

Internal or External
 Mark 7:14-23
 ABC 4/30/23

Whether humans are born good or evil has been debated for centuries. Aristotle argued that morality is learned & we're born as *amoral creatures* while Freud considered infants a moral blank slate. Augustine believed all people are born broken & selfish. Anyone who's read *Lord of the Flies* expects kids to be sociopaths. Maybe the 2 most famous opposing views on this debate are those of Hobbes & Rousseau. Hobbes describes humans as *nasty & brutish*, needing society & rules to reign in their instincts. Rousseau argued that man would be gentle & pure without the corruption of greed & inequality caused by the class system imposed by society.¹ What is the popular thinking today? A quick internet search will tell you: *Our nature is inherently good.*² *We are hard-wired for goodness.*³ *Augustine & Hobbes were wrong ... we are fundamentally "good" creatures.*⁴ While most people think humans are basically good, Jesus gives a true view of human nature as we return to Mk 7. Because all people are sinners (Rom 3:23), we're all born with a nature that's already corrupt (Ps 51:5; Rom 5:12, 19). The problem isn't outside of us but within us. Our text today (14-23) is a continuation of the confrontation we looked at last week (1-13). When challenged by the scribes & Pharisees as to why His disciples didn't comply with the ceremonial washings they required, Jesus dismissed their traditions, called them hypocrites, & told them they were **invalidating the word of God by your tradition** (13). Jesus pulls in the crowd & exposes why the Pharisees' question was flawed to begin with. These men from Jerusalem, despite their great learning, had no true understanding of sin. In their minds, the act of washing your hands before eating, provided a righteousness which was sufficient to receive the blessing of God. This shows how little they understood the law they were claiming to defend. Jesus now tells the religious leaders, the crowd, & His own disciples that real defilement doesn't come from the outside but from the inside, from the heart. Outward conformity means nothing unless it comes from a changed heart. As the oral traditions took precedence over Scripture, the religious leaders

¹ Tom Aglietti, *Are we born good or evil? (naughty or nice)*, www.bbcearth.com/news/are-we-born-good-or-evil-naughty-or-nice

² Gustavo Razzetti, www.fearlessculture.design/blog-posts/is-the-human-nature-good-or-evil

³ David G. Allan, *Breaking news alert: People are inherently good, nonviolent*, www.cnn.com/2018/12/11/health/nonviolence-good-wisdom-project/index.html

⁴ Adrian F. Ward, *Scientists Probe Human Nature*, www.scientificamerican.com/article/scientists-probe-human-nature-and-discover-we-are-good-after-all/

concluded that sin & wickedness were external things, not internal ones. If they could stay away from anything unclean, they'd be right before God. In their minds, defilement happened from the outside. But Jesus informs them that defiling happens from the inside. *The heart of the problem is a problem of the heart.* Jesus wants us all to know that we are the problem. Jesus wants us to understand that sin & its defiling influence comes from within us. The problem is internal. Not washing your hands in a particular way doesn't defile you. You're defiled because of your sinful heart. What you eat doesn't defile you.

1. Jesus & the Crowd (14-16) **14**

Jesus calls the people near in order to explain what He'd just said about their traditions, God's Word, & defilement. This is important enough that Jesus uses the only 2 commands in this passage: **listen to Me & understand**. In other words, *listen carefully & pay attention to what I'm about to say*. He says this not because what He's about to say is complicated or hard to understand but because this truth will be hard to accept. This message is directed to **all of you**. Everyone there & then & everyone here & now. This is a universal truth. This is one of the most revolutionary truths of Scriptures. What is it? The problem is not outside of you, but inside you. You, the real you, is the problem. **15**

