do with washing before eating. There are also numerous references to full-body bathing for cleansing *after* a defilement has taken place.

nature. Jeremiah 17:9 give the true diagnosis of the human condition when it says, “The heart [is] deceitful above all [things], and desperately wicked....”

So this morning I want you to have a better understanding of the true nature of sin, and what it is that truly defiles us. *You* do not get to define what sin is. Our Creator God determines what is sinful. So if you are not saved, I hope this message will help you realize that you are a sinner in need of Jesus as your Savior. Only He can cleanse you of your sin. If you are already a Christian, I hope this message will help you focus on avoiding what is *really* sinful. Now the first truth I want you to see is this:

I. SIN AFFECTS OUR SPIRITUAL UNDERSTANDING

Jesus points out that His own disciples had failed to understand the spiritual truth He was teaching. Jesus asked His disciples in v.18, “Are you thus without understanding also?” Evidently, they still had been influenced too much by the teachings of their Jewish upbringing. They still viewed sin mainly as a matter of external defilement, and they were slow to accept the rather radical teaching of Jesus that we find here.

This is still a problem today. The fact is, people are slow to understand spiritual things. That’s because the corruption of human nature is a universal disease. It affects the mind and understanding. The very same person who is quick and clever in worldly things will often completely fail to comprehend the simplest truths of Christianity. They will sound to him either foolish (1 Cor. 1:18, 23) or mysterious. That’s because 1 Corinthians 2:14 says, “But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.” We need divine intervention to gain a correct spiritual understanding.

So in light of this truth, Jesus said to the multitude in the last of v.14, “Hear Me, everyone, and understand.” Notice that the first step is this: You have a responsibility to hear what Jesus has to say.² So attend a church where the Bible is taught, and make it a point to listen carefully to the Word of God. That’s the first step in gaining a correct spiritual understanding. Are you listening?

Then you have a responsibility to *understand* the Word of God. Otherwise, you are going to have some very flawed ideas about God, and about human nature, and how to correct the flaws of human nature.

I remember having a tough time understanding some new math concepts in the 5th or 6th grade, including pre-algebra. But with some help from my sister and my teacher, I finally got a good grasp of math, and from then on I understood it and did well in math. It took both effort on my part and outside help to gain a good understanding.

So are you ready to listen, and gain an understanding of the true nature of sin and what actually defiles us? We need to pray and ask God to help us understand His truth with the help of His Holy Spirit. Otherwise, His truth will be hidden from us. You also need the help of gifted and knowledgeable Bible teachers and a humble, teachable spirit.

So what is it that we need to understand about sin? Notice what Jesus teaches here:

² This responsibility to hear is reinforced in v.16, where Jesus says, “If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear!” There is sufficient textual evidence to suggest that v.16 should not be here in this particular text, but Jesus spoke those words on at least 3 other occasions (4:9, 23; Mt. 11:15; 13:9; 13:43).

II. SIN IS A PROBLEM WITH THE HUMAN HEART

The Bible is very clear in pointing out that man has sinned against a holy God. Romans 3:23 says, “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Sin is compared to missing the mark on a target. Sin is also transgression, or crossing a forbidden line. Sin is a violation of an objective standard of righteousness, which is rooted in the holy nature of God. Sin displeases God, separates us from Him and condemns us. Now let’s see what Jesus teaches here. First:

A. The Sin Problem Is Not Primarily External – Jesus said in v.15, “There is nothing that enters a man from outside which can defile him...” Likewise, He said in the last of 18, “Do you not perceive that whatever enters a man from outside cannot defile him?” He is speaking primarily about the kind of filth that can be washed away. Your main problem is not physical filth on the *outside* but the condition of your heart on the inside.

