

Portrait of an Unbelieving Heart

Mark 7: 14-23

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¹⁴ And he called the people to him again and said to them, “Hear me, all of you, and understand: ¹⁵ There is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him, but the things that come out of a person are what defile him.” ¹⁷ And when he had entered the house and left the people, his disciples asked him about the parable. ¹⁸ And he said to them, “Then are you also without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, ¹⁹ since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled?” (Thus he declared all foods clean.) ²⁰ And he said, “What comes out of a person is what defiles him. ²¹ For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, ²² coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. ²³ All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.”

How should we define the heart?

When Jesus says, “heart” in this passage, he means what the Greek lexicon defines *heart* as “*the seat of physical, spiritual and mental life*” or “*the center and source of whole inner life with its thinking, feeling and volition*”. So, *heart* is not just emotions but what constitutes your affections, your thought process, your will.

Jesus calls a crowd to teach about what defiles the heart. Everything flows out of the heart.

1. The wisdom of Solomon tells us in Proverbs 4:23 “Keep your *heart* with all vigilance, for from *it* flow the springs of life.”
2. Who can say, “I have made my *heart* pure; I am clean from my sin”? Proverbs 20:9
Answer: No one!
3. The *heart* is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?
Jeremiah 17:9

I wonder how many people (even professing Christians) are self-deceived into thinking that they became Christians because they thought were not as bad as others or they were not as sinful as others.

You are a Christian or a disciple of Jesus Christ not because you needed to upgrade your moral compass, or you needed to feel better about yourself or you needed to forget your past and therefore church became a remedy or a safe haven. You are a believer, a disciple of Jesus, a Christian because you once saw how unrighteous, depraved and wretched you were in the sight of a Holy and Righteous God.

Sin is despicable and appalling to God. You know that. But the teaching about how egregious sin is, is not taught enough and therefore, I believe, there are false converts. Man is not somewhat depraved but totally depraved.

So, it is absolutely necessary to teach what Jesus taught his disciples in this passage. Jesus gives us a picture or a portrait of an unbelieving, an unregenerate or an unconverted heart.

To give you a context of where we are in the Gospel of Mark, this is Jesus' second rebuttal in his response to the accusation of the Pharisees.

Last week, we saw that the Pharisees and scribes asked Jesus why his disciples were not washing their hands before they ate bread according to their tradition.

Jesus responds to them by calling them hypocrites and calling their worship vain.

Why? Jesus gives three reasons:

Mark 7:8 – They *abandon* the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men.

Mark 9:9 – They *reject* the commandment of God in order to establish tradition.

Mark 7:13 – They *annul* the word of God by their tradition.

Majoring on traditions brings out legalism, hypocrisy and vain worship. Jesus wants none of that.

Following traditions like hand washing, or ritual, reciting a prayer cannot make the heart clean. Only Jesus can make you clean.

Let us first see what Jesus taught in the form of a parable and then see how he unpacks this parable by explaining it.

Verses 14 and 15.

¹⁴ And he called the people to him again and said to them, “*Hear me, all of you, and understand: ¹⁵ There is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him, but the things that come out of a person are what defile him.*”

The parallel passage in Matthew 15:11 says it this way “*it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but what comes out of the mouth; this defiles a person.*”

Jesus says to the crowd that food does not make your heart unclean or ceremonially impure. The word “defile” has a strong sexual connotation in terms of being unclean or being impure.

So far, in the Gospel of Mark, we saw that Jesus touched a leper and a corpse (Jairus' daughter whom he raised to life.) Jesus met with a Gentile man living in the tombs. All these actions would have rendered him ceremonially unclean. Jesus was even accused of breaking the Sabbath, which was a big deal for the Jewish Temple establishment at that

time and even today. Jesus is emphatic in his teaching to the crowd. He says, “Hear and understand”. Understand what? It is not the external that makes you unclean but the internal. You don’t have to eat Halal or Kosher meat or at least don’t compare those ceremonial laws with being righteous or holy. They are preferences. Last week we saw what Jesus told the Pharisees - Stop the lip service. Stop the hypocrisy. Stop the vanity. Worship God from the heart: in spirit and in truth.

And here is the intriguing part. Jesus’ disciples did not understand this parable at first.

Look at verses 17 and 18.

¹⁷ And when he had entered the house and left the people, his disciples asked him about the parable. ¹⁸ And he said to them, “*Then are you also without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, ¹⁹ since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled?*” (Thus he declared all foods clean.)

Jesus has a mild rebuke for his disciples. Food does not contaminate the heart and soul. Jesus is rather direct and graphic with his explanation. Food that you eat gets into body - into your stomach for digestion. The word used here is *koilian* (I believe we get the English word colon here - meaning large intestine). What happens to stuff in the colon? It is expelled! A word-to-word translation says “it is expelled into the drain” You get the idea.

