

Mark 7:14–23 — Jesus Gives A New Heart

May 12, 2019

In 2012, Scientific American published a study that claimed human nature was basically good.¹ The problem is, there is lots of evidence to the contrary. Simply look at the evening news. I don't care what network you watch. All of it is bad news. The news is filled with stories of people committing atrocities and a host of other evils. How can you say people are basically good?

With the advent of the Internet and cell phone cameras, the thin veneer of belief in human goodness many of us held was wiped away. The Internet is flooded with video and photo evidence of people recording and posting their evil for everyone to see. We have an entire section of the Internet devoted to wickedness. It is called the dark web. The most visited sites on the Internet and the most common sites on the Internet are pornographic sites. How can anyone say people are by nature good?

This raises some obvious questions. Why is there so much evil in the world? Where did all this evil come from? At one time we thought extraordinary evil was only done by extraordinarily evil people — the Charles Mansons of the world. Now we know that is not true. James Waller published a book titled Becoming Evil: How ordinary people commit genocide and mass killing. The thesis of his book is that history proves ordinary people, like you and me, are capable of extraordinary evil. We see it with surprising frequency. An example would be the mass killings at Columbine High School. They were committed by

¹ <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/scientists-probe-human-nature-and-discover-we-are-good-after-all/>

high school kids who planned and role played mass murder on a video game before they carried it out. When reading the news, we should never say, “I would never do that.” Instead we should say, “If it wasn’t for God’s grace, that could be me.” Ordinary people like you and me can do extraordinarily evil things.

With so much evil in the world, even from common people, we might wonder where all this evil comes from. In 2007, Philip Zimbardo wrote a book called the Lucifer Effect: Understanding How Good People Turn Evil. His thesis is that human evil is caused by our environment. When we do evil things, it is not our fault. It is the fault of the people and circumstances we were exposed to. If we make sinful choices as adults, we can blame it on our parents. Maybe they didn’t give us enough toys at Christmas so we can claim we were traumatized children. If we are not faithful to our spouses in marriage, we can say it is not our fault. “It is actually my spouse’s fault because she didn’t love me the way I deserved.” If we steal from work, that is our employers’ fault. If they paid us more, we wouldn’t be tempted to steal.

What do you think? Are the evil choices we make someone else’s fault? Can we just blame the evil choices we make on the environment around us and the people around us so they are not our fault, or do we bear some responsibility of our own?

According to the Bible, the problem of evil in this world and why we choose evil is not something we can blame on someone else. It is not something we can blame on the circumstances around us. Whenever we choose evil or sin, it is a choice we make. It is our fault. It is not someone else’s fault.

The Bible says the problems in the world don't come from outside us. They come from the heart within us.

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it? Jeremiah 17:9 (ESV)

But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. James 1:14 (ESV)

The Bible says the problem of evil in this world and in the problem of evil in our lives comes from inside of us. Human evil doesn't come from what was done to us. All sin and evil is a choice we make. Each of us is capable of horrendous amounts of evil. Each one of us is capable of committing the atrocities of Hitler. The potential for that kind of wickedness resides in each of our hearts. The problem is that society doesn't believe that. Society teaches us to blame shift our sin to others. Society tells us to blame our sin on someone else, not to recognize that it comes from within us.

For example, when a husband yells at his wife and his wife asks him to stop yelling, he may scream back, "This is your fault! I wouldn't yell at you if you didn't make me so angry." With those words, he blames his wife for his sinful anger instead of taking responsibility for the sinful way he is treating her.

The world tells us sin comes from the toxic circumstances and people around us. The Bible tells us our sin comes from the toxic nature of our hearts that lies within us. Even if we lived in a perfect home with perfect parents, in a perfect political environment, all of us would still choose evil. The problem is always the sinfulness of our hearts. Today, if you are struggling with sin in your heart, you came on a good Sunday. We are going to learn the answer to a heart that is filled with sin.

