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## What Makes Us Sinful?

Mark 7:1-23

During the summer months when we were children, with our dad at work at the Pentagon, our mom would send us five boys outside to play. In Northern Virginia where we lived, there was a park with a baseball diamond just three houses away. Often times the neighborhood kids could all be found playing some kind of game on the ball diamond or on the hills in the park. We would play kickball, dodgeball, kick the can, king of the hill, war, tag or any number of made-up games. At dusk we knew it was time to go home. We were hungry anyway and we were ready to eat. As we entered the house we were told to **go to the bathroom and washup** for dinner. Before we could sit down at the dinner table, mom had to inspect our hands to see how clean they were. Mom checked our palms, the back of our hands and our fingernails. She would even check our forearms for dirt. Many times we were sent back to the bathroom to wash our hands again. Mom would tell us, "Use soap this time." As adults we are still being taught and told about proper handwashing.

I had my annual health review last Monday, December 29. After the initial height, weight and blood pressure check, I was placed in a room to wait for the doctor. This room had a framed poster on proper handwashing. I took a picture of it. It had 8 small pictures with directions. 1. Wet hands. 2. Apply soap. 3. Rub soapy hands for 20 seconds. 4. Scrub fingertips and between fingers. 5. Scrub forearm to just below elbow. 6. Rinse forearms and hands. 7. Use towel to dry hands and forearms or use an approved hand drying device. 8. Turn off water with towel, throw towel away. I think these people talked to my mom. This is what she taught us, all but the last picture. We turned off the water before we dried our hands. And we never had paper towels. We had real bath towels hanging on the wall we would rub our hands on.

**Mark 7:1-2** In our scripture today, Pharisees and scribes came from Jerusalem to Galilee to see and hopefully meet Jesus. Jesus had become popular in Galilee. Word had reached the Jews in Jerusalem about this prophet and His amazing healing ministry. Not only did these Jews see Jesus, they confronted Him about His disciples. Some of Jesus' disciples were seen eating bread, probably bread leftover from the "Feeding of the Five Thousand." These Pharisees and scribes must have been watching the disciples for some time and paying close attention to their actions. They took note that these disciples did not properly wash their hands before they ate, if they washed at all. Their mothers were not around to catch them and send them back to the bathroom. But the Pharisees were there. The disciples were defiled! They had eaten their bread with unclean, unwashed hands. We have never done this. Right?

**Verses 3-4** For generations, the Jews had been taught how to properly wash their hands. They had their oral law. Pharisees could even be seen showing off their skill and righteousness in their personal hygiene and handwashing. All Jews in Jerusalem were required to wash their hands according to this oral tradition of the elders. Jews living in the Galilee of the Gentiles were different. They did not follow the oral laws so closely. For the Pharisees, this disobedience was sin and made them defiled. Being **defiled meant that a person was unclean**. According to Jewish law they were unable to have a right relationship with God. They could not worship God or be in His presence because they were defiled. What made them defiled? Dirt from dirty, sinful people. Dirt and filth from their own unwashed hands. When the Pharisees left the Gentile marketplaces and went to the places they were staying, they basically took a bath before they ate. They washed all the dust and dirt that had gotten on them while they walked around the towns in Galilee. Not only did they wash their hands in an elaborate way, they also thoroughly washed all their utensils, cups, pitchers and couches they used. There is nothing wrong with being clean. We have been told the Bible says, “**cleanliness is next to godliness.**” Where is that verse in the Bible. There is no verse with those words. Although the concept of cleanliness is taught in the Bible. Several places in Exodus and Leviticus command the priests and people to wash their hands and feet and their clothes (Exodus 19:10-14 / 30:17-21; Leviticus chapters 14-15). Over the centuries Jewish elders developed stricter rules to keep people clean and stricter measures to become clean once defiled. These man-made ceremonial laws were in direct conflict with the word of God.

**Verse 5** “*Then the Pharisees and scribes asked Him, ‘Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashed hands?’*” Why, they ask? It appears that these Jews elevated or revered the traditions they held as being just as important if not more so than the laws of God. These traditions of the elders were just that, man-made rules. One of the **great things about the Bible** is that there are no contradictions. Oh, there may seem to be some on the surface. When we know the character of God as Love, Holy and Just, then we can begin to understand forgiveness and judgment. When anyone or any group **adds man-made rules with the doctrines of God**, there is going to be a conflict. Both cannot stand together. A choice has to be made. Both cannot be followed. When a person or group or church follows man-made rules, then they are rejecting the doctrines of God. From Jesus’ perspective, they are hypocrites. The Jews have developed books of man-made rules and they follow them. They read God’s word and say they believe God’s word but they follow the rules of men and Jesus called them out on it.

