

Sermon outline and notes:

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Mark 7:14-23 “Jesus and Human Sin”

Intro. Now in our text today the Lord Jesus picks up with what we read about in v.2, “Now when they saw some of His disciples eat bread with defiled, that is, with unwashed hands, they found fault.” The religious leaders of Israel found fault with Jesus because of some very basic faults of their own. They had 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 a hand-washing ceremony. But the religious leaders had made an even more fundamental error. They misunderstood the nature of human sin as well.

So our Lord was going to correct a terrible misunderstanding that the Jews acquired over the centuries concerning sin. Because of their ceremonial laws which dealt with externals, 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. And some religious people tend to focus mainly on externals. 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.

Likewise, in secular society people focus on the externals rather than the real problem of the heart. They try to cure the symptoms of sin rather than the sin problem.

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

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 effort. Yet modern society has largely rejected this biblical doctrine, & even the biblical concept of sin. They have largely destroyed the concept of absolute moral truth. They rarely acknowledge that anything is sinful. And they say that if there is such thing as sin, it is relative to the situation. And when people do bad things, they say it is due to external factors, like environment, or upbringing, or lack of the right kind of education. Yet the Bible teaches that the fundamental problem with man is his own sin nature.

So this morning I want you to have a better understanding of the true nature of sin. 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. 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 spiritual truth. 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. Jesus was disappointed

that His own chosen pupils were still under the spell of Pharisaic theological tradition and outlook. They still viewed sin mainly as a matter of external defilement. They had been with Jesus for over 2 years now and still not fully accepted His teachings.

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 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."

So in light of this truth, Jesus said to the multitude in the last of v.14b, "Hear Me, everyone, and understand." Notice that the first step is this: You have a responsibility to hear what Jesus has to say. This responsibility to hear is reinforced in v.16, where Jesus says, "If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear!" Make it a point to listen carefully to the Word of God this morning.

Then you have a responsibility to understand the Word of God. If you fail to hear & understand the Word of God, 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. But with some help from my sister & teacher, I finally got a good grasp of math, and from then on I understood it & did well in math. It took both effort on my part & outside help to gain a good understanding.

So are you ready to listen, & gain a true understanding of the true nature of sin? 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 & knowledgeable Bible teachers. I can help you understand God's Word. Furthermore, in reading the Bible and hearing sermons, everything depends on the spirit in which we read and hear. We need to have a humble, teachable spirit.

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

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. Sin is compared to missing the mark on a target. Sin is 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, & condemns us. Now I'm going to show you that sin is a problem with the human heart. Before we get into that truth, I must show you that:

A. The Sin Problem Is Not Primarily External – Jesus said in v.15a, "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?"

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 eater. Yet this statement of Jesus went beyond the issue of unwashed hands. The Jews were taught by the Law of Moses that eating certain foods would defile them. About 200 years before Christ, the ruler Antiochus Epiphanes demanded that the Jews should eat pork. Hundreds of Jews died rather than doing so.

The Jews were also defiled by touching something dead, or touching someone with a bodily discharge. And while you were unclean, you were barred from the tabernacle or temple. You could not approach God.

Yet the Jews failed to understand that these laws against eating certain foods, or touching anything unclean, was simply part of their spiritual training. God was using a physical illustration to help them understand spiritual truths. You see, the concept of physical uncleanness was intended to illustrate spiritual uncleanness. They were being taught the difference between what is clean & unclean; what is holy & what is common. They were taught to discern the difference between what is right & wrong. Physical defilements were intended to illustrate that sin makes us spiritually unclean. They were taught that our sin separates us from a holy God. God was preparing the Jews to long for a Savior, who would save them from their real defilement, which comes from the sin nature of man.¹ So Jesus is teaching that the sin problem is not really a matter of external defilement.

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?” Though the NKJV attributes that comment to Jesus, I believe it is the inspired evangelist’s interpretation of the significance of Jesus’ saying regarding ceremonial verses real 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, “What God has cleansed you must not call common” or “unclean” (Acts 11:9). In that context God was showing Peter animals that were unclean according to Mosaic Law, yet God told him to kill & eat because Old Testament dietary laws had been abolished under the New Covenant. 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, & are no longer needed.

Keep in mind here that Jesus is not speaking about what will or will not make you healthy, but what will or will not make you holy. It is obvious that there are certain things that you can put in your body that will immediately, or over time, harm your health. So don’t use this as an excuse to pig out on unhealthy food. Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, & you should take care of it. Yet it is not because of something you eat or touch that makes you a sinner.

Jesus gives the reason for His statement in v.19, “because it does not enter his heart but his stomach, and is eliminated.” The NKJV doesn’t bother to translate the word for where bodily waste is eliminated. The main point is that our food does not enter the heart & 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. Of course, when Jesus uses the word “heart,” He is speaking of the inner spirit of man, not the physical organ that pumps blood.

Yet in spite of this teaching of Jesus, we still have denominations & cults that still command their followers not to eat certain foods. They still enforce some of the Old Testament dietary laws, & add to them. Their religion is largely a matter of externals, & they still cling to their traditions.

¹ These laws also tended to separate the Jews from other peoples, which would help protect them from the terrible influences of ungodly people.

