

Scripture: Mark 7:1-23

Jesus Has the Power to Make Clean!

Beloved in Christ, in the gospel of Mark, we see Jesus bringing in His glorious reign. Jesus cleanses lepers. He casts out unclean spirits. He cleanses the woman with the issue of blood. Yet, over and over again, the religious leaders fail to recognize who Jesus is.

Witness the presence and power of God. His signs and wonders confirm who He is. He is the bread of life, the bread from heaven. He is the "I AM" of the Old Testament who has come in the flesh. And He has the power to make clean! He is the One to whom the entire Old Testament points.

Yet the Jewish leaders fail to see Him --- who He is. They choose to follow their own traditions rather than believe Him, who has the power to make clean. An intense and critical conflict occurs over the issue of clean and unclean. In Mark 7:1-23, we see that Jesus has the power to make clean,

1. Jesus confronts their lie
2. Jesus reveals the truth

1. Jesus confronts their lie [vv.1-13]

It happened before and it happens again. We read in **verse 1** that the Pharisees and some of the scribes come together to Jesus. They came all the way from Jerusalem, as they did before in Mark 3. They were the religious leaders among the Jews. The Pharisees, as you may recall, were the 'pure ones'. That was a Pharisee. The scribes were scholars, the interpreters of the law.

What was the occasion for the conflict? **Verse 2:** They saw that Jesus' disciples did not wash their hands before they ate bread! That made them defiled/unclean! The concern was not hygiene, but ritual purity. We wash our hands for health reasons. But that was not the case here. They find fault. In their mind, Jesus' disciples were deviating from the law of Moses.

That's why the Pharisees and scribes question Jesus in **verse 5**, "*Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashed hands?*"

You need to be aware of something here. This regulation was according to their tradition but this regulation was not in the law of Moses! The Lord, however, did instruct His people [see Leviticus 11] to distinguish between the clean and the unclean; that is, between the animals they were allowed to eat and not allowed to eat. They were not to eat unclean animals [Leviticus 11:47].

Why did the Lord command this in the Old Testament? This is the important question. By making this distinction between clean and unclean, the LORD was teaching His people their own need for cleansing from sin. He was teaching them that when sin came into the world, the whole world became unclean. Only the Lord Jesus can cleanse and make the world new through His atoning sacrifice. The food laws were a shadow pointing to Jesus, but they failed to see Jesus, the Reality.

As a result, they made rule upon rule. They added laws and more laws of their own, that are not in the Bible. Instead of seeing their own sin and need for Jesus, they became proud. They relied on their own works to

make themselves clean. These regulations were very extensive as we see in **verses 3-4**. Before they ate, they would wash their hands in a special, prescribed way. They had all kinds of laws for washing of cups, pitchers, copper vessels and even couches. If they went to the market place, one might bump into a Gentile, a common person. Without even knowing it, you might touch something unclean. So always you had to wash your hands before eating. If you touch food with unclean hands, the food itself would become unclean, and if you ate it, you would become defiled.

You see, false religion is concerned about externals, things you do to clean the outside of you – fastings, oils, no meats, and such things. It's concerned about making steps toward God by your own man-made rules. It makes you look holy and good, but is this pleasing to God? No. It's proud and it stinks before God.

Here, in **verses 6-13**, the Lord Jesus confronts the lie of the Pharisees and scribes by calling them hypocrites and lawless.

First, in **verses 6-8**, Jesus says, 'hypocrites! That's what Isaiah says about you.' It's 'appearance only; not the 'real' you. All shell; but no substance. All mask; but no reality. That's what hypocrisy is: living a lie. In quoting Isaiah, Jesus says, "*You honor Me with your lips*". You say all the right things; you follow your rules but your heart is far from Me.

As a brief application to us: True religion is about the heart. God wants more than your lips. He wants your heart, your love; not an outward show. For example, going to worship, not merely because God commands, but also because you desire to worship Him from the heart. God wants your heart – your heart in the worship of Himself!

Secondly, in **verses 9-13**, Jesus says that when it comes to a choice of God's Word or your traditions, you choose your traditions over God's commandments. In other words, you make the word of man more important than God's Word. If it comes to a choice between the two, you reject God's Word.

Jesus gives one simple illustration using the fifth commandment as an example. "Honor your father and your mother" [Exodus 20:12]. To honor them does not mean that they should live under the same roof as you. The Bible does say that the married husband shall leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife. But to honor them does mean that we love and respect them; that also means providing for them when they are in need, in distress, or in their old age.

But here, in this example, suppose parents needed support in their old age, the son might say, 'Corban'; that is, 'a gift to God.' In other words, the son piously says all his money is given to the church. They could use this as an excuse not to support their parents in their old age. The word 'corban' was so loosely interpreted, he could justify spending this money on himself. Jesus says to them, '*you have not only laid aside the Word of God, but you make the Word of God of no effect.*' Jesus says, "*and many such things you do*" [v.13].