The OT declared certain foods to be defiling, but Jesus says nothing that enters a person's body can render them unclean. Wait a minute! Is Jesus doing the very thing He accused the religious leaders of doing, elevating Himself above the law of God? The answer is, *yes & no*. Jesus is elevating Himself above the OT law, but contrary to the religious leaders, He has the authority to do so. His authority over the food laws is related to who He is & what He's accomplishing. As Jesus declared earlier, **He is Lord even of the Sabbath** (2:28). As the divine Son of Man & Son of God, Jesus alone exercises the right of God with reference to the OT law. Since God instituted it, He has the authority to modify it. Additionally, Jesus is inaugurating a new covenant which means that everything is changing. The law is coming to fulfillment through His words & deeds (Mt 5:17). With the coming of the kingdom of God, the law will no longer be written on tablets of stone but on the hearts of God's people (Jer 31:33). They'll be filled, empowered, & led by His Spirit (Is 44:3; Ezek

11:19; 36:26; 39:29; Joel 2:28). The gospel is something radically new & transforming.⁵ We see this as Paul says that **nothing is unclean in itself** (Rom 14:14). Such external regulations are no longer applicable to Christians since **the kingdom of God is not eating & drinking, but righteousness & peace & joy in the Holy Spirit** (Rom 14:17). The greater principle behind the law is to love God with heart, soul, mind, & strength & to love others as yourself (Mk 12:30–31).

Israel's God-given rituals & regulations were in the law. Certain foods were forbidden (Lev 11:1–47) & certain medical issues made a person unclean. But those things were intended as symbols of the true nature of man's sinful heart & his desperate need for divine cleansing. It gave a powerful picture of the fact that every sinner requires divine forgiveness & internal cleansing before coming into God's presence.⁶ The idea that external acts, like observing dietary laws or performing ceremonial washings could provide salvation from sin was utterly alien to God's law but was at the core of the Pharisees' traditions. God gave the law so that as Israel was internally devoted to God, it would show itself in these ways. The NT would continue to confirm what Jesus is teaching here. In fact, we find in Heb 10:1, **For the Law, since it has *only* a shadow of the good things to come & not the very form of things, can never, by the same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make perfect those who draw near.** Jesus isn't ripping up the Law. He's not taking God's Word & saying you can forget it. He's not doing that because the author of Hebrew's says the law's a good thing, but it's just a shadow of the good things to come. Paul would further emphasize this in Col 2:16-17. **Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day--things which are a *mere* shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.** This is what Jesus was doing. The Pharisees believed improperly washed hands defiled food & thus defiled the eater. The defilement, as they saw it, worked its way from the outside to the inside. Jesus says the very opposite. It isn't what goes into a person but what comes out that defiles them. Understand, no Jew in Jesus' day believed that. This was radical & shocking. What Jesus is doing is showing that people are unclean because they have sinful

⁵ Mark L. Strauss, *Mark*, pp 307–308

⁶ John MacArthur, *Mark 1–8*, p 352

hearts, not because they don't wash their hands. The flip side of this is that people with sinful hearts can't be rendered clean just because they wash their hands according to the rules of the Pharisees. The key to understanding their error is to see that they externalized sin; sin is what we do. But as Jesus points out, sin is internal; we are sinners. Because we have a sinful nature, we sin. Unless the human condition is dealt with at its core, we can't be holy before God. The traditions of the Pharisees can't do anything to fix the human condition. Because the Pharisees have a flawed view of sin, they have a flawed view of righteousness as well. When Jesus says there is nothing outside **the man** He's giving a generic & comprehensive reference to all humans. This is true for every one of us. There's nothing outside of us which dirties us spiritually, particularly food (Mt 15:17). The food you eat doesn't defile you, it doesn't make you unclean before God. The stuff outside of you doesn't condemn you before God. Jesus makes sure we get it by saying, **there is nothing outside the man which can defile him** (15). No food can cause you to be unclean. **Defile** originally described what was of little value, something *common*. In the NT it means to be unclean, polluted, or made profane. Defilement is moral & spiritual, not physical. Food cannot defile you. Then what does? **The things which proceed out of the man** (15). The problem is inside, it's internal. Jesus doesn't define exactly what's inside of you yet, but He's very clear, you are the problem. You need some serious help. Whereas the one external thing, food, doesn't defile you, there are many internal **things** coming from within you that do defile you. It's not just one issue, but many. Jesus says these **things ... proceed out of the man**. He's making it very clear that the **things** that corrupt you aren't an import but an export. We are depraved sinners. As the puritans said, *Adam's fall, sinned we all*. We are sinners by nature. We aren't sinners because we eat certain food. Nor are we righteous because we wash our hands in a certain way or avoid eating certain foods. Judaism had turned defilement into an external issue, but Jesus says it's an internal reality. That shouldn't have surprised them. They all should've known that God's priority was the heart. Remember the choosing of King David? Samuel was impressed with David's older brother, but God told Samuel, *Don't be focused on the external*. 1 Sam 16:7 says, **Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the**

outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart. God didn't say this just once. It's throughout the OT. Even before Israel entered the Promised Land God said to them,

What does the LORD your God require from you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways & love Him, & to serve the LORD your God with all your heart & with all your soul, & to keep the Lord's commandments & His statutes which I am commanding you today for your good? ... So circumcise your heart, & stiffen your neck no longer (Dt 10:12-13, 16).

Later, Joshua challenged the nation, **Now therefore, put away the foreign gods which are in your midst, & incline your hearts to the Lord, the God of Israel** (Josh 24:23). The Jews knew God desired their hearts but they turned their faith into external rituals. They became a people who would die for their traditions, since keeping those rules defined their salvation. Following the external traditions became their idea of internal salvation. Like giving a new paint job to a dying beater, they were merely trying to fix their appearance. In the face of that, Jesus makes this revolutionary statement that nothing going into a man can make him unclean. This is shocking. *Things* can't be unclean or clean spiritually. Only **people** can be defiled & what defiles a person is the product of his own **heart**. Spiritual uncleanness has nothing to do with what we take into our body but has everything to do with what comes out of our hearts. To get right with God we must have a right heart. To get a right heart, only Jesus is the right help. This is important to understand. **16**

The manuscript evidence suggests vs 16 was probably not in the original text by Mark. But it fits with the Lord's commands to **listen & understand**. We need to accept this truth. This is crucial for us to hear. But everyone doesn't understand yet, so look what happens next.

2. Jesus & the Disciples (17-23) Matthew tells us the Pharisees were offended by what Jesus taught. But as much as they were offended, the disciples were confused. They struggled to understand so Jesus takes them away from the crowd & religious leaders to teach them privately. **17-18**

Away from the crowd, the disciples are in shock & Matthew tells us it was Peter who asked on behalf of the other disciples. They wanted Jesus to explain what He meant by saying that external food doesn't defile you. They'd been taught & believed that very thing since childhood. *What do you mean only heart issues can defile a person?* They viewed vs 15 as a parable or puzzle & want to know the real meaning. It can't mean what we they think it means. What Jesus said goes against everything Judaism stood for. Jesus responds with either surprise, *Really, you're that dense?* Or

merely a question, *You still don't get it?* Either way, it was a mild rebuke after all the instruction they've received. *You've been with Me for 2 years! Are you still so lacking in understanding?* That His own disciples were still under the spell of external, traditional thought must have been discouraging to Him. They failed to understand what should have been obvious. Jesus asks, *Don't you understand?* meaning they should have been able to get this. Jesus says this isn't a mystery which requires a revelation, this is an obvious truth you can **understand** if you'd think about it. What should be obvious to them & to us? Food is not the issue. We realize food can be bad for us physically but what we eat doesn't affect our spiritual life. (I'll save gluttony for later.) **18-19a**

