

**LIFE CHANGE, GOD’S WAY:
WHAT IS INSIDE ALWAYS COMES OUT**
Mark 7:14-23

Please review this week’s catechism question.

INTRODUCTION

If you could wave a magic wand and change one thing about your behavior, character, emotions, attitudes, etc. what would you want to change and why?

There are few people in the world that would say that there is nothing they would want to change about themselves. Self-improvement books, seminars, videos, etc. are a multi-billion dollar industry in the U.S. The first question that must be answered when we begin to consider what it will take to change is a diagnostic question. First we must ask why do I do what I do? This diagnosis is the critical first step in the process of change. While there are a myriad of explanations in our culture giving an answer to this question, the Bible contains the only true, authoritative and ultimately helpful answer to that question. In this study we will listen to Jesus explain why it is that humans cannot change themselves. In showing how hopeless is our condition he will tell us what is ultimately wrong with us and then point us to the only hopeful answer there is.

STUDY

1. In Mark 7:1-5, why are the Jewish religious leaders upset with Jesus’ disciples and ultimately Jesus?

They are upset because they have observed the disciples eating their food with “unclean” hands, that is, unwashed hands. They demand to know why the disciples and Jesus do not follow the tradition of the elders. The tradition of the elders refers to a large body of teaching handed down from one generation of Jewish teachers to another that sought to instruct the people of Israel on how to obey God’s law.

For these men, to disregard the traditions of the elders was equivalent to disobeying God.

2. How does Jesus respond to their challenging question in vv. 6-13? What does he say about their tradition?

Jesus is not very friendly in response to their challenging question. He calls them hypocrites and quotes Isaiah 29:13 and says that Isaiah wrote this about them. He calls their religious observances mere lip service and declares that their hearts are not in any way engaged in the worship of God. Because of their fastidious obedience to these man-made rules they do not obey God’s word. Their religious performance, which they do in the name of serving God, actually prevents them from obeying God’s law. Then, in vv. 9-13, he gives them a specific example of how their man made traditions by which they claim to be obeying God do in fact promote disobedience to God. They appear to be very committed to God’s law when in fact they are changing it by adding to his law. They have made it doable and have made it serve their self-interest.

3. What does it mean to be “unclean”? What reason would the Jewish religious leaders give for washing hands and utensils?

The idea of being unclean is a thoroughly OT concept. To be unclean was to be unacceptable to God and thus unable to enter God’s temple or be in the presence of God’s people. There were many ways to become unclean. You became unclean if you ate unclean food, if you touched a dead body, if you had an open sore on your body, if you had a baby, etc. In addition, objects, such as eating utensils, could become unclean through contact with many of these same unclean conditions. The law commanded that anyone or anything that became unclean was to go through a “cleansing” ritual, which in every case included washing the body or the utensil with water. In addition to all these cleansings the priests were commanded to wash their hands and feet every time they entered the temple. Over time, Jewish teachers instituted a series of preventative cleanliness rituals. They taught, as you could never be sure if you had come into contact with unclean people or objects that every good

Jewish person was to wash their hands before eating just in case they had come into contact with something unclean. In this way, so they reasoned, they could always be sure to be clean and thus not make the food they ate unclean by touching it with unclean hands.

4. Compare what Jesus says in v. 15 with what Leviticus 11:40 says. How would this impact his Jewish audience? How can Jesus say what he says in light of what Leviticus 11:40 says? How does this statement relate to what he has just said to the leaders?

The statement he makes is, as the disciples call it later, a parable. It is a sort of riddle that requires some thinking. I can guarantee you that everyone who heard this statement from Jesus was shocked. The reason this is shocking is because Jesus says that nothing going into a man makes him unclean. This is a shocking thing to say because there are dozens of statements in the OT that appear to say exactly the opposite. Consider this one example: Lev. 11:40, “Anyone who eats some of the carcass must wash his clothes, and he will be unclean till evening.” Jesus is not simply attacking the tradition of the elders that has been added to the law but he is also attacking a way of approaching the entire law. There is a way of viewing and using the good law of God that is bad. While the specific example he is dealing with is eating unclean food, whether made unclean by contact with something unclean or whether unclean in itself, the broader point has to do with how the Jewish people viewed and used the OT law. They acted as though external conformity to the law was all that the law required and that this external conformity made you either acceptable or unacceptable to God. They believed they had the power to keep it and thus make themselves clean in God’s sight. Jesus, as the fulfillment and the one who fulfills the entire OT is showing that the point of food laws, of the entire OT, is to point to and prepare people for him (Galatians 3:15-25, Romans 10:4). He gives the authoritative meaning of the OT.

5. How would you describe Jesus’ response when the disciples ask him to tell them what the “parable” of v. 15 means? See Romans 1:21 where the same word is translated “foolish” and Rom. 1:31 where it is translated “senseless”.

Jesus’ response to them is demanding. He asks them, “Are you also so dull?” The “also” indicates that Jesus is comparing them to the Jewish religious leaders he rebuke dearlier. That word translated dull is used throughout the rest of the NT to describe the dull hearts of unbelieving non-Christians. Jesus is surprised that these men who know that he is the Messiah, do not yet understand the spiritual nature of the law. He attributes their lack of understanding, not to the fact the OT is unclear, but rather to their willful, spiritual blindness. They are at fault for not understanding what he has just said. Jesus expects them to get it in the same way he expected the Jewish religious leaders to get it.

