

THE THINGS THAT DEFILE, THAT MAKE A PERSON UNCLEAN

MARK 07: 14–23

Introduction

This is one of the most startling things Jesus ever taught. It shook the world of His day, and it has disturbed and gnawed at the minds and consciences of men ever since. This teaching revolutionizes man's idea of evil and wrong-doing, of just what evil is and what causes it. It knocks the props out from under man's religion and morality. It lays man bare before God making him totally dependent upon God for salvation and life.

- I. Jesus called the crowd to Him (vv. 14-17).
- II. Explanation 1: the thing that enters the body does not defile nor make unclean (vv. 18-19).
- III. Explanation 2: the thing that comes out from the heart does defile and make unclean (vv. 20-22).
- IV. Explanation 3: the source of evil is the heart (v. 23).

I. *Mark 07:14–17 Defilement of Heart and Uncleaness*

Jesus called the crowd to Him. Note verse fifteen where He says, "Listen, hear and understand. Do not only hear what I am about to say, but understand it. It is of supreme importance."

"Nothing outside a man can make him 'unclean' by going into him. Rather, it is what comes out of a man that makes him 'unclean'" (v. 15)

Simply stated, a man is not defiled nor made unclean by what enters his body, but by what comes out of his heart. Now note verse sixteen. The importance of the point is again stressed: if any man has ears, let him hear. But the disciples were spiritually dull. They did not understand the parable. They asked Him to explain.

Thought 1. It is not enough for us to hear what Christ is saying, we must understand.

II. *Mark 07:18–19 Sin, Source of Defilement*

Uncleaness the first explanation — the thing that enters the body does not defile nor make a person unclean. What defiles a man is not what he eats and drinks. What a man eats and drinks does not enter his heart; it enters his digestive tract and passes through his body. Therefore, food and drink, or eating with unwashed hands, or doing any other outward thing cannot defile a man — not *spiritually*.

There is no connection between what we eat and spirituality. That is not to say that excessive eating and intemperance are not wrong. Lustful and excessive appetites come *out of the heart*. But when it comes to the items themselves, the food and drink, there is

no merit or value, no morality or virtue to them — not within themselves. It is *what we do with the things*, what our heart does, that makes us either good or bad, spiritual or carnal.

Thought 1. When *formal* or *outward religion* is outlined like Christ shares in this passage, the foolishness of holding such a position is really seen.

Rom 14:17 *For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.*

1 Cor 7:19 *Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing. Keeping God's commands is what counts.*

1 Cor 8:8 *But food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do.*

Gal 4:10-11 *You are observing special days and months and seasons and years! I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you.*

2 Tim 3:5 *Having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them.*

III. **Mark 07:20–22 Heart, the Source of Sin**

The second explanation — the thing that comes out from the heart does make a person unclean. Note exactly what Jesus was saying: It is not things that make a man unclean. It is the heart that defiles a man. A man's heart is corrupt; therefore, he corrupts himself. Man is not *made unclean* by things; he is unclean because of his polluted heart. *It is he himself who takes things and does unclean things with them.*

MARK 07:19–20 HEART (KARDIA)

In the Bible the word “heart” refers to both the major organ of the body (Lev. 17:11) and to the most important part of a person, that is, to man's innermost being. The heart is the central part, the very centre of man's life. It is the most vital part of man's being.

The heart is man's inward life. It lies deep within, containing the inner self or the real man (1 Pet. 3:4); that is, the heart contains what a man really is, his true character.

The heart determines what a man does, his behaviour, whether good or depraved (Mt. 15:18; Mk. 7:21-23).

1. The heart is the source of man's rational being: reasoning (Mk. 2:6), understanding (Mt. 13:15), thinking (Mt. 9:4).
2. The heart is the source of man's emotional being: joy (Jn. 16:22; Eph. 5:19), affections (Lk. 24:32). desires (Mt. 5:28).
3. The heart is the source of man's spiritual being: conscience (Acts 2:37), will (Rom. 6:17), faith (Mk. 11:23; Rom. 10:10), evil (Mt. 15:18; Mk. 7:21-23; see Je. 17:9). □

MARK 07:21 SIN

Note the progress of sin within man.

- (1) It begins in human nature: “from within, out of men’s hearts.”
- (2) It develops in the human mind: in “evil thoughts.”
- (3) It is expressed in human acts: “sexual immorality, theft...” □

MARK 7:21 EVIL THOUGHTS (DIALOGISMOI HOI KAKOI)

Thoughts and imaginations and ideas and concepts that are base, wrong, wicked, immoral, unjust, reprehensible; thoughts that are not what they should be; thoughts that are not moral, clean and pure; thoughts that are not just and equitable; thoughts that are not uplifting and edifying; thoughts that are not spiritual, but carnal and worldly. (See Rom. 8:6; 2 Cor. 10:5; Phil. 4:8. See Mt. 5:28.) Evil thoughts are a sin against all the commandments (Exo. 20:1f).