Mark is writing to a Gentile audience who may have been wondering why Christian teaching didn't include following the OT dietary laws. Mark explains that when Jesus rejects the pharisaical understanding of clean & unclean, He is, in effect, laying down the rule which should settle the controversy over the dietary laws which were still dividing Christians. Why doesn't food defile you spiritually? Because food doesn't go into the heart. It goes into the stomach, is processed, & eliminated. Food goes in one end & out the other. Food enters the mouth, & ends up, literally, *in the latrine*. Food passes through physically, but doesn't affect you spiritually. It doesn't touch your heart. What you put in your mouth never enters your heart, the core & center of your being. Therefore, how can it render someone unclean or defiled? It can't. Now Mark adds a shocking footnote. **19b**

When Mark was writing his gospel with the influence of Peter, this issue of eating & not eating certain foods was still a problem. It was deeply ingrained into the thinking of all faithful Jews. It was difficult to embrace Jesus' teaching on this. The Jews had a restricted diet, primarily to set them apart from other nations. It was an external symbol of an inward need. These laws were to be a picture of their desperate need for internal cleansing. But they'd slowly turned these laws into external rules to keep in order to make them supposedly right with God. These laws & traditions had become more important than the meaning behind them. As the Jews interpreted the dietary laws, they believed they were clean before God because of what they refused to eat & how they washed their hands. As a result, the matter of food was so ingrained in their thinking that even

years after Pentecost, Peter still couldn't accept the idea that all foods were now clean.

Remember Acts 10 & Peter's rooftop revelation?

Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour to pray. But he became hungry & was desiring to eat; but while they were making preparations, he fell into a trance; & he saw the sky opened up, & an object like a great sheet coming down, lowered by four corners to the ground, & there were in it all kinds of four-footed animals & crawling creatures of the earth & birds of the air. A voice came to him, 'Get up, Peter, kill & eat!' But Peter said, 'By no means, Lord, for I have never eaten anything unholy & unclean.' Again a voice came to him a second time, 'What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy.' This happened 3 times... (9-16) until Peter began to understand it.

Years later he slipped back into his old way of thinking & had to be confronted by Paul.

When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For prior to the coming of certain men from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he began to withdraw & hold himself aloof, fearing the party of the circumcision (the Jews). The rest of the Jews joined him in hypocrisy, with the result that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy (Gal 2:11-13).

Paul warned in 1 Tim 4, **the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith... what will they do? Things including to advocate abstaining from foods which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe & know the truth (1, 3).** Food isn't defiling. Food is not the issue. It isn't what you put in your mouth, but what erupts out of your heart that defiles you. The disciples struggled to understand this. So do we. Many of us blame the problems we have as coming from outside of us: It's the way we were raised, the politicians, lack of education, or whatever. Let's fix society. Let's reinstall prayer in schools & post the 10 Commandments everywhere. That's all external. We all tend to look at the outside as the **problem**. Jesus is teaching us the problem is within, we are the problem. We are defiled by what's inside of us. I'm sure you've seen the Allstate Insurance *Mayhem* commercials. In a spiritual sense, that's you. You are *Mayhem*. You are your own worst enemy. **20-21a**

Is that clear enough? Defilement comes out of your heart. It's what's within you which causes you to be separated from the holy God. Defiling things proceed out of the heart, out of the inner, moral nature of all humans. You are your own worst enemy because you are a sinner at heart. Take a reality check. Look at your heart. You know Jesus' teaching here is true from your own experience. Who has lied to you more than you have? Who has hurt you more than you've hurt yourself? Who has deceived you into sinning most often? Jer 17:9 says, **The heart is more deceitful than all else &**

is desperately sick; who can understand it? Jesus' words fit perfectly with our own experience. Though some of you are pretty on the outside, all of us are ugly on the inside. The heart is man's most real self & from that heart come ugly attitudes, ugly talk, ugly thoughts, & ugly behavior. Nobody makes you do ugly but you. It's so ugly Jesus continues in vss 21-22.