At CrossWinds, we are studying our way through the Gospel of Mark. This morning we are in Mark 7:14-23. Last week, in the verses just prior to this section, we saw Jesus was approached by prestigious scribes from Jerusalem. They were the biggest brains of the ancient world. They were trying to trap him. They couldn't find anything he did wrong according to the Bible so they found fault with Jesus' disciples for not keeping the traditions they established. They critiqued Jesus' disciples for not properly washing their hands before meals, according to their traditions. They claimed that because their ritual hand washings were not followed, Jesus's disciples were not pure before God because they ate with defiled hands.

While the Jewish scribes of Jesus' day were obviously not affected by the thoughts of modern psychologists, like modern psychologists, they misunderstood basic truth about the source of corruption in this world. They thought corruption in this world came from outside of them and could be put in them by things they did or people they touched, such as by not properly washing hands. They thought that as long as they fenced off impurities from the outside world, such as avoiding eating shellfish and other unclean animals, they wouldn't let the defilement of the world around them pollute their hearts. That is the same thinking of modern psychologists who blame the evil in people's lives on the evil environment around them.

The problem is, while those ancient scribes blamed evil of the world around them, just like modern psychologists, they ignored the clear teaching of

the Bible. The evil in this world comes from the depravity of our hearts. Each one of us has a wicked one living within us.

These verses break into two parts. The first part is Jesus giving a parable. In the second part, Jesus gives an interpretation of that parable.

We are going to work our way straight through the text.

The Parable

And he called the people to him again and said to them, “Hear me, all of you, and understand: 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.” Mark 7:14–15 (ESV)

What crowd is this? It is likely the same crowd we met last week in Mark 7:1. At that time, Jesus was talking primarily to the scribes and Pharisees with a crowd around them. Now Jesus is talking to the crowd who gathered to watch his debate with those religious leaders.

Jesus said, “Hear me, all of you and understand.” That was a Hebrew way of telling people that what he was about to say was very important. Everybody should have leaned forward and listened.

There is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile them. It is the things that are inside of a person that come out of him that defile him. The Pharisees and scribes said that eating with unwashed hands could lead to spiritual impurity before God, because eating something with unwashed hands let impurity outside of you into you. Both the Jewish leaders and modern psychologists thought people were basically good and all of the sin in man comes from something or someone polluting him. Jesus said defilement doesn't come from eating unclean food or from eating with unwashed hands or by

rubbing shoulders with a Samaritan at work. No, the filth that offends God comes from inside of us. It comes from our very hearts. More important than anything outside of us, God cares about the hearts within us.

But the Lord said to Samuel, “Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.” 1 Samuel 16:7 (ESV)

Every way of a man is right in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the heart. Proverbs 21:2 (ESV)

This raises a good question. The scribes and Pharisees were concerned with all the external regulations of the Old Testament law while they completely disregarded the state of people's hearts before God. Last week we learned that the Scribes and Pharisees created extensive rules and regulations beyond the Old Testament rules and regulations to make themselves right by God. If what God really cares about is the heart, why did God give so many external rules and regulations for his people to follow in the Old Testament? Why did God say that if his people touched a reptile they would be unclean? Why did God say touching a dead body would make them unclean? Why was a woman ritually unclean for a period of time after childbirth? If you touched someone that was considered unclean, then you were considered unclean. What was the purpose of all of these rules if God says what really matters is the heart?

Here is the point. These external requirements were meant to be symbolic and temporary in nature. They were not to replace purity of the heart but to remind people of the need for purity of the heart. These Old Testament ceremonies were to teach God's people about holiness in the same way we teach a child to read. When we teach children to read, we give them picture

books before we can give them word books. They learn to read by following the pictures, images, and symbols to help them understand. In a similar way, the Old Testament rituals and ceremonies were given to be temporary pictures, symbols and shadows of the spiritual reality of sin before God. They were meant to replace purity in the heart but ultimately to point to the importance of purity of the heart. Look what the author of Hebrews says about the temporary nature of Old Testament symbols and ceremonies.

...but deal only with food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until the time of reformation. Hebrews 9:10 (ESV)

That means they had a temporary role to play until the coming of Christ. They were the primer, the basic illustrations. All of the Old Testament rituals and rules were pointing to Christ and were fulfilled by Christ once he came.