So, food does not defile the heart. So what defiles the man?

Verses 20 through 23.

²⁰ And he said, “*What comes out of a person is what defiles him. ²¹ For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness.*

²³ *All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.”*

Jesus gives us a list of *thirteen* things that come out of an unconverted heart. And these are not exhaustive. These are symptoms of sin that are natural and native to the unconverted heart. Imagine all the 8 billion people living on this planet. For those who are unconverted, these things are true of them.

Why do think we have so strife, violence and darkness in this world? Because everyone who is unconverted do what is natural to them – sin.

For the converted heart, these things must have been true of you in the past and should be less true as you live your life as a Christian.

Let's see what Jesus says come out from the heart of man

1. *Evil thoughts*

The word used for *thoughts* is “*dia-logizomai*”. *Dia* is “through” and “*logizomai*” is to reason. We get the English word *dialogue* from here. Have you ever reasoned within yourself? A better way to understand *thoughts* is dialogue, reasoning or opinion. Jesus says the unconverted man or woman dialogues, has opinions, reasons within himself or has imaginations that are evil. Your spiritual life does not begin with your emotions or action. It begins with your mind. Paul writes to the church in Rome in Romans chapter 8:7 - “*for the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for he does not submit to God’s law. Indeed, it cannot.*” Flesh simply means the unconverted or unredeemed part of man.

As a believer, you know why reading and meditating on your Bible is key? Because Satan wants your mind. The world wants your mind. Others want your mind. And if your mind is not right, unwholesome emotions and actions will soon follow. But God wants your mind to be right! Give your mind first to God.

2. *Immorality*

This is the word *porneia*. Broadly labeled as sexual immorality. It could mean a heart that is inclined towards all kinds of immoral behavior – whether it is pornography, sex before or outside of marriage and with people of the same sex. As a believer, you must *abstain* or be far from *any* kind of sexual immorality. “*For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God*” 1 Thessalonians 4:1-5. The church in the West for all its boasting about being morally superior is not doing really well in this area. Every so often we hear about some scandal, not in the unbelieving world but in the church world. We must pray with tears that God would spare us from any hint of immorality. Yes. That is the *standard* for Christ’s church. “*But sexual immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints*” Ephesians 5:3

3. *Theft*

This is the word *klepto*. We hear the English word *klepto-mania* – an intense desire to steal. No special explanation needed here but we know the eighth commandment is “You shall not steal”.

4. *Murder*

God will require a reckoning from anyone who sheds blood and takes a life. God told Cain, “your brother’s blood is crying out to me from the ground” (Genesis 4:10). The *sixth* commandment is “You shall not murder”. Jesus taught that anger is equal to murder and deserves the same judgment as murder. Anger is very sinful.

Anger is such a detriment to anyone just not believers. Anger is like half insanity. Proverbs 29:22 *A man of wrath stirs up strife, and one given to anger causes much*

transgression.

Ecclesiastes 7:9 - *Be not quick in your spirit to become angry, for anger lodges in the heart of fools.*

Believers must refrain from any sort of sinful anger. If you are prone to anger, ask the Lord to put this sin to death.

5. *Adultery*

This is in the same category as sexual immorality but specific to those who are unfaithful to a spouse. This is violation of the seventh commandment. Adultery is a recipe for self-destruction. *“He who commits adultery lacks sense; he who does it destroys himself.”* Proverbs 6:32

6. *Greed*

This is simply the desire for more. Some people cannot sleep unless they have more and more. Contentment is a such virtue. Paul tells Timothy in 6:6 *“Godliness with contentment is great gain”*. Believers are to be content. The antidote to greed is generosity. And as the Lord blesses you, give and give cheerfully. If social media causes to be greedy, then this year turn it off.

7. *Wickedness*

This is a general term for malice - a desire to harm or hurt others.

8. *Deceit*

This is a term for being cunning, being crafty or being sly. When Jesus looked at Nathanael what did he say? *“Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!”* John 1:47. The chief priests and the scribes were plotting to arrest Jesus using stealth or deception (Mark 14:1). It is quite sad that there are many deceivers who use the name of God and Christ for their greed and self-glory.

9. *Sensuality*

This is being lewd, vulgar or profane. We live in society where profanity is now normal. From government officials, to podcasters to every day citizens and sadly even a church leader or two use profanity to express their outrage. Believers ought to have no place for this kind of behavior. *“Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving”* Ephesians 5:4. How does Paul exhort Timothy to set an example? In speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity. (1 Timothy 4:12).

