

### The Lord Explains about Defilement

#### Mark 7:14-23

Mark 7:14-23 - *“When He had called all the multitude to Himself, He said to them, “Hear Me, everyone, and understand: <sup>15</sup>There is nothing that enters a man from outside which can defile him; but the things which come out of him, those are the things that defile a man. <sup>16</sup>If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear!”*

*<sup>17</sup>When He had entered a house away from the crowd, His disciples asked Him concerning the parable. <sup>18</sup>So He said to them, “Are you thus without understanding also? Do you not perceive that whatever enters a man from outside cannot defile him, <sup>19</sup>because it does not enter his heart but his stomach, and is eliminated, thus purifying all foods?” <sup>20</sup>And He said, “What comes out of a man, that defiles a man. <sup>21</sup>For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, <sup>22</sup>thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. <sup>23</sup>All these evil things come from within and defile a man.”*

#### Background Notes

The Lord called the multitude to Him, and it's very clear that He really wanted them to understand His teaching: *“Hear Me, everyone, and understand.”* Up to this point in the chapter, the Lord had been speaking just to the scribes and the Pharisees about their hypocritical traditions. One of these traditions was “defilement.” The scribes and Pharisees said that eating certain foods would defile a person. In addition, they said that eating with unwashed hands would defile a person - you had to wash ceremonially in a certain way that they prescribed. The Lord rebuked these men for their hypocrisy. But now we see that He wanted everyone - the entire multitude - to hear what He said, and to get it straight: *It's not what you eat or how you eat it that defiles you!*

In reference to verse 15, it's very important to understand the background so that the verse is not pulled out of context and misinterpreted. When the Lord said that there is nothing that enters a man from the outside that can defile him, He wasn't saying that you can take anything into your body and it won't hurt you. The Lord was not saying here that there is no such thing as substance abuse or contaminated food. He was speaking in a *moral sense*, not in a medical sense. What you eat does not defile you *morally*. There are lots of substances taken into the body that can hurt you and even kill you, but the Lord was speaking in a moral sense. You can't be *defiled morally* by what you eat!

In the context, the Lord was thinking of the clean and the unclean foods of the Old Testament dietary laws. The scribes and Pharisees said that you were defiled if you ate those unclean foods, and that eating clean foods without washing ritualistically defiled you as well. The Lord said, no – that's not true! Eating the unclean foods of the Old Testament Law did not defile you just because the food itself was considered unclean. No - you were defiled if you ate those foods,

because you would be disobeying the dietary laws that God had given. The Lord had given the dietary laws for a number of reasons. Some were given for the people's good health - for example, they didn't have refrigeration in those days. So we can see the wisdom of God in the dietary laws.

The Jewish religious leaders had twisted the dietary laws so that the food itself defiled you, and you were defiled if you did not wash properly. The Lord was correcting their incorrect thinking about food and what went into their stomachs. So let's not pull verse 15 out of context and apply it to things other than food. The Bible is **not** saying that you can fill your mind with trash, such as pornographic pictures and literature, and not be defiled. **You will be defiled!** The Lord was not talking about pornography – He was talking about the clean and unclean foods of the dietary laws of the Old Testament.

In verse 19, there's a question as to how the last phrase should be interpreted. Verse 19 says, *"thus purifying all foods."* "Purifying all foods" or "making all foods clean"? Was this part of the Lord's statement, or is it a parenthetical editorial comment by Mark? Some translations say, *"In saying this, Jesus declared all foods 'clean.'"* If that phrase was part of the Lord's own statement, then He was saying that a food can't defile a person morally because it does not go into the heart but into the stomach. There the body itself purifies the food by drawing out the nutrients and eliminating the rest. However, if the phrase is a parenthetical editorial comment by Mark, then the point is that the Lord was indicating that the laws about the clean and unclean foods were coming to an end - just as the Lord indicated to Peter in the vision in Acts 10:15, *"Don't call impure, or unholy, what the Lord has pronounced clean."*

In either case, the point is clear: there's nothing unclean in the food itself!

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. Even spiritual people can be blinded by unbiblical traditions.

In verse 17 the disciples asked the Lord about "the parable." What parable? They meant the parable of verse 15. *"There is nothing that enters a man from outside which can defile him; but the things which come out of him, those are the things that defile a man."* The disciples still did not understand, and the Lord had to explain it again to them. They were convinced that if a person ate pork, for example, that he became defiled - not just because he disobeyed the dietary laws, but that he was defiled by the food itself.

