

Mark 7:14-23 “Unclean” comes from within.

Jesus had just finished a discussion with the Pharisees that began when the Pharisees observed the disciples of Jesus eating without first going through the ceremonial washings that were expected of every Jew. Jesus responded to them by quoting Isaiah that the people honor God with their lips but not with their hearts. He was implying that the Pharisees honored God by keeping their made-up rituals but not with their heart commitment to Him.

Mark 7:14 tells us that following that discussion, “**Jesus called the crowd to him.**” Mark added that Jesus said, “**Listen to me, everyone, and understand this.**” That was Jesus way of asking them to pay close attention because what He was about to say was tremendously important. That was the way an Old Testament prophet announced an important message from God and everyone knew that. Read Mark 7:15.

Jesus was making a powerful statement to the Jews of His day. He said to them that what one eats, even if eaten with ceremonially unclean hands, cannot make a person unclean. We cannot begin to imagine how radical that teaching was for Jesus’ day. The Jewish people of His day not only had all sorts of rules and regulations regarding what one could or not eat, but how it was to be eaten.

The truth that Jesus spoke is an important one for us today. Jesus said, “**it is what comes out of a person that defiles them.**” Later Jesus further clarified this for His disciples, Read Mark 7: 20, 21, and 23.

If the concept outlined by Jesus were radical for His day, it is equally radical for our day. We live in a day when society believes that man is basically good, even when everything we read in the daily paper tells us differently. Society tells us that evil does not inherently dwell in individuals. Since we obviously see improper behavior all the time, society has found various ways to explain it. Sin, in our society, is the result of environmental factors or some other external force such as poor family situation, poverty or not being treated fairly by society. Our society says all we need to bring out the goodness of man is to change the environment, better educate or pass laws that will legislate morality. When we can’t explain it via environment etc. we call it a disease which eliminates all responsibility for it. The problem is that sin seems to abound more and more.

To understand sin, we must go back to Genesis 3 and the choice of Adam and Eve to disobey God. The theological term for the occasion of Adam’s sin is called “*the fall.*” Until Adam and Eve disobey God they experienced perfect fellowship with Him. Sin brought various consequences, including being cast out of the garden, having to struggle at work to earn a living, and having difficulty in child birth.

One critical result of sin is what is called in theology “*depravity.*” Depravity is the condition whereby we are prone to sinning instead of doing what is right and good. The moment Adam and Eve sinned, human depravity set in. The Bible teaches that before Adam and Eve ate of the

forbidden fruit they legitimately had the option of either sinning or not sinning. Once they sinned by eating that forbidden fruit, they no longer had that option. Man became sinful or depraved and that is all he is ultimately capable of doing. Read Psalm 51:5, Jeremiah 17:9, Romans 3:23, and Romans 5:12. Not only is man sinful but he sees nothing wrong with it. Read Proverbs 14:12.

Man's sinful condition is passed on to him at conception. It doesn't have to be learned, it is what we are. There is literally nothing we can do about having a sinful nature. Some people keep it under control better than others, but we are all born with it and live with it. The Bible teaches that not only are we born with sinful natures, we act in sinful ways. Sin is an inner problem and there is no way to change that without changing the heart. There is no way to change the heart apart from Jesus. What our society needs is Jesus.

In addition to having a sinful nature, man's depravity also means that he does not understand God. Read I Corinthians 2:14. That is the reason it is so difficult to witness and why, if we are going to see lives changed, it will only happen because we have appealed to the Holy Spirit to work through us. The only way through the barrier of depravity is via the ministry of the Holy Spirit. That is why Paul, when he wrote about reaching the lost, stressed in I Corinthians 3:6, **"I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow."**

Returning to Mark 7, remember Jesus had invited the crowd to listen carefully to what He was saying. The disciples recognized that this was something they should pay careful attention to, but they honestly had no idea what Jesus was driving at. Verse 17 tells us that Jesus left the crowd and entered a house and the disciples asked Jesus what the meaning of that parable was. Verse 18 shows Jesus a bit frustrated with them and asking, **"Are you so dull?"** Part of the problem was that this was not a parable but straightforward truth that they just did not get. Jesus then explained it to them. First, He reviewed in verses 18 and 19, the idea that it was not what went into a man that made him unclean. That was certainly an issue for the Jews of Jesus' day, so Mark added a parenthesis in verse 18 to explain its significance. He wrote, **"(In saying this, Jesus declared all foods clean.)"**

Then in verse 19 Jesus returned to the issue that it is what comes out of a man that makes him unclean. Jesus said, according to verse 21, **"For it is from within, out of a person's heart, that evil thoughts come."** Jesus got even more specific as He proceeded to list 12 examples of what evil thoughts lead to. Sinful thoughts lead to sinful actions which is why as Christians we need to be extremely careful what we allow our eyes to see and our ears to hear. We won't look at that list in detail but if you look it over sometime, you will see that of the 12 items, the first 6 are plural and the second 6 are singular and there is a parallelism between the first 6 and the last 6.

Jesus concluded by saying, according to verse 23, **"All these evils come from inside and defile a person."**

The point is very clear. Man's problem is his heart problem which was a Hebrew way of saying that man's problem was at the core of his being. Man's problem is his depravity as a result of Adam's sin.

That is serious but not as serious as it would be had God not acted on our behalf. The answer to our depravity is God's provision for our redemption. Read Ezekiel 36:25-27, Jeremiah 31:33 and II Corinthians 5:17.

Man's problem is what theologians call "depravity." We are all depraved because of Adam's sin but God has provided a way out, and that way is through Jesus. The gospel offers us a new spirit, a new birth, a new heart, a new creation. Apart from Jesus mankind is totally lost. As R. Kent Hughes puts it, "We can polish the outside. We can educate ourselves. We can do 'good' things. But none of these things will really change us. We need Christ's life."

Jesus said, **"What comes out of a person is what defiles them. For it is from within, out of a person's heart, that evil thoughts come."** Our society desperately needs to learn that and stop trying to make individuals better by improving their environment or changing the definition of sin. America needs Jesus and we need to begin sharing Him in the community in which He has placed us.