This is why when we come to the New Testament, all of the Old Testament ceremonies, rituals, and hand washings went away. They were not the real issue. Jesus is the real issue, and the heart is what matters, not external ceremonies and avoiding certain foods.

Unfortunately, the Jews in Jesus' day were careful to follow the external symbols of the Old Testament but they ignored the inward realities of what they pointed to, which is the importance of purity in the heart. That is why Jesus said this about them.

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness. Matthew 23:27 (ESV)

On the outside they looked pious by going through all the hand washing rituals, wearing the right clothes, obeying all the rules, and following all the

holidays. They had down every Old Testament ritual. The problem is their hearts were filthy, wicked, and wreaked of sin. Remember these were the same scribes and Pharisees that were plotting the death of Jesus simply because he threatened their popularity, not because he said anything biblically wrong.

The same is true today. God cares about our hearts more than he cares about how we look on the outside where everyone else can see. God really doesn't care how many times we come to church. He doesn't care how loud we sing. He doesn't care how much we give or where we serve. What God really cares about is our hearts. Are our hearts right with God and are they right with other people? Only you and God know the answer but that is the answer that really matters.

Let's pause that line of thought for a moment. If you are following along in your Bible, you will notice verse 16 is missing. Occasionally you run across someone that refuses to use a modern Bible translation because he or she claims modern translations cut out verses in the Bible. I have met these people.

Actually, that is not what happened. The ESV didn't just cut verse 16 out of your Bible. Old translations, like the KJV, have a verse 16 in them. Let's read it from the King James.

If any man have ears to hear, let him hear. Mark 7:16 (AV)

If you look at the footnote in your ESV, you will see the text of verse 16, and it will tell you the earliest Greek Manuscripts, which go back to the time of Jesus, do not have this verse. The King James Bible was written based on much later manuscripts that were not nearly as old. Even though the King James is an older English Bible translation, it was not based on Greek manuscripts as old as

the ones used for your ESV. In history, all manuscripts were copied by hand. In one of those hand-copied manuscripts, at some time in history, a copyist apparently added verse 16, and a descendant of that manuscript was used to write the King James. Since verse 16 has a history in the English Bible, that is why it was included as a footnote in your ESV, although it is not likely Jesus said this. This is actually not a big deal because the verse doesn't change anything. It is just a reminder to make sure you pay attention to the parable Jesus told.

I tell you this background so if you meet someone who gets on his or her hobby horse because he or she claims our modern English Bibles take verses out of them that were in the King James, know there are good reasons for a verse that is removed. People who claim you can't use modern translations for that reason know enough about translating to be dangerous but not enough to be knowledgeable about what they are talking about. Thankfully, at this point you are smart than they are.

The Interpretation

What goes into a person cannot make him unclean before God.

And when he had entered the house and left the people, his disciples asked him about the parable. 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, since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled?" (Thus he declared all foods clean.) Mark 7:17–19 (ESV)

At this point, Jesus left the scribes, Pharisees and the crowd that was following them. We read that Jesus went into a house. Most likely it was Peter and Andrew's house in Capernaum. Earlier in the Gospel of Mark, we learned Jesus used that house as his base of operations in Capernaum. In the book of Mark, when Jesus entered a house, it often indicates a shift in focus. Jesus

moved from teaching the crowds in public to training his disciples in a house. Almost every time in this Gospel when Jesus went into a house, it was to teach his disciples something beyond what he taught the crowd.

The disciples claimed they didn't understand Jesus' parable about what goes into the mouth is not what makes you unclean but what comes out of the mouth is what makes you unclean, so they wanted Jesus to give them more of an explanation.

Personally, I think the disciples understood exactly what Jesus was teaching in this parable, but it was so contradictory to everything they were taught and everything they were raised to live by that it was hard to wrap their minds around what Jesus said even though it wasn't hard to understand.

