

## The Gospel According to Mark The Heart of the Problem

Mark 7:14-23

Sunday, October 11, 2020

### Introduction

It's a problem that goes all the way back to the Garden of Eden. All of us are guilty at times of convincing ourselves that our sin is the result of something or someone outside of us. We say things like: *I yelled because he cut me off* or *I lost my temper because I'm under a lot of stress*. Whether we recognize it or not we are often tempted to see the source of our sin as something outside of us instead of something within us (James 4:1-2).

But not only do we fail to recognize the true source of our sin, we are also prone to turning to the wrong solutions for dealing with our sin. Our nature is to try and justify ourselves. We do something outwardly in an attempt atone for our sins and to earn the favor of God.

Thankfully we have the Word of God to help us properly understand both the source and the solution for our sins. In Mark 7:14-23 Jesus makes it clear that the source of our sin is the corruption of our hearts and that there's nothing that we can do to make our to make ourselves clean.

### Setting the Scene – Jesus, the Pharisees and Ritual Purification

In Mark 7:1-13 Jesus is confronted by religious leaders because His disciples were eating without ceremonially cleansing their hands. Once again Jesus and the disciples were not living up to the religious standards of the scribes and Pharisees. Jesus first responds to them by pointing out their hypocrisy and their misuse of the Law of God.

Now, starting in verse 14 He more directly addresses their questions about ritual purification, but not in the way they would have expected.

### Understanding the Source of the Problem (7:14-15)

- **A call to hear (v. 14)** – Before Jesus speaks He addresses the crowd in a way that we have seen several times in the Gospel of Mark. He calls them to hear (truly) and to understand (see Mark 4:3, 9, 12, 23-24).
- **Defilement comes from within, not from without (v. 15)** – After calling for their attention Jesus speaks to the Pharisees question about defilement in a way that undercuts their entire way of thinking.

Their religious system revolved around avoiding defilement and being cleansed from defilement, but now Jesus says that there's nothing outside of a person that can cause defilement.

### A Question and a Rebuke (7:17-18a)

- As is often the case Jesus offers the crowd a parable of sorts without a fuller explanation. And, yet again, Jesus' disciples inquire about the meaning of Jesus' teaching.
- While Jesus rebukes the disciples for their lack of understanding (yet again), He also takes time to teach them. He continues to show patience toward these men who are slow to hear and understand.

### A Fuller Explanation – Unpacking the Source of Defilement (7:18-23)

- **Defilement isn't a matter of what's outside of us (vv. 18b-19) (outward actions do not ultimately defile or cleanse)**
  - The religious system of the day placed a lot of emphasis on outward, physical defilement and ritual purification. But Jesus explains that there's nothing outside of a person that can defile.
  - **A Contradiction of the Old Testament?** While it's true that God identified clean and unclean animals (Lev. 11, Deut. 14) and other rules about purification, these external actions were meant as symbols to remind people of their need for spiritual cleansing. They also served as shadows of things to come (Hebrews 10:1-4). Jesus isn't changing God's plan but pointing out what has always been at the heart of the plan.
  - **Mark's Parenthesis** – In a kind of side note Mark makes says explicitly that Jesus is declaring all food clean. Jesus came, not to abolish the Law, but to fulfill it (Matthew 5:17).
- **Defilement is a matter of the heart (vv. 20-23) (our hearts are corrupt and need cleansing)**
  - While defilement doesn't come from outside, Jesus does acknowledge that we are defiled and in need of cleansing. The source of our defilement is our hearts (Jeremiah 17:9; James 1:13-15). Every person is born with a heart corrupted by sin and in need of inward cleansing. This is the root problem that must be solved.

### Gospel Implications

- **The problem is our heart:** Our need is not outward conformity, but heart transformation (Matthew 23:25-26; Colossians 2:16-3:4).
- **The good news:** Jesus came to cleanse us and to give us new hearts (Hebrews 9:11-15; Hebrews 8-10; Psalm 51:1-12).