Jesus gives examples of ugly sins that come from the heart, sins that reside in each of us. Out of the cesspool of the corrupt heart vomits evil actions & evil attitudes. The 1st 6 are plural referring to sinful actions & the 2nd 6 are singular describing evil attitudes. Jesus opens up your chest like a surgeon & shows you these deadly poisons coming out of your heart. He begins with an overall sin of the heart, **evil thoughts**. Every outward act of sin is preceded by an inward act of choice. He's showing us the source of our bad behavior. Our hearts contain **evil thoughts**, which are bad reasonings, wicked ponderings, perverted imaginings, & an inner dialog you have with yourself over things that are sinful. That's why managing what you think about is crucial. Why? Sin must be stopped 1st in the mind. Prov 23:7 tells us, **For as he thinks within himself, so he is**. How is this done? Paul tells us, **Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence & if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things** (Phil 4:8). It's a battle of the mind. Then Jesus adds **fornications**, which is a wide word covering every kind of sexual sin. All of this starts in the heart. Next **thefts**. This includes all kinds of theft: shoplifting, loafing on the job, robbery, mugging, squandering what God has given us, cheating on taxes, & withholding from God what is rightfully His. **Murders** is next. Whether imagining it in our hearts or actually committing it, murder begins within. Jesus already taught that hatred is murder (Mt 5:21-22). **Adulteries** are the violation of the marriage vow which always starts in the mind & is desired in the heart. As Jesus said in Mt 5:28, **everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart**. **Deeds of coveting** comes from 2 Greek words which mean to have more. It's been called the love of having, the ravenous appetite for that which isn't ours. It's the passion to gain things because you see happiness & contentment in things not in God. & all of it starts within you. *Deeds of wickedness* is next. This is the one who, in their heart, desires to harm others in any way.

Then He gives 6 sinful inner drives. **Deceit**, a word for trap or snare & was used to describe the deceitful gift of a Wooden Horse for Troy. **Deceit** is a heart full of crafty, cunning, & clever treachery. **Sensuality** could be translated as *debauchery* or *lewdness*. It's a heart that resents all discipline & restraints. This is a person who gives free play to their sinful impulses. **Envy** is to look with ill-will at another person because of what they have. Literally, it's *the evil eye* that views another person with grudging displeasure. Whenever jealousy & envy can be distinguished, jealousy is the fear of losing what one has, envy is the displeasure of seeing someone else have something you want.⁷ **Slander** is literally *blasphemy*, meaning abusive speech. It's used to describe the act of defaming the character of another in your heart, then with your words, either directly or behind their back. It's hurtful speech. In Mt 12:34 Jesus tells the Pharisees, **You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart.** Next **pride**, which means *showing oneself above*. It's a person who has contempt for everyone except himself. It's the evil tendency to think oneself as better, more able, & greater than others. It's to think only of self. You see it in your heart when you secretly compare yourself to others. Finally, **foolishness**. This doesn't mean lack of brains, but someone who chooses to play the fool because he's playing with sin. They're morally & spiritually desensitized. Is this descriptive of your heart? Are these sins inside you? Yes! Like a hornet's nest painted like a piñata, just one hit & it all comes flying out. Every area of life is tainted with sin, which originates in our heart. This is radical stuff if you think that humankind is intrinsically good. No physical act of ceremonial cleansing or external ritual can purify a depraved heart. Sinners need to be given a new nature, a new heart. Only the Spirit of God can create that (Jer 31:33; Jn 3:3-8).⁸ Jesus concludes, **23**.

Proceed is in the present tense meaning evil is constantly proceeding out & defiling us. Jesus is proving to His disciples, & to us, that we're not made sinful because of foods or washings or ceremonies. He's proving we have a major heart problem. All this sinful defilement comes directly from our inner being, our nature, meaning we desperately need inner cleansing. No religion,