Jesus explained it this way. Food can't defile you. It just enters the mouth, but the food doesn't go to the heart. It goes to the stomach where it is eventually expelled. The food we eat cannot soil our hearts with sin. A person's attitude, affections, priorities, ambitions and desires reveal their sin. Eating with unwashed hands cannot put evil things into our hearts.

Now there is a break in the story where Mark inserted a parenthetical comment. *With this, Jesus declared all food clean.* There is some exciting background at this point. We know John Mark was writing this Gospel. He was writing this Gospel based on the firsthand eyewitness account of Peter who was telling him about the time he spent with Jesus.

Does anyone remember Peter struggling to understand that food and Gentiles wouldn't defile him? Does anyone remember Peter struggling to

understand that Jesus made both food and Gentiles clean? If you remember your New Testament, you will remember Acts 10:9-20 where Jesus sent Peter a vision of all kinds of unclean animals lowered down from heaven on a sheet. That was followed by a voice that told him to get up, kill and eat. Peter protested three times that he had never touched anything unclean. Finally, Jesus took the sheet back to heaven and the vision stopped. Peter was left wrestling with his thoughts wondering why Jesus told him he could now eat unclean animals and the rules of defilement from unclean animals no longer applied. Immediately after Peter's vision, Gentiles came to Peter's door asking for Peter to come tell them about Jesus. Normally Peter wouldn't have gone with them. They were Gentiles. They were unclean. Then Peter put the pieces together. Jesus then declared unclean food clean. Anything could be eaten. Jesus also declared unclean Gentiles clean. Peter could go with them and tell them about Jesus. The external rituals and rules no longer mattered. Even though Peter learned this lesson, he soon forgot this lesson. A few years later up the coast in Antioch, under pressure from some Jews, Peter was once again avoiding eating with Gentiles because he didn't want to be defiled. In Galatians 2:11-21, Paul set him right and told him Jesus had made Gentiles clean.

This letter was written approximately 15 years after that incident. I picture Peter in Rome telling these stories of Jesus to Mark who was writing them down. I picture Peter telling this incident to Mark, then Peter stopped and said with a smile on his face, "This is where Jesus declared all food clean." Then Peter probably said, "But, I was a slow learner. God had to reteach this lesson to me

twice. Right here is when I should have figured it out. Jesus declared all food clean.” Then Peter would say, “Pass me another ham sandwich and give me bacon with my eggs for breakfast now that I can eat them.”

I tell this to you because once in a while a book appears in the Christian book stores that tells us we should go back to the Old Testament diet to experience God’s blessing. That is absolutely wrong. Right here Jesus declared all food clean. What matters is the defilement in our hearts, not what we eat, what we touch, or the environment we live in.

What comes out of a person is what makes him unclean before God.

And he said, “What comes out of a person is what defiles him. 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. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.”
Mark 7:20–23 (ESV)

Jesus then he gives us a list of sins that defile us. They all come out of the heart. None of them come from eating with unwashed hands. The first half of this list is plural so they refer to sinful acts that come from the heart. The second half are singular so they refer to sinful attitudes that come from the heart.

Evil thoughts — This is a general term. It refers to the way we think inside of our minds. The Bible says our thought lives are filled with evil thoughts.

Imagine I was to invent a machine that went on a head like a football helmet. The machine captured all of your thoughts and projected them on the big screens behind me for everyone in the church to see. Who would want to wear that helmet for a day so everyone in this room would know all of your thoughts? I don’t think anyone would put that on his or her head.

Our unedited thought lives can be pretty sinful. We are constantly thinking lustful things, vengeful things, hurtful things. Where do those thoughts come from? Is it from eating with unwashed hands or eating bacon? Absolutely not. Those thoughts just naturally gush out of our hearts because our hearts are constantly manufacturing evil.

Sexual Immorality — This is the Greek word *porneia*. It the Greek word we use for the English word pornography. It refers to any sexual expression by a man or a women outside the bounds of the marriage. It refers to adultery, premarital sex, extramarital sex, homosexuality, and looking at pornography. All of that defiles us before God. Where does it come from? It doesn't come from being around the wrong people. The wrong people do not make us pursue sexually immorality. They may tempt us and put us in situations that draw the evil sexual desires already in us out of us. Our hearts are the source of all sexual wickedness, not eating with unwashed hands.