Mat 9:4 Knowing their thoughts, Jesus said, “Why do you entertain evil thoughts in your hearts?”

Rom 1:21 For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.

Gen 6:5 The Lord saw how great man’s wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time.

Psa 94:11 The Lord knows the thoughts of man; he knows that they are futile.

Prov 15:26 The Lord detests the thoughts of the wicked, but those of the pure are pleasing to him.

Prov 23:7 For he is the kind of man who is always thinking about the cost. “Eat and drink,” he says to you, but his heart is not with you.

Prov 24:9 The schemes of folly are sin, and men detest a mocker.

Ezek 8:12 He said to me, “Son of man, have you seen what the elders of the house of Israel are doing in the darkness, each at the shrine of his own idol? They say, ‘The Lord does not see us; the Lord has forsaken the land.’” □

MARK 07:21 SEXUAL IMMORALITY (PORNEIAI)

A broad word including all forms and kinds of immoral and sexual acts. It is fornication, premarital sex and adultery; it is abnormal sex, all kinds of sexual vice.

1 Cor 6:18 Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body.

Eph 5:3 *But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people.*

Col 3:5 *Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.*

1 Th 4:3 *It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality. □*

MARK 07:21 THEFT (KLOPI)

To cheat and steal; to take wrongfully from another person, either legally or illegally.

Exo 20:15 *You shall not steal.*

Lev 19:11 *'Do not steal. Do not lie. Do not deceive one another.'*

Eph 4:28 *He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need.*

Titus 2:10 *And not to steal from them, but to show that they can be fully trusted, so that in every way they will make the teaching about God our Saviour attractive. □*

MARK 07:21 MURDER (PHONOS)

To kill, to take the life of another. Murder is a sin against the sixth commandment.

Exo 20:13 *"You shall not murder."*

Mat 19:18 *"Which ones?" the man inquired. Jesus replied, "Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony."*

Rom 13:8-10 *Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellow-man has fulfilled the law. The commandments, "Do not commit adultery," "Do not murder," "Do not steal," "Do not covet," and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: "Love your neighbour as yourself." Love does no harm to its neighbour. Therefore love is the fulfilment of the law.*

1 John 3:15 *Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him. □*

MARK 07:21 ADULTERY (MOICHEIAI)

Sexual unfaithfulness to husband or wife. It is also looking on a woman or a man to lust after her or him. Looking at and lusting after the opposite sex, whether in person, magazines, books, on beaches or anywhere else, is adultery. Imagining and lusting within the heart is the very same as committing the act. (Mt. 5:28; See *Marital Unfaithfulness*, Mt. 19:9.) Adultery is a sin against the seventh commandment.

Exo 20:14 “You shall not commit adultery.”

Mat 5:27-28 “You have heard that it was said, ‘Do not commit adultery.’ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”

1 Cor 6:9-10 Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders. Nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

2 Pet 2:14 With eyes full of adultery, they never stop sinning; they seduce the unstable; they are experts in greed — an accursed brood! □

MARK 07:22 GREED (PLEONEXIAI)

To lust for more and more; to have a starving appetite for something; to have a love of possessing (2 Pet. 2:14); to crave after and for. It means to crave and grasp after possessions, pleasure, power, fame. Greed lacks restraint. It lacks the ability to discriminate. It wants to have in order to spend in pleasure and luxury. Greed is an insatiable lust and craving of the flesh that cannot be satisfied. It is an intense appetite for gain, a passion for the pleasure that things can bring. It is a lust and craving so deep that a person finds his happiness in things instead of in God. It is idolatry (Eph. 5:5).

Exo 20:17 “You shall not covet your neighbour’s house. You shall not covet your neighbour’s wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbour.”

Luke 12:15 Then he said to them, “Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.”

Eph 5:5 For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person — such a man is an idolater — has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.

Col 3:5 Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.

Ezek 33:31 My people come to you, as they usually do, and sit before you to listen to your words, but they do not put them into practice. With their mouths they express devotion, but their hearts are greedy for unjust gain.

Micah 2:2 They covet fields and seize them, and houses, and take them. They defraud a man of his home, a fellow-man of his inheritance. □

MARK 07:22 MALICE (PONERIA)

To be depraved, to be actively evil, to do mischief, to trouble others and cause harm, to be malicious, to be dangerous and destructive. It is hatred and ill-will. It is an active wickedness, a desire within the heart to do harm and to corrupt people. It is actually pursuing others in order to seduce them or to harm them.

