

Mark 7:14-23
God Honors Clean Intentions
6/5/22

ILL: After the tragedy of **9/11**, **Ken Howard**, the pastor of **St. Nicholas' Episcopal Church, Darnestown, MD**, said this: "The most shocking things to me about the tragedies of **9/11**—after the horrors of the attacks themselves and the immediate aftermath—was reading the diary-like notes left by the lead hijacker, **Mohammad Atta**: 'God, I trust in you. I lay myself in your hands. Allow me to glorify you in every possible way. Purify my heart and Clean it from all earthly matters. If God supports you, no one will be able to defeat you.'

Howard says, "What disturbed me was not that his words were evil, but that they didn't really sound evil at all. Here were the words of the man responsible for the deaths of several **1,000 innocent** people. The very act felt blatantly evil to me. I was well-prepared to think of him as an utterly evil person. But, I was **not prepared** to reconcile the utter evilness of his acts w/ his words that seemed so devout and spiritual.

"I was not prepared for the realization that he committed these terrible acts really believing that he was doing them in the name of good and of God, and that to him people like me were the evil ones. But what disturbed me most of all was the fact that none of his words are words I couldn't have used in my own prayers at one time or another.

"When I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand. That was what really disturbed me: that I could not convince myself that—**given the right set of circumstances**—I would not be capable of doing evil in the name of good—or even of doing evil convinced that it was good¹."

RN: Do evil intentions present themselves as bad or as **good**? Do evil intentions spotlight the good intentions of **God's Law**, or does God's Law spotlight the **bad** intentions of evil? Can evil intentions misrepresent God—**in God's name**?

AN: Clearly, evil intentions can shatter our lives, but—**through God's Grace and our Saving Faith**—godly intentions can reconcile us to God's life-restoring love.

BI: Jesus says that evil intentions make us **Impure** not diet, b/c God judges the intent of our hearts **not** the contents of our stomachs. **Please turn in your Bible to Mk 7:14-23.**

- I. Today, we'll see how Jesus compares God's Law to **Tradition**.
- II. And, we'll see what **frustrates** Jesus about His Followers.
- III. Finally, we'll see what makes us **Impure** in God's sight.

God honors Clean intentions. **[PRAY]**

7:14-23 is the aftermath of Jesus' confrontation w/ the Bigwigs. And, Jesus gives a more direct answer to the issue of what is **Clean** and what is Impure. First, Jesus gives a **general principle** to the Crowd; that is, the **Outsiders**. Then, He explains the general principle **in-depth** to His Followers; that is, the **Insiders**.

(TRN) In (14-16), Jesus compares God's Law to **Tradition**.

Mark 7:14–16 (NASB95) ¹⁴ **After [Jesus] called the crowd to Him again, He began saying to them, "Listen to Me, all of you, and understand: ¹⁵ there is nothing outside the man which can defile him if it goes into him; but the things which proceed out of the man are what defile the man. ¹⁶ "If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear."**

(14-16) Jesus starts telling everyone to pay close attention and make every effort to understand what He's saying. IOW, what He's about to teach is **key** to seeing the difference b/t Cleanliness and Impurity. So, they better listen up.

A. Then, Jesus describes what Impurity is all about: **First**, He says what **Impurity is not**. And then, He says what Impurity **is**.

1. He says that nothing like **food** can make a man morally Impure. IOW, a man can't make himself morally Impure if he eats carrot sticks or caribou w/ **unwashed** hands.

2. On the contrary, it's what's **inside** of a man that makes him morally Impure. IOW, **if** a man's **heart** is Impure b/f God, **then** he'll **never** be morally Clean no matter how often he washes his hands.

B. **READ THAT** sin first begins its work on the inside, and then sin works itself to the outside. Listen to what God says about the **natural** human heart:

1. **CONTEXT:** Noah offers a sacrifice of thanksgiving after the Flood: **Genesis 8:21 (NASB95)** ²¹ **The LORD smelled the soothing aroma; and the LORD said to Himself, "I will never again curse the ground on account of man, for the intent of man's heart is evil from his youth; and I will never again destroy every living thing, as I have done.**

2. IOW, evil is the **natural inclination** of mankind to one degree or another, and evil starts showing itself, even when we're little.

3. **CONTEXT:** Jeremiah explains why people choose evil. **Jeremiah 17:9–10 (NASB95)** ⁹ **"The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; Who can understand it? ¹⁰ "I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give to each man according to his ways, according to the results of his deeds.**

4. As such, every natural human heart is dishonest and corrupt to one degree or another, and it's ridiculously hard to see what really makes it tick in any given situation, but God sees the heart's intent and judges it appropriately.

C. IOW, Jesus restates the real intent of God's Law concerning Clean and Impure foods (Lv 11; Dt 14): Impure foods don't make the Jews who eat them Impure. **Disobeying** God's command to abstain from Impure foods makes these Jews Impure.

1. IOW, it's the **intent** of our heart, **not the contents** of our stomach that gets us in hot water w/ God. So, God designs the Law to **expose** the Impurities of a man's heart, s/t a sinner can appeal to God, receive His forgiveness, and experience His Cleansing.