Thefts — This is the Greek word *klepto* which is the root work for kleptomaniac in English. A kleptomaniac is someone who compulsively steals. Thievery does not come from poverty. There are many poor people who never steal. Stealing comes from the wickedness of the heart. Poverty does not make you steal. It may tempt you to steal but the desire to steal and the decision to steal all come from the wickedness of our own hearts.

Murder — When people take others' lives by murder it is because of the wickedness in their hearts. Rather than waiting for the scales of justice to turn in our society, and yes, they turn slowly, people decide to take matters in their own

hands and execute their own justice. The desire to murder and the decision to murder all comes from the sinfulness of someone's heart. Nobody makes you murder. The great depravity in your heart is what spawns the desire to murder. Another example is abortion. When a baby's life is taken in an abortion, the problem is not that someone became pregnant and couldn't afford another child. There are scores of people waiting to adopt. There are not enough children to go around. I have heard there are more people waiting to adopt children than there are unwanted children being aborted. The decision to abort a child rather than carry a child for nine months, then put it up for adoption is a decision to murder that comes from someone's heart. Rather than being inconvenienced for nine months, she would rather murder. Abortion is never forced on a woman. It is suggested to a woman and the evil in her own heart latches onto the opportunity to murder and place her convenience over the life in her womb. Murder always comes from the sinfulness of someone's heart. It is never forced on someone by society outside of them.

Adulteries — This is a subset of sexual immorality, but it involves breaking the marriage covenant through intimacy with someone else. When a married man is in the Army, and he has a long tour overseas, so he is lonely, it is easy for him to justify committing adultery on his wife. No one forces him to commit adultery. It is the sin inside of him that gives him the desire for adultery and the willingness to commit adultery. It all comes from a sin-sick heart.

Deeds of Coveting — This means actions motivated by greed. We all know this when we go to Wal-Mart. There are many things we purchase not because we

need them but simply because we want them because everyone else has them. Nobody puts a gun to your head when you are in the check out line in Wal-Mart to make you purchase anything. We purchase things other people have that we don't need simply to keep up with them. The root cause of our materialism is the sin of greed in our hearts. Stuff doesn't make you happy in life. Jesus makes you happy in life.

The first half of the list was about sinful actions that all show up in our lives because of the sinfulness of our hearts. The last half of the list is about attitudes in our lives that all come from a sinful heart.

Deceit — Deceit is lying. Deceit is not telling people the truth. Deceit is also only telling part of the truth so we can frame situations in a way that manipulates people into believing something that isn't true. We are never forced to be deceptive. Deceptiveness comes out of us because of the natural wickedness that lies in each of our hearts.

Sensuality — This means living for what feels good, not what is good. Sensuality means living for what makes us happy, not for what is right. Where does the desire to live for pleasure instead of truth come from? We don't become deceptive because we ate shellfish. Deceptiveness naturally erupts from the wickedness of our hearts. The problem is always an evil heart.

Envy - Literally translated, this means an evil eye. It is looking at other people with hatred and jealousy because they have something you don't have. If other people have more than you possess, what they have never forces us to think

about them in an evil way. The reason we think about other people in a jealous or evil way is because of the sinfulness of our own hearts.

Slander — This is abusive language and speech. When someone swears at you, or yells at you or demeans you, or gives you the universal salute in traffic, that is never something you made him or her do. You did not make him treat you in such a hateful and condescending way. Your bad driving and poor choices may have irritated her but you didn't put the evil in her hearts that made her respond with cuss words. The irritation you placed in his life simply reveals the great level of selfishness and evil that already resides in his heart. When someone cusses you out, it shouldn't make you feel bad. All it does is reveal that he or she is bad. Think of it this way. When Jesus was flogged before the cross and had the skin torn from his body with whips and hooks, in anger for the great sins being committed against him, did he cuss anybody out? Did he swear? Absolutely not. The book of Isaiah tells he suffered in silence. The reason he did not erupt into a stream of verbal filth when he suffered was because of the purity of his heart. It revealed he had no wickedness in his heart.