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 – Jesus said in the last of v.15, “the things which come out of him, those are the things that 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. 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.” Our thoughts, our words, & our actions that originate from within 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. Moses made it clear in Deuteronomy that God wanted love and obedience to come from the heart, and not be merely outward obedience to rules. For example, God commanded Israel in Deut. 6:5 that they were to “love the LORD [their] God with all [their] heart...” (Cf. Dt. 10:12; 30:20). 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 ought to remember this in the training and education of children. In all our management we must never forget that the seeds of all mischief and wickedness are in their hearts. They inherited the sin nature from you! As a result, they carry within them a heart ready for any sin, and until that heart is changed they are not safe, whatever we do. Bad companions are a great evil to be avoided as much as possible, but no bad companion teaches a boy or girl half as much sin as their own hearts will suggest to them. If parents were half as diligent in praying for their children’s conversion as they are in keeping them from bad company, their children would turn out far better than they do.

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

III. SIN MANIFESTS ITSELF IN THOUGHTS & ACTIONS

How do we know that man is sinner by nature? Well Jesus said you will know a tree by its fruit. You know a dog by its bark. We know man has a sin nature because it always, without exception, manifests itself in sinful thoughts & actions. In vv. 21-22 Jesus gives examples of the attitudes and actions that really defile a man. I’ll guarantee you that if you read the Sunday paper, you will find that this is what came out of man during the last twenty-four hours:

A. Evil Thoughts² – At the head of the black list of our heart’s contents stand “evil (*kakos*) thoughts.” Thoughts are the parents of words and deed. Before we commit the act of sin, we first have the attitude of sin. What a person says within his heart is tremendously important, probably often even more important than what he says audibly (Prob. 23:7). Furthermore, this is

² The Greek word is similar to “dialogue” (*dialogismos*).

one example of how a person who appears to be outwardly righteous can sin without people knowing it.

B. Adulteries – 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. It seems quite evident that Tiger Woods transgressed this fundamental law of God, & deeply hurt his wife & children.

C. Fornications – This refers to sexual sin in general, which has become very widespread in our society. It includes rape, reading of pornographic literature, premarital sexual intercourse, etc. Many young people today are engaging in what is called "sexting." They exchange sexual text messages & pictures. This is a practice of the sin nature.

D. Murders – This is a terrible sin. Yet you may say, "I've never done that." Remember, according to Jesus, hatred is murder in the heart. Also, there have been over 40,000,000 innocent babies whose lives have been snuffed out because of legalized abortion.

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

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 bring others down to their sinful level as well. This is behind peer pressure today.

H. Deceit – People lie & practice other forms of deceit all too often. It was by deceit that the leaders of the Jews planned to bring about Christ's death. That deceit is very common is clear from Jn. 1:47. The Greeks deceived the Trojans with the wooden horse. False advertisement is one form of deceit. How many times have you deceived someone this past week?

I. Lewdness – The term (*aselgeia*) stresses the lack of self-control that characterized the person who gives free play to his perverse & sinful impulses. Often this type of shameless behavior even shocks normal decency. In some cities they have so-called gay pride parades. They openly manifest perversity without shame.

J. An Evil (*poneros*) Eye – Have you ever had someone give you the evil eye? Have you ever given someone an "evil eye"? This is perhaps referring to a person who is looking for malicious mischief. Or it refers to a look of hatred & animosity. Or it refers to envy, looking on the success and happiness of another in such a way that it would cast an evil spell upon them if it could. Our English word envy comes from the Latin in-video, meaning "to look against."

K. Blasphemy – When directed to people, it refers to slander, defamation of character. People who gossip often engage in slander.

L. Pride – The Greek word (*huperephania*) literally means, “to show one’s self above.” 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 and lack of brains; it means moral folly, not the brainless fool, but the man who is playing the fool. 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.

Notice again, that Jesus says that these things come from the heart. These sins are potential for every sinful heart, before they become a reality. 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, & the restraint of public opinion. But everyone has the root of every sin inside.

How humble we ought to be, when we read these verses! He sees in each one of us countless evils which the world never sees at all, for He reads our hearts. Surely of all sins to which we are liable, self-righteousness is the most unreasonable and unbecoming.

Furthermore, as we prepare to observe the Lord’s Supper, you are to confess your sins & receive forgiveness from the Lord. Have you violated any of these sins?

So what’s the solution? If the real problem with man is his sin nature, 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 the outside. You can join a church, be baptized, take communion, attend every Sunday, and make some outward changes in behavior, but that does not cure the sin problem.

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 try to clean up this bad habit, and work on that bad habit, 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?

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. We are to place our faith in Christ, for the Bible says, “with the heart man believes unto righteousness.” And the Bible says that the blood of Christ can “cleanse us from all sin.” When you trust in

Christ as Savior, then you can be “born again.” God will give you a new heart. What people should do, therefore is, pray for a new, a transformed heart, and not pay so much attention to things like unrinsed hands, or other outward rituals. Even David understood this truth in the Old Testament period. He prayed in Psa. 51:10, “Create in me a clean heart, O God....” That Gospel contains a complete provision for all the needs of our poor defiled natures. The Holy Spirit will also be given to the believer, and He can change our sinful hearts. He can give us the power to reject sin, & 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, Psa. 119:9 says, “How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word.” Then v.11 says, “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.

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 & 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 & 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); 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); 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* [CD-ROM] (Ontario: Timnathserah Inc., 1996); 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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