There are so many ways the human heart tries to get around the commandments of God. ' Many religious teachers add their own rules: touch the TV screen, use this oil, pray this way, drink this, and so on, making the Word of God of no effect.

They dress their unrighteous deeds with pious words. For example, in Matthew 23, Jesus says, "*Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, for you devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayers*" [23:14].

In Matthew 7:22-23, Jesus addresses religious hucksters [peddlars], *“many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name? And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.’”*

Many people act religious, look very clean, but they have no true love for God in their hearts. Jesus pulls the covers off. Jesus reveals the holiness of God to us and in so doing, He also reveals man’s uncleanness from within – the heart. This brings us to verses 14-23

2. Jesus reveals the truth [vv.14-23]

Jesus now turns away from these religious leaders who want to control the multitude with their rules and regulations.

In **verses 14-16**, Jesus calls the multitude to Himself. His appeal is urgent: *“Hear Me, everyone, and understand!”* Nothing entering a man from the outside can make him dirty/unclean. Rituals can’t change the heart. What comes out of your heart — those are the things that make a man unclean. He calls for their ears! *“If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear.”*

In **verses 17-23**, Jesus explains the whole matter once more to His disciples. You hear Christ’s sadness, *“are you thus without understanding also?”* Indeed, we need God’s grace to enlighten our understanding. Literally, Jesus is saying what enters into you from the outside does not make you unclean. It enters the stomach, not the heart, and then it goes into the toilet.

In Christ, the OT food laws regarding cleanness and uncleanness are no longer binding. They were valid only for a time. Its purpose was to point to the uncleanness of our hearts and our need for cleansing in Jesus. Our hearts are unclean because of sin, by all the evil that comes forth out of it. Jesus says, *“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.”* We are born way. It’s inherited through our first parents, Adam and Eve. Note the sad result: loneliness, broken trust, and division.

Sin is now made clear to us in another way and no longer through food laws. It is revealed to us especially through the terrible suffering Jesus had to endure on the cross for our sins.

Man needs cleansing. This cleansing comes through repenting of sin and believing in Christ. The same urgent call of Jesus comes to all today, *“Hear Me, everyone, and understand!”* God’s grace is freely offered to all who come to Christ. Sin is forgiven by God’s grace and mercy through faith in Christ Jesus who gave Himself as the perfect sacrifice to God for sinners. By the power of His Holy Spirit, He cleanses your heart -- your thoughts and desires, the words that come out of your mouth and the deeds from your hands. Note the result the cleansing work of the Spirit: love, forgiveness, unity, wholeness, true community. Note the fruit of the Spirit!

It’s not about foods; it’s about your heart. The Christ who cleanses now declares all foods clean [v.19b] and He declares the good news of salvation for all people. You may eat pork. Remember Peter’s vision of the clean and unclean animals in a blanket coming from heaven? God said to him, *“Rise, Peter; kill and eat”* [Acts 10:13]. And when Peter objected, a voice said, *“What God has cleansed you must not call common /defiled”*.

The whole point here is that Peter had to bring the gospel to the Gentiles who were considered the unclean. Look at the following verses in Mark 7, Jesus goes to a Gentile!

The power of Christ's cleansing work was seen in a court room in Texas this past week. A white woman, a former police officer, was sentenced to prison for ten years for accidentally fatally shooting a black man. In the final moments at the trial, the brother of this murdered man spoke. In a moving testimony, he said to her, "I love you; I forgive you. I want the best for you. And the best would be . . . give your life to Christ . . . that my brother would want you to do." He then asked the judge, "Can I give her a hug please?" The judge gave permission. He did. She wept aloud. The judge left, only to return with her own personal Bible and in the hearing of everyone, she read John 3:16, *"For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son that whoever believes in Him, shall not perish, but have everlasting life."*

It hardly seems to make sense that *"Christ died for the ungodly"* [Romans 5:6,8] and that God *'justifies the ungodly'* [Romans 4:5]. But that is the gospel of the true and living God. This is the best news you will ever hear!

Because of His atoning sacrifice, the entire creation will be sanctified and the curse will be removed from the world. In Revelation 21:27, 22:15, we read that *"there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles.... Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and whoever loves and practices a lie."* This is a warning to all who do not believe in Christ.

Christ came into conflict with the leaders of the people. Christ did not give in to their lies. What would all this conflict lead to? More conflict – to the point that Christ would give up His life as a sacrifice, being cast away as an unclean thing on the cross – all for the sake of our cleansing – to all who trust Him! Praise God for His grace and mercy and His power to cleanse. Amen!