

Clean & Unclean

Mark 7:14-23

Jesus continues the quiet revolution that is the kingdom of God. Having exposed the idolatrous religious traditions of the Pharisees (vv1-13), he now describes true defilement. But he doesn't just convict; he cleanses. Defilement isn't outside-in, it's inside-out, and when we peer inside the results aren't pretty. This message is most offensive in our day when you are constantly told "believe in yourself." Jesus declares all foods are clean, revealing his person in the authority to do. But he also reveals his work—the cleansing blood of Christ.

Outside-in

Jesus calls the crowd and commands them, all of them, to hear and understand (v14). This instruction is broader than hand-washing. It's about the nature of sin. Physical things can't morally taint someone by coming into contact. Not things going in, but things coming out defile a person (v16). It could hardly be more succinct (cf. vv3-5)! The disciples are supposed to *understand* but don't, so they ask in private (vv14, 17-18). Jesus gives a very earthy explanation. What you eat doesn't go to your heart, but to your stomach and then out (v19). This answer is two-pronged (Prov. 26:4-5). Food doesn't make you morally dirty. Even when the ceremonial law was enforced, this was known: "I desire mercy and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than ascension offerings" (Hos. 6:6; cf. Heb. 10:5-10). One was invented to bring about the other. Jesus rejects their fancy disobedience (vv9-13), but he also fulfills all the ceremonial laws (v19). The point of God's law is always lost on those who love the law *for its own sake*. God is the standard. The standard isn't God. Raw rule-keeping is outside-in defilement, and therefore strives for outside-in righteousness. If defilement can come from without, so can cleansing. But it can't. Rearrange the scenery—habits, friends, church, job, city or country—and you'll still be defiled whether you're a scribe, Sylvester Graham, or John Harvey Kellogg or you.

Inside-Out

"What comes out of a person is what defiles him" (v20). This unflattering but undeniable truth should drive us all to the cross. Jesus gets specific. From each of our hearts come "the evil dialogues" (v21). Our running inner conversation is polluted by these twelve: sexual uncleanness, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, malicious acts, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. Some of these are easier for others to identify, and so Jesus characteristically cuts to the issue. This defilement is deep and wide. It begins in the heart but never stays there. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn said the line between good and evil runs through every human heart.

Declared Clean

"Thus he declared all foods clean" (v19). Look at this declaration! Jesus begins by saying nothing outside can defile you, but everything within has. We are far more defiled than we ever despaired, and far more--infinitely in fact--cleansed than we ever hoped. "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor. 5:21). What the ceremonial law and every self-justifying, do-gooding man-made black-market knock-off could never do, Jesus did on the cross. He bore the penalty and shame of our defilement so we could walk in radiant forgiveness, clothed in his righteousness. "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come" (2 Cor. 5:17). All foods are clean including eggnog with the viscosity of motor oil. More importantly this Christmas, if you are in Christ, *you* are clean.

NOTES FOR LITTLE SAINTS

Today's Passage: Mark 7:14-23

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."

1. People who worship other gods often have lots of rules for what they can eat and not eat, thinking that certain foods are holier than others. What does Jesus say about defilement in verse 15?
2. While nothing from the outside can defile us, where does Jesus say our defilement comes from (verses 20-21)?
3. Jesus gives a long list of sins that begin in our heart. List them:
4. How do you get rid of sin?
5. Jesus declared all food clean. Draw a picture of your top five favorite foods.

Memory Verse to Recite Next Week:

And he said to her, "For this statement you may go your way; the demon has left your daughter." -Mark 7:29