**Verses 6-7** Jesus said, “*Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: ‘This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain*

*they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.”* Are we to honor God with our lips? Yes, certainly we are! Yet He wants our hearts too! These Jews read the scriptures and studied the scriptures but they **did not live them**. They knew the scriptures but they developed their own teachings to get around the laws of God. They **lived according to the teachings of men**. Of course, the Jews taught that these traditions were how they were supposed to understand and follow the laws of God. They **fooled themselves** so that they could live comfortable selfish lives. What example did Jesus give? It is an example that challenges every person in every generation, honoring your father and mother.

**Verses 9-13** Jesus told these Jewish leaders that their actions were fulfilling Jewish prophecy. By their own self-righteous actions, they were setting aside, rejecting God’s commands and were keeping their own traditions. Moses said, *“Honor your father and your mother and He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.”* If they did not do the first, they should suffer the second. The Jews rightly understood that the way God wanted them to honor their father and mother was to **care for their aging, failing parents and financially support them until they died**. But many Jews, especially the ruling class were getting rich. They wanted to keep their money and not ‘waste it’ on their parents. So, they made a tradition, an oral law that allowed them to keep their own money. These Jews could declare their money to be Korban. Korban meant the money was a gift dedicated to God. It could not be used for anything or anyone else, not even their parents. To put it politely, Jesus was not happy with this tradition. Now adult children did not have to care for and financially support their aging and failing parents which goes against the commandment of God. Jesus had a list of problems He had with many of these oral traditions. Each one was a way out for the Jews so that they did not have to follow the commandments of God any longer. They followed the commandments of men instead.

**Verses 14-16** After this confrontation with the Pharisees and scribes from Jerusalem, Jesus called out to the crowd that had gathered. Jesus taught them the truth. He said, *“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.”* This sounds very straight forward and it makes sense. What a person eats does not separate them from God. What a person eats does not make them a sinful person. Although if you had been taught wrong all your life, this would be a lot to swallow and believe. Jesus emphasized the truth. What defiles a person before God is what comes out of your mouth. This is what makes us sinful and shows that we are a sinful people. What had made the Jewish leaders defiled? All the man-made oral traditions that came out of their hearts defiled them. Those oral traditions nullified the word of God. These are the things that defiled the Pharisees and scribes and the generations of elders.

**Verses 17-19** Later that day Jesus had gone into a house and was with His disciples. His disciples were not quite sure they heard Him correctly. They had been taught all their lives to eat only certain food and eat them certain ways in order to maintain a right relationship with God. Their lives had been consumed with these dietary rules, not for dietary reason but for religious reasons, to keep from being defiled before God. **It is perfectly alright to follow dietary rules.** Jesus does not have a problem with anyone following dietary rules. What He has a problem with is making the association of defilement with God by these dietary rules. **The dietary rules were never intended to be taken that way,** not even in Moses' day. All the way back to Adam and Eve, *"whatever enters a man from outside cannot defile him, because it does not enter his heart but his stomach, and is eliminated."* What you eat does not enter your heart and change your heart. What we eat goes into our stomach and, well you know the rest of the story. This has always been true. If there is defilement with something we or drink, it is not because of **what it is.** It is because of **why we eat** or drink it. Think of **blood.** It is not natural to drink blood. Why did people do it. They believed they could get the life of the animal into their bodies. That is a lie. Their reasoning is all wrong. They were defiled for the thought that came out of their heart.

**Verses 20-23** What makes us sinful? Jesus said, *"What comes out of a man, that defiles a man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within and defile a man."* That is a very complete list. **These are why there is evil in the world. These are why bad things happen to people.** Do you know that each one of us are capable of all of these. A Christian has the presence and power of the **Holy Spirit** to constrain them. We have the Holy Spirit who produces His fruit, love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. There are lots of people in the world who have **learned to constrain themselves** from most of these. But believing one's ability to constrain themselves from these evils will get them into heaven is just as wrong as believing that eating the wrong foods will make a person defiled with God. Eating right or acting right will not get you into heaven. The only way to get into heaven is to **get a new heart** and only Jesus can do that. Ask for His help today. Get the new heart He wants to give you.

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