Why did Jesus even need to address this issue? Well through their religious traditions the Jews assumed that unrinsed hands defile the food and therefore the person who eats it. Yet Jesus went beyond the issue of unwashed hands. The Jews were taught by the Law of Moses that eating certain foods would defile them (see Lev. 11; Deut. 14:3-20). And indeed, under the Old Covenant, disobedience *was* defiling. About 200 years before Christ, the ruler Antiochus Epiphanes demanded that the Jews eat pork. Hundreds of Jews endured torture and even death to avoid the defilement of eating pork. The Jews were also defiled by touching something dead, or touching someone with a bodily discharge. And while you remained unclean, you were barred from the temple. You could not approach God. You couldn’t touch other Jews lest you defile them!

Yet the Jews failed to understand that these laws against eating certain foods, or touching anything unclean, was simply part of their spiritual training to prepare them for the Savior who was to come. God was using a physical illustration to help them understand spiritual defilement and the hope of spiritual cleansing. They were being taught to discern the difference between what is clean and unclean; what is holy and what is common, between right and wrong. Physical defilements were intended to illustrate that sin makes us spiritually unclean and separates us from a holy God. God was preparing the Jews to long for a Savior, who would save them from what truly defiled them.³

Now based on the principle that Jesus had given in vv.15 & 18, there is a clear implication concerning food. Mark, writing mainly for a Roman audience, is the only Gospel writer that adds the comment in the last of v.18, “thus purifying all foods?”⁴ Though the NKJV attributes that comment to Jesus, I believe it is probably the inspired evangelist’s interpretation of the significance of Jesus’ saying regarding ceremonial defilement. Peter, Mark’s source, did not accept the significance of these words at first, but he did later when God spoke directly to him in Acts 11:9, “What God has cleansed you must not call common” or “unclean.” In that context God was showing Peter animals that were unclean according to Mosaic Law, yet they were no longer unclean under the New Covenant that Jesus ratified by His blood sacrifice (Mt.

³ These laws also tended to separate the Jews from other peoples, which would help protect them from the terrible influences of ungodly people.

⁴ However, a well attested variant reading has *katharizon* with an omicron, which would affirm that the food has somehow become clean in the process of its elimination. According to the Mishnah, excrement is not ritually impure though it may be offensive. So how can food be impure as it enters the mouth but somehow becomes clean as the waste is eliminated? However, the Qumran community considered such waste impure based on Deut. 23:22-14 and Ezekiel 4:12-15 [See Garland, pp. 275-276].

26:28).⁵ So at least for *Christians*, Jesus was declaring null and void the entire Mosaic system of “clean and unclean” foods. The ceremonial law was the shadow, but Jesus Himself was the substance. Since He has come, the ceremonial laws have fulfilled their purpose, and are no longer needed. I don’t know about you, but I am kind of glad that I can eat shrimp, scallops, bacon, and a good pork roast!

Jesus gives the reason for His statement in v.19, “because it does not enter his heart but his stomach, and is eliminated.”⁶ The main point is that our food does not enter the heart and soul of a person, but nourishes the body. And whatever is not used to benefit the body is just eliminated into the toilet. The real problem is not food or dirt from the outside, but sin on the inside that produces defilement. What makes a person a sinner is not the food that enters their stomach, but the sin that originates in the heart.⁷

Yet in spite of this teaching of Jesus and His apostles (Rom. 14:14, 17; 1 Cor. 8:8; Col. 2:20-23; 1 Tim. 4:1-5), we have denominations and cults that still command their followers not to eat certain foods. They still enforce some of the Old Testament dietary laws and even add to them. Their religion is largely a matter of externals, and they still cling to their religious traditions.

Think about this: Jesus could touch a leper, a woman with an issue of blood, and even a dead corpse. The Jews believed that such touching defiled a person. Yet Jesus did not become unclean by such physical contact! (2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Pet. 2:22). That proves the point that Jesus is making.

So we need to be careful not to focus on externals, especially when it comes to actions or rituals that are not even designated as right or wrong in the Bible. Instead, we need to understand that:

B. The Sin Problem Is Primarily Internal – This is so important that Jesus stated this truth three times in our text. Jesus said in the last of v.15, “the things which come out of him, those are the things that defile a man.” Likewise, Jesus also said in v.20, “What comes out of a man, that defiles a man.” Then Jesus concluded His remarks in v.23 by saying, “All these evil things come from within and defile a man.” What really defiles us is from within. In other words, the sin nature that we have on the inside becomes manifest on the outside, including our thoughts, words, and our actions. *These* defile us.