10. *Envy*

This literally means having an “evil eye” or being jealous. Listen to the brother of our Lord in James 3:16 *“For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice.”* When others are successful, celebrate, rejoice and bless not envy.

11. *Slander*

This comes from the word blasphemy. Slander or gossip can be a huge problem. You know what gossip is? Half-truths or lies being promoted. Should never be named

among believers.

12. *Pride*

This is being high-sounded or being arrogant. Having an attitude that somehow one is better than others. Pride is huge problem. So huge that Satan was thrown down from heaven and is eternally damned.

13. *Foolishness*

This is lacking good sense or judgment. Folly is bound up in the *heart* of a child, but the rod of discipline drives it far from him. Proverbs 22:15

So food does not defile the man. Sin defiles a man.

A man asked me once after he heard me preaching about sin. He said don't people know they are sinners? Why list them like that?

Unbelievers may know they are sinning and still sin. Some don't care. Others may not know even that are sinning against God. We live in a culture where some sins are legalized and accepted as preferences. Paul says "I acted ignorantly" before his conversion (1 Timothy 1:13).

Here are a couple of reasons why we teach about sin:

1. To plead with those who are not yet converted and entreat them to repent. The wages of sin is death. There is a better way to live. Not by imposing rules, not by legalism, not by teaching do's and don't's but to live by grace. By explaining the nature of sin we want to point to the remedy for sin's penalty - Jesus. You will not find a more gracious and forgiving Savior than Jesus. You will not find one single evil thing that came out of Jesus' heart and mind. Every thought of Jesus was *good*. Jesus' heart was *pure*. Jesus came to *give* not steal. Jesus was *murdered* and *gave* his life for others. No deceit was found in mouth. Jesus was *meek* and *humble*. Jesus is the wisdom of God. So, for a man to be converted, you must know what your condition is. It is full of sin. But the good news is that Jesus can take your sin and make you clean. Jesus took all the weight of sin on himself and paid for the penalty that you should've paid for. *Repent* and *believe* in Jesus in his death and resurrection.
You know happens when you *repent* and *believe*?
You get a new heart! New desires. New affections.
"Whoever *believes* in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'" John 7:38
2. Secondly, as a believer you may sin and will sin again. Here is paradox of the Christian faith – If you are in Christ, you are a new creation. And yet the vestiges of sin still remain in your flesh. So when you sin, your sinning is not like the sin of unconverted or unbelieving people. Unbelievers are marked for judgment unless they repent. Believers are marked for heaven. The mark of true saving faith is that you will have a desire to fight sin when you recognize it or when it is exposed. Better repent

and seek God's favor before you are exposed, embarrassed and fall into discipline of God. An unbeliever doesn't fight sin, they love sin. A true believer has a desire to fight sin and hates sin. For least thirteen looks at the symptoms of sin and its dreadfulness, look 10 times more at Jesus. Look at the wonderful exhortation from the author of Hebrews:

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God" Hebrews 12:1-2. And the Holy Spirit helps you fight sin.

The secret of the Christian life is to discern what is flesh and live according to the Spirit. God has already made you a temple of the Holy Spirit. So why sin?

When you notice things that are ungodly in you, starve it, flee it, fight it and put it to death. (Romans 8:13).

"I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. ²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. ²⁴ And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Galatians 5:16-24

Consider what R.C Sproul said about true saving faith.

"If a person claims to have faith yet brings no fruit of obedience whatsoever, it is proof positive that the claim to faith is a false claim. True faith inevitably and necessarily bears fruit. The absence of fruit indicates the absence of faith. We are not justified by the fruit of our faith. We are justified by the fruit of Christ's merit. We receive his merit only by faith. But it is only by true faith that we receive his merit. And all true faith yields fruit"
RC Sproul

In conclusion, Jesus said the flesh is of no help. The Spirit gives life. May the Lord Jesus help us live to have a heart full of praise, thanksgiving and bearing fruit for God.

----- Discipleship Questions-----

MESSAGE SUMMARY: Portrait of an Unbelieving Heart. Mark 7:14-23

HEAD: These questions help you examine the truth of God's Word.

1. Why does Jesus explain the condition of the heart to his disciples? Why is necessary to understand the nature of sin?

HEART: These questions help you wrestle with what you believe.

2. Do you believe God supplies the strength to fight sin and live victoriously? How? Go around and share. John 14:16, 26, Romans 8:2,9,13,16, 26, Hebrews 12:1-2

3. What is God convicting you of and to believe in light of this message?

HANDS/HABITS: These questions help you bring the truth into your everyday life and develop behaviors that change your habits.

4. For personal reflection: Do you have a plan or discipline in your life to resist temptation and fight sin?