⁷ William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Mark*, p 288

⁸ MacArthur, p 358

prayers, Bible reading, walking aisles, making decisions, coming to church, or speaking Christianese will clean your heart of sin. Only Jesus can wash you & make you white as snow. Your heart needs heaven's help to be forgiven of sin. Only Christ can do this. You must believe Jesus became a man, lived a perfect life as the God-man, took your place of punishment for sin on the cross, died for your sin, & rose from the dead. When you depend on Him in faith & turn from your sin in repentance, He washes you clean, gives you a new heart, indwells you by His Holy Spirit, & helps you turn from sin & follow Him. Only Christ can help you. You can't give life to your dead, sinful, rock-hard heart. Only He can. Your heart also needs heaven's help to battle with sin. Even though forgiven, cleansed, & delivered from the penalty & power of sin, we still struggle with the presence of sin. True, Christians are **no longer slaves to sin** (Rom 6:6). Therefore, if you feel the stain of sin in your life, there's only one place to be washed. Jesus is the fountain of cleansing & new life. Repent of your sin & confess it. Depend on Jesus. Saturate your life in His Word, give yourself to prayer, to the supportive fellowship of other Christians, reckon yourself dead to sin (Rom 6:11), & live filled with God's Spirit. Go after one sin at a time & see what God will do. Prov 28:26 says, **He who trusts in his own heart is a fool**. Don't trust your own heart, it's evil. Trust God's Word. You just heard God's Word, not some self-help pastoral pep talk. This is God's Word as Jesus taught it & Mark wrote it. God's Word teaches that you are internally rotten, your heart is the source of sin, that you aren't forced to sin by your environment but simply by being a member of the rebellious, sinful human race. Things & people don't corrupt you from the outside, but sinfulness comes from the inside. Own the fact that you are your own worst enemy. Some of you are really pretty on the outside. But all of us are really ugly on the inside. Cleaning up your life, being super religious, keeping rules, being nice, showing compassion, caring for the hurting, showing generosity, attending church, studying the Bible, regular prayer, none of that will wash you internally of the pollution that is inside you. Only one cure is available, it's Jesus. Turn from your sins & depend on Him alone. Put all your hope in Christ dying for your sins on the cross, rising from the dead, & causing you to be born again, which results in you no longer living for yourself, but living for Him, living with Him. All your eggs need to be in His basket. The path to salvation &

sanctification is never external. It's always internal. The Pharisees were always trying to clean up their lives on the outside, on their own, by their own standards & traditions. They refused to turn to Jesus for internal cleansing. So Jesus said to them in Mt 23:25-26, **Woe to you, scribes & Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup & of the dish, but inside they are full of robbery & self-indulgence. You blind Pharisees, first clean the inside of the cup & of the dish, so that the outside of it may become clean also.** It's an internal clean heart that actually causes external change & allows for true growth in Christ. It isn't external issues that cause you to sin but an internal heart that's already corrupted by sin. It's not your environment that's the problem, it's your heart. Your heart needs heaven's help, because you are your own worst enemy. Jesus alone can fix the human problem. This is why He came preaching the kingdom of God & healing the sick. These were His messianic credentials & the proof that He alone has the power to forgive sins. This is why Jesus died for the guilt of our sins upon the cross. This is why God raised Him from the dead for our justification. This is why Jesus gives us the Holy Spirit, not only purifying us from our sins & imputing to us His perfect righteousness, but He'll also create in us both the desire & the power to obey Him. This is how sinful hearts become clean, not because we wash our hands. There is no power in the world which can make a bad heart good. Only the gospel can do that. Jesus said, **Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God (Jn 3:3).** There must be a radical new birth. There must be a new heart. **I will give you a new heart & put a new spirit within you; & I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh & give you a heart of flesh (Ezek 36:26).** Apart from Jesus, the world is desperately lost. It can only be redeemed & saved by Him. There is no other way. We can polish the outside. We can educate ourselves. We can do *good* things. But none of that will really change us. We need Christ's life in us.⁹ This passage drives us to the necessity of the cross. It's impossible for us to achieve acceptance with God by the keeping of the law because of the sinfulness of our hearts. The only hope for us was for God to send His Son who would live with a pure heart; who would perfectly keep God's law; who would be an acceptable sacrifice & redeem us & give us a new heart.

⁹ R. Kent Hughes, *Mark: Jesus, Servant & Savior*, pp 169–170