The principle Jesus announced had been true throughout the ages. In every period of history, true holiness has always been a matter of the heart. Though God commanded the Jews to circumcise the flesh, He also said that they should circumcise the heart (Dt. 10:16; 30:6). That was most important. Real defilement comes not from dirty hands but from a dirty heart.

Dr. Jerry Vines told the story of the time that his watch was broken. He took it to the jeweler and said, “There is something wrong with the hands on this watch. They will not move.” The jeweler replied, “No, there is nothing wrong with the *hands*. The problem is with the mechanism on the inside.” Even so, it is not the physical manifestation of sin that is the *main* problem, but the spiritual root cause is the main problem. We are born with the strong, inward tendency to commit sin.

⁵ His *main* point was to illustrate the truth that Peter should no longer consider Gentiles unclean just because of their Gentile ancestry.

⁶ The NKJV doesn’t bother to translate the word for where bodily waste is eliminated.

⁷ Of course, when Jesus uses the word “heart,” He is speaking of the inner spirit of man, not the physical organ that pumps blood.

So we have seen that sin is primarily a matter of the heart. However, even though sin is an inward problem, we also need to understand that:

III. SIN MANIFESTS ITSELF IN THOUGHTS AND ACTIONS

How do we know that man is a sinner by nature? Well Jesus said you will know a tree by its fruit (Mt. 7:17-19; 12:33). Likewise, you know a dog by its bark. We know man has a sin nature because it *always* manifests itself in sinful thoughts, words and actions. In vv. 21-22 Jesus gives examples of the attitudes and actions that *really* defile a man. What a list we have here! 4 of the 13 are in the 10 Commandments. If *Jesus* says these are sinful manifestations, then you can be sure that when we have done such things, we are convicted as sinners and our souls have become defiled. Furthermore, we should avoid such sins in the future.

So what are the kind of sins that truly defile us. Well, heading the list are:

A. Evil Thoughts⁸ – Have you had any of those? Thoughts are the parents of words and deeds. Before we commit the *act* of sin, we first have the *attitude* of sin. Furthermore, this is one example of how a person who appears to be outwardly righteous can sin without people knowing it!

Then, what follows are primarily sins that harm others, such as:

B. Adulteries – Unfaithfulness to our wedding vows begins with lust that leads to emotional and physical adultery. This is becoming more and more common in our society. The sinful heart is not content with what we have. We want what we *don't* have. We have heard stories and reports of politicians, businessmen, and even preachers who have committed adultery against their wives.

C. Fornications – This refers to sexual sin in general, which has become very widespread in our society. Any kind of physical or visual (Mt. 5:28) intimacy outside a covenant relationship of marriage is fornication. In addition to premarital sexual intercourse, it includes rape, viewing pornography, etc. Many young people today are engaging in what is called “sexting.” They exchange sexual text messages and pictures. This is a form of fornication.

D. Murders – The shedding of innocent blood is a terrible sin. Especially in certain cities, there has been an escalation of the murder rate the last several years. Terrorists murdered about 1400 Israeli citizens on Oct. 7. Yet you may say, “I’ve never done that.” Remember, according to Jesus, hatred is murder in the heart (Mt. 5:21-22). Also, there have been over 60,000,000 innocent babies whose lives have been snuffed out because of legalized abortion.

E. Thefts – This also has become increasingly common in our society, even in broad daylight, captured by surveillance cameras. There are many forms of theft, including shoplifting, looting, fraud, extortion, and robbery. You say, “I haven’t stolen anything.” But it also includes loafing on the job and not paying taxes. Mal. 3:8 says we can even rob God by withholding from Him our tithes and offerings.

