

The Heart of Man

Mark 7:1-23

Learning Objectives

- We need Jesus' cleansing. We cannot clean ourselves.

? Growing up in your family, did you have unusual things you couldn't do or were told to stay away from? If so, what was the reasoning?

Possible answers/examples: Pokemon, Star Wars, Trading cards, Harry Potter

Mark 7:1-23 (NIV)

(Alternatively, we recommend listening to the Streetlights Bible reading of this section of Scripture on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1uxHHChuOsE>)

¹The Pharisees and some of the teachers of the law who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus ²and saw some of his disciples eating food with hands that were defiled, that is, unwashed. ³(The Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they give their hands a ceremonial washing, holding to the tradition of the elders. ⁴When they come from the marketplace they do not eat unless they wash. And they observe many other traditions, such as the washing of cups, pitchers and kettles.)

⁵So the Pharisees and teachers of the law asked Jesus, "Why don't your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders instead of eating their food with defiled hands?"

⁶He replied, "Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written:

"These people honor me with their lips,
but their hearts are far from me.

⁷They worship me in vain;
their teachings are merely human rules.'

⁸You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to human traditions."

The practice of handwashing mentioned here is a tradition that is described in a Jewish book of law called the Talmud. It was one of several practices brought about by religious leaders attempting to answer the question: "How do we remain clean & follow God in every aspect of our everyday lives?" The resulting traditional practices arose from looking at priestly commands in the Torah (e.g. Ex. 30:19) and integrating them into everyday life for all Jews to honor Yahweh. At some point, these traditional practices became synonymous with the original commands from the Torah. To not do these traditional practices was to not obey Yahweh, so when the Pharisees observed Jesus & his disciples not washing their hands ceremoniously, it seemed like an affront to the Law of Moses and thus God himself.

⁹ And he continued, “You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions! ¹⁰ For Moses said, ‘Honor your father and mother,’ and, ‘Anyone who curses their father or mother is to be put to death.’ ¹¹ But you say that if anyone declares that what might have been used to help their father or mother is Corban (that is, devoted to God)— ¹² then you no longer let them do anything for their father or mother. ¹³ Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that.”

¹⁴ Again Jesus called the crowd to him and said, “Listen to me, everyone, and understand this. ¹⁵ Nothing outside a person can defile them by going into them. Rather, it is what comes out of a person that defiles them.” ¹⁶

¹⁷ After he had left the crowd and entered the house, his disciples asked him about this parable. ¹⁸ “Are you so dull?” he asked. “Don’t you see that nothing that enters a person from the outside can defile them? ¹⁹ For it doesn’t go into their heart but into their stomach, and then out of the body.” (In saying this, Jesus declared all foods clean.)

²⁰ He went on: “What comes out of a person is what defiles them. ²¹ For it is from within, out of a person’s heart, that evil thoughts come—sexual immorality, theft, murder, ²² adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. ²³ All these evils come from inside and defile a person.”

? In the icebreaker at the beginning of study, at least some of us had families that, for one reason or another, prohibited us from doing certain things as a child, to perhaps protect our innocence. Did your parents’ prohibitions make you not want those things?

Possible Answers: Yes, they did work. No, it made me want to do it more. It made me curious, but I never did it.

? Similarly for our spiritual family, we may have been told by mentors or other leaders that it was an essential part of being a Christian to “stay away from this” or “make sure you always do that”. What are some things you have heard or were told that you must do or not do in order to live the Christian life?

Possible Answers: Read my Bible every day, Pray first thing in the morning before anything else. Pray before meals. Don’t drink. Don’t swear. Don’t watch porn.

? When you’ve failed to do those things, how has that affected your desire to care for others? How about your desire to walk with God?

Possible Answers: I feel great when I do them, but when I fail, I feel like I’m a bad Christian.

? What are some reasons you think that Christians create prohibitions and rules that define a Christian life?

Possible Answers: To keep us from “being defiled” or “stay away from evil”. Doing and watching bad things makes you a bad person. To keep us from having our “minds corrupted”.

? Jesus says in verses 14-15 that “nothing outside a person can defile them by going into them. Rather, it is what comes out of a person that defiles them.” Put another way, the evil is not “out there” in horror movies or alcohol, it is “within us”. If that’s true, what value do rules and prohibitions have?

Possible Answers: They acknowledge our inclination to sin and set up barriers to fight it. They may be helpful for resisting temptation.

Watch: Holiness – The Bible Project (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I9vn5UvsHvM>)

? How did the video affect your understanding of holiness?

Possible Answers: Holiness is dangerous for unclean humans. We need Jesus to make us holy.

? Reading verses 14-23, why is it that keeping rules and regulations aren’t effective for keeping us in close relationship with God?

Possible Answers: Because we would always become unclean again. We can’t actually get clean permanently by doing good stuff or avoiding bad stuff. Scripture for reference: Psalm 51, Jeremiah 17:9, Ezekiel 11:19.

? If we are focused on keeping ourselves pure through rules and prohibitions, how does that affect our ability to love other people like Jesus calls us to?

Possible Answers: We may devote more energy to “being good” than reaching out to others. We may worry about not loving someone “right,” so we hesitate to do it all.

Christians are free from the burden of obeying rules & regulations in order to make sure we remain in the presence of God. We’ve been placed permanently in the presence of God through Jesus Christ. This is why Paul writes that “All things are lawful for [him]” because nothing he does in his life can remove him from God’s presence (i.e. sinning). His works have no bearing on his status with God.

That being said, Paul goes on to say that neither all things are “helpful” nor to all things “build up”. Heavy drinking, though technically lawful, tends to destroy relationships and our own bodies, not build them up. Watching movies with lots of nudity and sex may not affect our status with God, but may affect our thought-patterns and physical intimacy with others negatively. God made all things lawful for us to do not for us to feel less guilt sinning in ways we used to enjoy, but to love others more freely.

? Christians have been given a “heart of flesh” (Ezekiel 11:19) and God’s own Spirit to mark God’s permanent presence in our life. How does that free us from the burden of obeying rules & regulations?
Possible Answers: We don’t have to work to keep up our relationship with God. We can enjoy the lasting relationship made possible through the work of Jesus on the cross.

For Discussion and Accountability

? When you hear that you can sin and not have it affect your status with God, is your reaction to feel better about your own sin or to thank God for his grace?

? What are things that you burden yourself with to try to make up for your something even though Jesus’ presence is already with you?