D. ILL: A man visited his boyhood home when a **big storm hit**. As he looked out the front window, a gust of wind suddenly **toppled** a tall, stately **oak** in the front yard. The man could hardly believe it when the beautiful tree fell. But later, when he examined its broken trunk, he saw that the wind wasn't the only reason for its fall. **Disease** on the **inside** had weakened the oak's massive trunk.

Then, the man remembered that as a boy he'd used a hatchet to **chop away** some of the bark when it was only a tender **sapling**. Over the years, water had seeped into the gashes, and finally disease found a way **in**. Then, the trunk had begun to slowly rot from w/i. And, although the sapling grew into what seemed to be a strong tree, b/c of hidden rot, and outside stress, the tree came crashing to the groundⁱⁱ.

E. APPL: A **sinful** heart makes a man morally Impure, and **religious rituals don't** make God blind to it.

We can appeal to God for a **purified** heart, b/c God honors Clean intentions.

(TRN) In (17-19), Jesus' spiritually **numb** Followers frustrate Him.

Mark 7:17-19 (NASB95) ¹⁷ *When [Jesus] had left the crowd [and] entered the house, His disciples questioned Him about the parable.* ¹⁸ *And He said to them, "Are you so lacking in understanding also? Do you not understand that whatever goes into the man from outside cannot defile him, ¹⁹ because it does not go into his heart, but into his stomach, and is eliminated?" ([Thus He] declared all foods Clean.)*

(17) After Jesus teaches the **Crowd**, He and His Followers go back to **Peter's** house. And, as soon as they're alone, they start picking Jesus' brain about His teaching.

A. **Now, don't miss this:** They're living w/ the Son of Man, hearing His teaching 1-on-1, participating in His miracles, and they still **don't get** Him. It seems that **Tradition** has helped numb their hearts to the real **intent** of God's Law.

1. IOW, Tradition has reduced the deep, heart-piercing moral precepts of God's Law into a great laundry list of dos and don'ts that leave Impure hearts **undisturbed**.

B. Doing a religious drill is a lot easier than having a relationship w/ God. When you do the drill you're done, and that's it. And, nobody's the wiser about your heart.

1. But, when you have a relationship w/ God, then deep, tough, and yet **superb** changes occur in your heart. You Love God more, Trust God more, and Serve God more. And, your straightjackets of selfishness, doubt, and rebellion fall off quicker.

C. But, this change can be scary, b/c nobody likes change, even when God's doing it. But, if we let God be God, then we learn that His works are welcome events, b/c the changes wrought by God—free us, ennoble us, and supercharge us.

1. As Jesus: Mark 4:8 (NASB95) ⁸ ***"Other [seeds] fell into the good soil, and as they grew up and increased, they yielded a crop and produced thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold."***

2. IOW, when God's Word has His way in our hearts, He produces the Christ's character in us.

(18-19) His Followers' spiritual numbness frustrates Jesus. Their spiritual numbness is evidence that their hearts are still hard toward God's intentions for man, and they should be moving along well past that by now.

A. So, Jesus strongly restates His teaching, **"Nothing like food—repeat nothing from the outside—can make you morally Impure. How can it? Food goes into your stomach—a non-moral part of you. And, after you digest it, your body gets rid of it."**

"But, your heart's a different matter. Your heart's the moral headquarters of your soul. So, if selfishness, doubt, and rebellion get in there and make themselves at home, then you have a morally filthy lifestyle—no matter how kosher you are."

1. IOW, the **intent** of a man's heart determines how he treats God and man. And, God responds to the **intent** of his heart w/ support or resistance in this life and Heaven or Hell in the next, depending on what He sees in that man's **intent**.

B. Now, Mark ends this section w/ a remark for his Gentile readers for whom Jewish food laws mystify. Namely, Jesus settles the food issue when He calls all foods **Clean**.

1. IOW, the Divine Son of God, the Author of the Law, says that God's people must focus on God's intentions for man, not the **passing** non-essentials of the Law.

2. IOW, like there's a time to pass from youth to adulthood, Jesus says that it's time to pass from an **apprenticeship** in Biblical morality to a **mastery** of Biblical morality.

D. ILL: In the **60s**, a **Baptist** evangelist named **Fred Brown** used **3** images to describe the Law's purpose. **1)** Brown compares the Law to a **dentist's** little oral examination mirror. He says, "W/ this mirror, the dentist can **detect** cavities. But, he **doesn't** drill w/ it, or use it to pull teeth. The mirror **can** show him decayed areas and other abnormalities, but it **can't** provide the **solution**."

2) Brown compares the Law to a **flashlight**. He says, "If the lights go out suddenly, you use it to guide you down the dark basement stairs to the fuse box. When you point it toward the fuses, it helps you see the one that is burned out. But after you've removed the bad fuse, you **don't** try to insert the flashlight in its place. You put a new fuse to restore the electricity."

3) Brown compares the Law to a **plumb line**. He says, "When a builder wants to check his work, he uses a weighted string to see if it's **true** to the vertical. But if he finds that he has made a mistake, he **doesn't** use the plumb line to correct it. He gets out his hammer and saw."