Why did the disciples think this way? Why was it so hard for them to understand what the Lord was saying? One word: **tradition!** They had grown up from childhood with that tradition. They had been taught that – and taught wrongly. They were spiritual men at this point, but they had a long way to go in understanding and maturing. They were not self-righteous hypocritical legalists, like the scribes and Pharisees. They loved the Lord; they were following Him. And yet they were blinded by tradition, and the Lord had to rebuke and correct them. Verse 18: *"Are you thus without understanding also? Do you not perceive that whatever enters a man from outside cannot defile him?"*

Even spiritual people can be blinded by unbiblical traditions, and that's just as true today as it was for the disciples. Unbiblical traditions are hard to shake, even when you're walking with the Lord.

Here's an example. Suppose you were raised with the teaching that Sunday is the "new Sabbath." That's an unbiblical tradition. Honoring Sunday as the Lord's Day is not wrong, but it would be unbiblical to legalistically impose the Old Testament Sabbath Laws onto Sunday (such as "no work or travel on the Sabbath"). And yet there are many Christians, spiritual Christians, who believe that this is what the Bible teaches, and think that everyone else should believe it too. They're blinded by unbiblical traditions.

When I was preparing this Talk, I got a phone call from a man whom I consider to be a spiritual Christian. And he asked me about this very thing! He began by asking me about Old Testament laws and how they should be applied today, and he was really confused. He thought many of these Old Testament ceremonial laws were to be applied today - and it goes back to an unbiblical tradition that he was brought up with.

Let's make sure we're not blinded by unbiblical traditions. Let's make sure our traditions are rooted in Scripture – especially before we force them on others! Remember, even spiritual people can be blinded by unbiblical traditions.

## **2. Evil actions follow evil thoughts.**

You might think that this is so obvious that we don't even have to mention it. But it does need to be taught, because there are some people who have the idea that you can think anything you want; sin is only in the actions. No. According to the Bible, evil actions and evil thoughts are both sin.

Notice what's mentioned first in verse 21, "*For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts,*" and then you have the evil actions listed. What's significant here is something you don't pick up in the English language. The evil thoughts actually precede the verb, and then the evil actions follow the verb, emphasizing that all the evil actions begin with evil thoughts.

Let's look at a couple of the evil actions mentioned here. What is "licentiousness" (v22)? It's lewdness; it's open and shameless immorality. That certainly characterizes our culture today, doesn't it? It's almost unbelievable what can be seen on TV these days – sexual immorality discussed jokingly, and even portrayed - even in comedies.

Look at the last evil action mentioned here: foolishness. We wouldn't think foolishness would be linked with all these other evil actions, would we? The word here is not foolish in the sense of being silly every once in a while. The Lord meant *moral folly*. Samson, for example, was a moral fool. Because of his desire for Philistine woman, he sold his soul. All of these evil actions begin with evil thoughts. Evil actions follow evil thoughts.

## **Practical Applications**

### **1. Beware, if you place too great an emphasis on the “externals.”**

The Scribes and Pharisees placed a great deal of emphasis on the externals, such as how long a prayer was, or how eloquent a prayer was, or the position of the body during prayer. Here in this chapter we see that they were concerned about the “externals” of foods and ritualistic washings. They were concerned about the externals – but God was concerned about what was in the heart!

As a result of their emphasis on the externals, unbiblical traditions were built up – and that’s always the way. When too great an emphasis is placed on the externals, it isn’t long before an unbiblical tradition builds up.

So beware if you place too great an emphasis on the externals. For example, a church or ministry that places too great an emphasis externals such as dress code or hairstyles may be setting itself up for unbiblical traditions in the future. Beware if you place too great an emphasis on the “externals”!

### **2. Let’s aim to change the heart of people.**

The Bible says that the root of all problems in society is the heart of man. Verse 21: *“For from within, out of the heart of men...”* Jeremiah 17:9 says, *“The heart of man is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked.”* Does society believe this? No, of course not. Everything but the sinful heart is blamed – environment, education, deprived childhood, all kinds of new syndromes that we never knew about before – but never the sinful heart of man.

There’s always a danger that, in spite of the clear teachings of Scripture, we as Christians can begin to buy into what the secular world is saying - and somehow even read it into the Bible. Let’s remember that the root cause of the problems in society - all the sins listed in verses 21-22 - the root cause is the sinful heart of man. And it can only be changed by the gospel of Jesus Christ!

Let’s not be indifferent to our hurting society, but let’s never lose our focus. Let’s aim to change the heart of people through the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.