Titus 3:3 At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another.

Psa 5:9 Not a word from their mouth can be trusted; their heart is filled with destruction. Their throat is an open grave; with their tongue they speak deceit.

Psa 37:12 The wicked plot against the righteous and gnash their teeth at them.

Prov 4:16 For they cannot sleep till they do evil; they are robbed of slumber till they make someone fall.

Isa 1:4 Ah, sinful nation, a people loaded with guilt, a brood of evildoers, children given to corruption! They have forsaken the Lord; they have spurned the Holy One of Israel and turned their backs on him.

Isa 57:20 But the wicked are like the tossing sea, which cannot rest, whose waves cast up mire and mud. □

MARK 07:22 DECEIT (DOLOS)

To bait, to snare, to mislead, to beguile, to be crafty and deceitful, to mislead or give a false impression by word, act, or influence. It is conniving and twisting the truth to get one's own way. A man plots and deceives, doing whatever has to be done in order to get what he wants.

Rom 3:13 "Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit."
"The poison of vipers is on their lips."

Col 3:9 Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices.

Psa 5:6 *You destroy those who tell lies; bloodthirsty and deceitful men the Lord abhors.*

Psa 101:7 *No one who practices deceit will dwell in my house; no one who speaks falsely will stand in my presence.*

Prov 12:22 *The Lord detests lying lips, but he delights in men who are truthful.*

Prov 21:6 *A fortune made by a lying tongue is a fleeting vapour and a deadly snare.*

Jer 9:5 *Friend deceives friend, and no one speaks the truth. They have taught their tongues to lie; they weary themselves with sinning.*

Jer 17:9 *The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?*

Micah 6:12 *Her rich men are violent; her people are liars and their tongues speak deceitfully. □*

MARK 07:22 LEWDNESS (ASELGEIA)

Filthiness, indecency, shamelessness. A chief characteristic of the behaviour is open and shameless indecency. It means unrestrained evil thoughts and behaviour. It is giving in to brutish and lustful desires, a readiness for any pleasure. It is a man who knows no restraint, a man who has sinned so much that he no longer cares what people say or think. It is something far more distasteful than just doing wrong. The man who misbehaves usually tries to hide his wrong, but a lewd man does not care who knows about his exploits or shame. He wants; therefore, he seeks to take and gratify. Decency and opinion do not matter. When he initially began to sin, he did as all men do: he misbehaved in secret. But eventually, the sin got the best of him — to the point that he no longer cared who saw or knew. He became the subject of a master — the master of habit, of the thing itself. Men become the slaves of such things as unbridled lust, debauchery, licentiousness, outrageousness, shamelessness, insolence (Mk. 7:22), sensual manners, filthy words, indecent body movements, immoral handling of males and females (Rom. 13:13), carnality, gluttony, and sexual immorality (1 Pet. 4:3; 2 Pet. 2:2, 18). (See 2 Cor. 12:21; Gal. 5:19; Eph. 4:19; 2 Pet. 2:7.)

Rom 1:27 *In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion.*

1 Pet 4:3 *For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do — living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry.*

Eph 4:19 *Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more.*

Jude 1:4, 7 *For certain men whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are godless men, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord....In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire. □*

MARK 07:22 ENVY (APHTHALMOS PONEROS)

To look where one should not; to lust after what one should not; to covet, crave and desire by looking; to use the eye in an evil way; to satisfy one's lusts and desires by looking.

Luke 11:34 *"Your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eyes are good, your whole body — also is full of light. But when they are bad, your body also is full of darkness."*

Deu 28:54 *Even the most gentle and sensitive man among you will have no compassion on his own brother or the wife he loves or his surviving children.*

Prov 23:6 *Do not eat the food of a stingy man, do not crave his delicacies.*

Mat 5:27-28 *"You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart." □*

MARK 07:22 SLANDER (BLASPHEMIA)

To blaspheme, insult, rail at, revile, speak evil of God or man.

Mark 3:28-29 *"I tell you the truth, all the sins and blasphemies of men will be forgiven them. But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; he is guilty of an eternal sin."*

1 Tim 1:20 *Among them are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan to be taught not to blaspheme.*

James 2:7 *Are they not the ones who are slandering the noble name of him to whom you belong?*

Psa 80:6 *You have made us a source of contention to our neighbours, and our enemies mock us.*

Psa 119:23 *Though rulers sit together and slander me, your servant will meditate on your decrees. □*

MARK 07:22 ARROGANCE (HUPEREPHANIA)

Self-exaltation, conceit, pride, haughtiness, putting oneself above others, looking down upon others, scorn, contempt. It means to lift one's head above another, to hold contempt for another, to compare oneself with others. Arrogance can be hidden in the heart as well as openly displayed. God opposes the arrogant or the proud (Jas. 4:6; 1 Pet. 5:5; Prov. 3:24).