⁸ The Greek word is similar to “dialogue” (*dialogismos*).

F. Covetousness – This is the root of many sins. The word translated “covetousness” (*pleonexia*), literally means “to have more,” the lust for having more and more things. The sinful heart is never content for long, but always wants more. The sinful heart of the man sees happiness in things instead of in God. This is at the root of the materialism of our day.

G. Wickedness – This (*poneria*) refers to the person who is not only bad themselves, but who desires to tempt others to sin as well. This is behind peer pressure today.

H. Deceit – People lie and practice other forms of deceit all too often.⁹ It was by deceit that the leaders of the Jews planned to bring about Christ’s death. The Greeks deceived the Trojans with the wooden horse. False advertisement is one form of deceit. Fake accounts on social media and spam emails are full of deceit. How many times have *you* deceived someone this past week?

I. Lewdness – This term (*aselgeia*) stresses the lack of self-control that characterized the person who gives free play to his perverse and sinful impulses. Often this type of shameless behavior even shocks normal decency. Today gender and sexual perversity is openly manifested without shame. Don’t tell me that Jesus never spoke about such sins. I was grieved to read that so-called Christians attended the Dove awards manifesting such lewdness. One came as a drag queen, another man came wearing a dress, and one singer and musician came who is openly homosexual. No small number in the Christian music industry celebrated their attendance in such fashion in the name of inclusiveness and tolerance.¹⁰ Yet Jesus said that lewdness is a sin of the heart.

J. An Evil (*poneros*) Eye – Have you ever had someone give you the evil eye? Have *you* ever given someone an “evil eye”? Though there are other interpretations,¹¹ this most likely refers to the *kind* of envious greed that looks on the success and possessions of others and wants to take or deprive someone of what they have. After all, it is used in the context of the sins of “thefts and covetousness.” Jesus spoke of a bad or evil eye in the Sermon on the Mount in a context of greed for money (Mt. 5:19-24). Prov. 28:22 says, “A man with an evil eye hastens after riches....” (cf. Deut. 15:9). An evil eye looks on the success and happiness of another with displeasure. Responding to those complaining about others receiving the same pay even though they worked less, the landowner said in Mt. 20:15b, “Or is your eye evil because I am good?” If someone else has success or some benefit you do not possess, don’t look upon them with an evil eye! That sin will defile your soul.

K. Blasphemy – When directed to people, it refers to slander, defamation of character. People who gossip often engage in slander. James 4:11 says, “Do not speak evil of one another, brethren....” When was the last time you did that?

⁹ Deceit is so common that when Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward Him, He said of him, “Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no deceit!” (Jn. 1:47).

¹⁰ AFA, *The Stand*, Jan./Feb 2024, p.7.

¹¹ Robertson says an “evil eye” is from one who works evil and then haunts one with its gloating stare.

L. Pride – This is the original sin. The Greek word (*huperephania*)¹² literally means, “to show one’s self above.” It is the attitude of self-promotion, to shine above others. Arrogance is part of the idea. God hates this sin above all else.

M. Foolishness – This (*aphrosune*) does not mean the foolishness that is due to weakness of intellect; it means moral folly. Such moral foolishness is warned against in the book of Proverbs. There are some intellectually smart people who engage in rather foolish behavior. They may commit adultery. They may commit white color crime, and end up in prison. So many people have done foolish things with lasting consequences.

Notice again, that Jesus says that these things come from the heart. Especially before we are born again, we could potentially commit any of these sins. They may lie dormant all our lives. They may be kept down by the fear of consequences, and the restraint of public opinion. But everyone has the root of every sin inside.

Who would’ve thought that such evil that was manifested in Nazi Germany would have been supported by so many of the German people, many of whom went to church? The only explanation is the reality of human depravity in the heart.

How humble we ought to be when we read these verses! I dare say that everyone in this room has committed at least a few of the sins listed here this past year. Surely there is no place for self-righteousness in our hearts.