Pride — Feelings of superiority, arrogance and that you are better than others instead of being a servant of others all come from sin in the heart. Instead of seeing ourselves as important, in humility, we should think of others as better than ourselves. It is the wickedness of our hearts that leads us to think of ourselves as better than others.

None of these things come from not ritually washing your hands, from eating shellfish, or from not properly observing a religious holiday. Those are

external things that can never put evil into our hearts. Our hearts are the source of all the evil in the world. Our hearts are the source of all the problems we have in life. The evil and filth is within us. It is not outside of us.

Just as there is nothing we eat that can put evil in our hearts, there is nothing we can physically do that can clean the evil out of our hearts. Perfect attendance pins at church will not clean our hearts. A big offering cannot clean our hearts. Social work cannot clean our hearts. What matters most to God is our hearts, and its wickedness is the one thing we cannot change. What are we to do? That my friends that where I have good news. God offers us new hearts.

In the Old Testament, God promised there was coming a day when he was going to give us new hearts.

God offers me a new heart through Jesus.

And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. Ezekiel 36:26–27 (ESV)

How do we get new hearts? Where do they come from? All of us are desperate to have one because we are constantly struggling with the evil of our hearts.

When we turn to the New Testament, we see this Old Testament prophecy becomes a reality. The Bible says when you turn to Christ and trust in Christ, not only does Jesus forgive our sin, God gives you a new heart that loves Jesus more than it loves sin. God changes us from the inside out. When we trust in Jesus, God doesn't just forgive our sin but he also sends his Holy Spirit into our lives and gives each of us that new heart.

...he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior... Titus 3:5–6 (ESV)

What does regeneration mean? It means something dies and something new is born. It is the death of our old hearts that delight in sin and the rebirth of new hearts from God that love Jesus and want to avoid sin. God changes us from the inside out when we come to Jesus. He changes our hearts!

Today, some people think society is the problem. If we just had better education, lower taxes, or someone different in the White House, the world would be fine. No, it wouldn't. Even if we lived in a perfect world we would still find our hearts filled with sin. The Bible says the real problems in this world are not from outside of us. The real problems in this world come from the filth of our hearts within us. The good news is God has a solution. When we come to him through Jesus we get more than forgiveness. We get completely new hearts where our addiction to sin is finally broken. That doesn't mean we will no longer struggle with sin but our hearts are no longer held captive by sin because Jesus has given each of us a new one.

Applications

1. **We can eat what we like.** Jesus declared all foods clean. Remember Mark was getting this information from Peter who was with Jesus. This is the Peter who was told by God in Acts 10 that all animals are now clean because the Old Testament ritual laws that pointed to Jesus were fulfilled by Jesus. The laws no longer apply. That means that since today is Mother's Day, take Mom

out for some BBQ pork ribs, shrimp, or lobster. While you are celebrating Mom, thank Jesus that he made it possible that we can now eat what we like.

2. **God cares about what I think, not just what I do.** God cares about our thought lives, not just the actions of our actions. While evil actions are worse than evil thoughts, evil thoughts still matter to God. Remember God doesn't just care what we do. He cares about our hearts and what we think. As Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, if a man looks at a woman lustfully, he has committed adultery with her in his heart. Jesus cares about the filth in our hearts because our hearts are the source of all sin in this world. Do not get caught in the trap believing we can think lustful thoughts, evil thoughts, hurtful thoughts, and God doesn't care as long as we don't live out those actions. God deeply cares about our hearts.

3. **God offers me a new heart that loves Jesus more than sin.** The way to purity in our hearts is to confess our sin to Jesus, to be forgiven of our sin, and then to let Jesus create a new heart in you that loves him more than it loves sin. This is why the Bible says the Christian life is about walking in step with Jesus and letting the new hearts we are given from Christ dominate and control our lives.



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