***Rom 12:16** Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.*

***1 Cor 8:2** The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know.*

***1 John 2:16** For everything in the world — the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does — comes not from the Father but from the world.*

***Psa 10:2** In his arrogance the wicked man hunts down the weak, who are caught in the schemes he devises.*

***Prov 3:7** Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and shun evil.*

***Prov 11:2** When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom.*

***Prov 16:18** Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.*

***Prov 21:4** Haughty eyes and a proud heart, the lamp of the wicked, are sin!*

***Isa 5:21** Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and clever in their own sight. □*

MARK 07:22 FOLLY (APHROSUNE)

Moral senselessness, foolishness, recklessness, thoughtlessness. It is a man who acts foolishly in morals and duty, behaviour and thought.

***Psa 49:13** This is the fate of those who trust in themselves, and of their followers, who approve their sayings.*

***Prov 14:8** The wisdom of the prudent is to give thought to their ways, but the folly of fools is deception.*

***Prov 15:14** The discerning heart seeks knowledge, but the mouth of a fool feeds on folly.*

***Prov 18:13** He who answers before listening — that is his folly and his shame.*

***Prov 26:11** As a dog returns to its vomit, so a fool repeats his folly.*

***Psa 53:1** The fool says in his heart, “There is no God.” They are corrupt, and their ways are vile; there is no one who does good.*

***Prov 14:9** Fools mock at making amends for sin, but goodwill is found among the upright.*

***Prov 15:5** A fool spurns his father’s discipline, but whoever heeds correction shows prudence.*

***Prov 28:26** He who trusts in himself is a fool, but he who walks in wisdom is kept safe.*

***Ecl 10:1** As dead flies give perfume a bad smell, so a little folly outweighs wisdom and honour.*

***Jer 17:11** Like a partridge that hatches eggs it did not lay is the man who gains riches by unjust means. When his life is half gone, they will desert him, and in the end he will prove to be a fool.*

***Luke 11:39-40** Then the Lord said to him, “Now then, you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness. You foolish people! Did not the one who made the outside make the inside also?” □*

IV. Mark 07: 23 Source of Sin and Evil

The third explanation — the source of evil is the heart. The problem of evil is from within, not from without; it is internal, not external. Evil comes from man’s heart (spirit), not his body. Consider the news report of any city on any given day. Notice the evil things reported and keep in mind — it is within one’s own city that such evil is happening.

Multiply that evil by every city of any size. Just think of all the evil that is being done every day, and that is only the reported evil, the *major* evil. Think of the evil words and evil treatment and evil thoughts — all the evil things done within all the cities (Mk. 7:21-22) — and one has a picture of what Jesus meant. Man’s heart is his problem. It is from the heart that *these evil things* come. Man knows better. He has more intelligence than to allow so much evil in his life and home and community and city and world. He just cannot control his heart.

Man makes three fatal mistakes when dealing with the problems of the law and evil, that is, with the problems of his heart.

1. Man judges evil to be external only. He judges only the sinful act, only the deed. In the eyes of society, a man would be considered perfect if he never did bad — never broke the law and never did the forbidden thing. A person is considered good if he *seldom* does bad — seldom breaks the law and seldom does the forbidden thing (for example, breaking the speed limit or taking a pencil from the office).

2. Man fails to see (or confess) that evil arises from the heart, from within. He does not consider that evil things come from an evil heart. Therefore, man puts little if any restraint upon the lust and inward thought. Man seldom thinks beyond the act; he seldom digs into the reason for the lust and thought; he seldom gives any attention to the heart. The result: man still grapples and always will have to grapple with the problem and tragedy of evil.
3. Man fails to see and acknowledge that the human heart needs to be changed, that is, converted. He refuses to face up to the fact that is so clearly seen: a new man is what is needed. Somehow man's heart needs to be reborn.

1 Pet 1:23 For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.

Eph 4:23-24 To be made new in the attitude of your minds; And to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

Col 3:9-10 Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices. And have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.

Jesus revealed the problem so clearly in this passage. Note the progress of sin within man. (1) It begins in human nature: “from within, out of men’s hearts.” (2) It develops in the human mind: in “evil thoughts.” (3) It is expressed in human acts: “sexual immorality, theft....” ■