Once we accept what the real problem is, then we are ready to ask, what’s the solution? Well, I want to share with you last of all:

IV. THE SIN PROBLEM HAS A CURE!

Often, before we will accept the correct cure, we need to reject the wrong cures. So I must start by saying this:

A. The Cure Is Not Just to Change Outwardly – Since sin does not originate from the outside, the cure is not to focus on externals. You can join a church, be baptized, take communion, dress nicely, attend every Sunday, tithe your income, and make some outward changes in behavior, but that does not cure the sin problem *within*. Outward religious rituals only have value if they reflect an inner spiritual reality (cf. 1 Pet. 3:21).

Let’s suppose that you come home one day and find your kitchen floor covered with water. So what should you do? Let’s say you get a mop and bucket. You mop some up, squeeze it into the bucket, and mop some more. You even get a fan to dry the floor. You may feel like you are making some progress, but might I make a suggestion? Wouldn’t it be a good idea to find the source of the water leak, and stop the leak first? Then you can work on the clean-up.

Even so, the solution to the sin problem is not to just work on outward reformation or outward religion. You can make a New Year’s resolution, try to clean up your bad habits, but all the while, the old sin nature just keeps spewing up new problems in your life. The Bible does not just speak of the *fruit* of sin, but the *root* of sin.

So what is the best solution?

¹² This is the only time this word is used in the New Testament, but another form of the word, *huperephanos* (proud), is used 5 times. Jas. 4:6 says: "God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble."

B. The Right Cure Is *Inward* Cleansing – All these sins come out of the heart of man. So the first step is to repent of our sins, and place our faith in Jesus. He died for our sins. The Bible says that “the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:7). When you trust in Christ as Savior, then you can be “born again.” God will give you a new heart. David understood this truth even in the Old Testament period. He prayed in Ps. 51:10, “Create in me a clean heart, O God...”¹³ The Holy Spirit will also be given to the believer, and He can not only change our sinful hearts, but He can also give us the power to reject sin and do what is right.

Furthermore, the Word of God cleanses us as well. Jesus prayed in John 17:17, “Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.” He also said in John 15:3, “You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.” Likewise, Ps. 119:9 & 11 says, “How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word.... Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You!” This is the real cure for the sin nature of man. So by means of a cleansed and changed heart, the power of the Holy Spirit, and the guidance of God’s Word, let us resist the temptation to commit such sins spoken of in vv.21-22.

Conclusion: Are you going to accept the biblical diagnosis for the problems that mankind is facing? Will you reject the idea that sin is due to outward factors, and accept the fact that sin is primarily due to our own sinful hearts? Will you turn to Christ for the real cure for the sin problem of man? Will you repent of your sin and place your faith in Him? Will you confess Christ as your Savior today, not just with your lips, but from your heart? Then you will be born again and receive the Holy Spirit. By the power of the new life, and the power of the Holy Spirit, you can live right in the sight of God. Commit to learning the Word of God. It will also cleanse your life of sin and help you live right. Take the step you need to take today to deal with the sin problem with *inward* cleansing!

Sources: William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible Series: Matthew* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975); Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971); Stephen Felker, *Devotional & Explanatory Notes on the Entire Bible* (Col. Hghts, VA: Published by Author), 2024; David E. Garland, *The NIV Application Commentary: Mark* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996); Oliver B. Greene, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, Vol. 3, (Greenville, SC: The Gospel Hour, Inc., 1971); William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Mark* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1975); H.A. Ironside, *Expository Notes on the Gospel of Mark* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1948); J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 4 (Pasadena, CA: Thru The Bible Radio, 1983); G. Campbell Morgan, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming. H. Revell, 1929); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 5:80] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2021); J.C. Ryle (1816-1900), *Mark: Expository Thoughts on the Gospels* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1993); Jerry Vines (notes from his sermon on this text); Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Diligent: Mark* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1987); Kenneth S. Wuest’s *Word Studies From the Greek New Testament*, Vol. 1, Mark (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1950). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

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¹³ In Ezek. 36:26 God says, “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.”