6. What is the main reason Jesus gives as to why eating unclean food cannot make you unclean?

The reason that eating unclean food cannot make a person unclean is because the food does not affect the heart. It is a merely physical thing that happens. The food goes into the stomach and then, literally, he says, it goes out of the body into the latrine. The main point that Jesus makes here is that external conformity to external law cannot save me or change me. Eating only clean food will not make you clean in God’s eyes and eating unclean food will not make you unclean in God’s eyes. The problem with human beings is not merely behavioral. What we need is not just better instruction and more determined moral effort. External conformity to external law cannot affect what is really wrong with me. There is no power in the law to change me. It can only condemn me. It can tell me what I should and should not do but it cannot give me the power to do it or forgive my failure to keep it.

7. What makes a person “unclean” in God’s eyes?

The various evil things that we do, think and feel are what make us unclean in God’s eyes.

8. Where do these evils come from? See Ecclesiastes 9:3, Jer. 11:7-8, Rom 1:21, & Eph. 4:18.

All these evil things that make me unclean come from my heart. The sad and sober reality of being a human being is that our hearts are evil and therefore, we do evil. Doing evil is not what makes us evil. Rather, we are evil and thus we do evil. Whatever is in the human heart is what comes out of the human heart and what is in the human heart is evil. This is the universal witness of the entire Bible.

9. The word heart is used over 750 times in the OT and 150 times in the NT. How would you describe or define the heart?

It is the normal biblical word for the interior part of man that is the real me. It does not primarily refer to our emotions though the heart has a profound effect upon our emotions. The heart is our interior faculty that understands or perceives the external world and then either affirms what it perceives or disapproves what is perceived. The heart believes or disbelieves, it loves or hates what is perceived. It determines the entire course of our lives. Whatever our heart perceives as valuable and trustworthy will determine how we feel, how we act, how we decide. It's important to emphasize that my heart is who I am. It is not something separate from the real me but is the real me.

10. How does it strike you that the first evil thing to come out of our hearts is “evil thoughts”?

You don't have to do anything wrong to be guilty before God. All you have to do is think an evil thought. Most of us think that our thoughts come to us unbidden, that we are not responsible for those strange and wicked thoughts that go floating through our heads. Jesus says that the reason we have evil thoughts is because we are evil. Our evil thoughts are the result of what we love, trust and value.

11. How does it strike you to know that your thoughts condemn you before God?

12. What is the relationship between the evil things that come out of me and the circumstances of my life, either past or present?

These actions, emotions and attitudes do not come out of us because of external circumstances but by an internal affection. I do not get impatient with my child because she dawdles when getting ready for bed. I get impatient with her because my heart believes I have better and more important things to do than to patiently help her learn to obey me. I have more satisfying things to do than spend time with her. I am not full of worry and fear because I don't have enough money to pay the bills this month. I am full of worry and fear because I believe having enough money is more necessary to life than being loved by God in Christ. My heart is not full of anger and bitterness towards another person because they made a rude comment to me. My heart is full of anger and bitterness because I believe that I have a right to be treated with respect and love by others. I believe that having a person love me is far superior to being loved by Christ. I do not steal from my employer because I don't get paid enough but because I love getting things for free more than I love being a righteous person who trusts God to give me what I need. What Jesus' statement tells us is that we are not slaves to our circumstances or our genes or the people around us. My heart is the cause of all of my behaviors, emotions, thoughts, and attitudes, not something that happens to me.

13. How does it make you feel to know that the evil that comes out of you is not caused by what happens to you?

14. Mark records Jesus' trip to the region of Tyre, a Gentile region, right after this. What happens in Tyre? (NOTE: The Greek word translated “evil” literally is the word for “unclean”, which the NIV shows in the margin.)

Jesus leaves Israel behind and goes into the region of Tyre, which is a Gentile, non-Jewish area. From the point of view of the religious leaders he was walking into a place of defilement. One of the reasons they washed their hands before eating was because the wind blew over Gentile lands and brought their uncleanness into contact

with their skin. Here is Jesus actually going into the heart of uncleanness. When he gets there a non-Jewish, Gentile woman comes and falls at his feet. An evil spirit, we are told, possesses her daughter. This Gentile, unclean woman, pleads with Jesus to cast out the unclean spirit from her daughter.

15. What does Jesus say to this poor woman?

He says that only the children of God have a right to the benefits that the Son of God has brought to this earth. Only those who belong to God by grace can receive the benefits of salvation. It's not right to throw the children's bread to the dogs. Jesus calls the woman and her child dogs.

16. What would you do if someone called you a dog?

17. How does the woman respond to what Jesus says?

She agrees that she is a dog. And on the basis of being a dog she asks Jesus to heal her unclean daughter of the unclean spirit. A dog was the epitome of uncleanness in Jewish law. The woman simply agrees with Jesus that his assessment of her condition is absolutely correct. She is unclean but yet she asks that he would help her. She knows that Jesus is gracious and only he can deal with an unclean spirit. Therefore she depends upon him to do what only he can do. Jesus cleanses her daughter of her uncleanness in response to her faith in him.

18. How are we cleansed from our unclean hearts that yield an unclean life?

Being unclean and unacceptable to God is not a reason to stay away from Christ; it is the reason to go to Christ. Here is how you get a clean heart that yields acceptable worship to God, you acknowledge always that you are unclean and unfit for God's presence and you trust Christ to make you clean and thus fit for God's presence. Christ alone is able to give you a clean heart that delights in God's ways and thus produces the good fruit of a progressively obedient

life. This is not something you do one time but this is the way you live your life at all times, confessing, mourning over sin and trusting in Christ as the one who bore God's wrath for sin and who gives me his very righteousness. He cleanses me of evil. I do not make myself clean.

Human beings are helpless to change themselves because...

- **What is outside of me, cannot affect what is inside of me**
- **What is inside of me will come out of me**
- **What comes out of me is what condemns me**