E. APPL: Soul-winners like Charles Spurgeon, D. L. Moody, and Billy Graham have used the Law to unmask the heart's Impurity and then point men to Christ. So, God uses the Law, not rituals, to unveil Impurity and lead sinners to real Cleansingⁱⁱⁱ.

We can become **Masters** of Biblical morality, b/c God honors Clean intentions.

(TRN) In (20-23), Jesus says that a heart's evil intentions defile a man.

Mark 7:20-23 (NASB95) ²⁰ *And [Jesus] was saying, "That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man. ²¹ "For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, ²² deeds of coveting [and] wickedness, [as well as] deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride [and] foolishness. ²³ "All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man."*

(20-22) Jesus gets really specific w/ His subject matter. He says, "**It's what comes out of the core of your souls that makes you morally Impure.**"

A. Then, Jesus says that it's evil thinking that gets us into trouble w/ God and man. IOW, **evil hearts generate evil thoughts that generate evil behavior.**

B. Then, Jesus gives **12** examples of what He's talking about. The **1** through **6** are evil **actions**, while **7** through **12** are evil **attitudes**:

C. **First**, Jesus names **sexual immorality**: everything from sleeping around **to** homosexuality. Then, there's **theft**: everything from shoplifting candy **to** trying stealing another country w/ an invasion.

1. Then, there's **murder**: everything from killing someone's self-respect **to** butchering innocent men, women, and children in concentration camps.

2. Then, there's **adultery**: everything from flirting w/ a coworker **to** breaking up your marriage for somebody else.

3. Then, there's **coveting**: everything from lusting after somebody's hunky boyfriend **to** lusting after somebody's cushy job.

4. Finally, there's **malice**: everything from making spiteful jokes about your spouse **to** destroying someone's reputation for the sake of revenge.

D. Next, Jesus names some evil attitudes. He names **deceit**: thinking it's OK to do everything from cheating on a test **to** lying to win the presidency of the **US**.

1. Then, there's **lewdness**: thinking it's OK to do everything from ogling members of the opposite sex **to** loving the basest pornography.

2. Then, there's **envy**: thinking it's OK to do everything from getting angry b/c your buddy got a better bike than you **to** getting angry b/c your coworker got more credit than you.

3. Then, there's **slander**: thinking it's OK to do everything from gossiping about your girlfriend **to** being angry w/ God when you don't get your way.

4. Then, there's **pride**: thinking it's OK to do everything from snubbing the new girl in class **to** treating your wife and kids like dogs.

5. Finally, there's **foolishness**: thinking it's OK to do everything from telling dirty jokes **to** leading a prayerless, Biblically illiterate, self-contained, and uninvolved life.

(23) Then, Jesus sums it all up: **"All of these evil, Impure attitudes and actions come from inside of a man or a woman, a boy or a girl. And, these are the kinds of attitudes and actions that really make you Impure."**

A. IOW, Jesus means that all of us are Impure like this to one degree or another. So, we must go to Jesus in repentance and Faith, s/t He can purify our dirty hearts.

B. **READ THAT** We **can't** change ourselves. Only Jesus can Clean up our heart's toxic waste dump. But here's the Good News—Jesus is ready, willing, and able to do so. ***Listen to what Jesus says—***

1. Luke 4:18–19 (NASB95) ¹⁸ **"THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME, BECAUSE HE ANOINTED ME TO PREACH THE GOSPEL TO THE POOR. HE HAS SENT ME TO PROCLAIM RELEASE TO THE CAPTIVES, AND RECOVERY OF SIGHT TO THE BLIND, TO SET FREE THOSE WHO ARE OPPRESSED, ¹⁹ TO PROCLAIM THE FAVORABLE YEAR OF THE LORD."**

2. IOW, Jesus is here to restore us to God, both now and forever.

C. And as such, Jesus can make us as Clean as the driven snow before Almighty God—
And, God's opinion about Cleanliness and Impurity is the only opinion that counts.

D. QTTS: *CONTEXT FOR BOTH: God promises to cleanse and restore His repentant and obedient people.* [God] Isaiah 1:18 (NASB95) ¹⁸ **"Come now, and let us reason together," Says the LORD, "Though your sins are as scarlet, they will be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, they will be like wool.**

[God] Joel 2:25 (NASB95) ²⁵ **"Then I will make up to you for the years That the swarming locust has eaten, the creeping locust, the stripping locust and the gnawing locust, My great army which I sent among you.**

E. APPL: We can't Clean ourselves up to God's specifications. But, Jesus can make as Clean as the driven snow b/f Almighty God—

We can be Pure as **driven snow**, b/c God honors Clean intentions.

ⁱ Ken Howard, "Despite our best intentions ..." July 7, 2002, *St. Nicholas Episcopal Church Web Site*, saintnicks.com.

ⁱⁱ "Hidden Faults," INFOsearch Pro ver 4.3P.

ⁱⁱⁱ "The Purpose of the Law," Ibid.

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