

Mark 7 Purity

It's a graphic image that Jesus gives us today. Things coming out of us. You heard how dark that list is too. These things come from our mouths, wickedness, deceit, slander, pride. These things come out our eyes, sexual immorality, coveting. These things are a hemorrhage in our brain, evil thoughts. Its oozing out under our fingernails, theft, murder, adultery, foolishness.

And the bile oozing from us gets onto our keyboard, our "neat and tidy" homes or workplaces, we leave it on our bathroom mirrors, and it spews out onto our loved ones, our friends – it's all over.

You can imagine the battle to try and contain it all. Bleach buckets, wipes, napkins, and when we can't keep up with the mess perhaps then a patient goes to a doctor. And there will be treatment for the symptoms, this oozing. They will relieve pressure on the skull, they will wash out the eyes with a solution, they wrap the hands, they will rinse the mouth. Yes, by all means they will treat the symptoms.

But Jesus tells us where the source is: the heart. It's dark, it's infected, it's evil. Lest we think "deep down everyone is good." No. Without treatment it gets real ugly.

And so with the wraps and the rinses and all the symptoms being fought against, well, the root cause must be treated and so there is nothing for it but to crack that sternum and let the Doctor take a good look at that heart. It's gonna hurt, a whole lot. But he, and he alone, can make it new again.

Paul in our epistle lesson, I think, speaks a bit about treating the symptoms of our disease. That's right, we have a disease called Sin, it's symptoms are sins. And Paul encourages us to put on the armor of God – fight the good fight, brothers and sisters, let's take real steps to avoid the

brokenness, to contain the bile spilling out of us. So what does your eye see? What do your ears hear that are feeding the darkness, not of your stomach, no, but of your heart and mind? What do we consume that goes straight, not to our stomachs, but our hearts and poisons our minds? And give thanks to God, yes him, not you, for any small victories, that come in this fight, because after all it's his armor, not yours.

But we cannot ignore the source of the corruption, down deep in us. The heart. Take it to Jesus, let the medicine of the Gospel in, through the walls you put up, to heal that heart. To wash it clean in his purifying, cleansing blood.

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The previous weeks' gospel lessons were easier to preach on. This, I suppose, is what I get for being gone! In the previous weeks' lessons Jesus pushed back against the pharisees because they were putting their traditions (aka: things not in the Bible) above God's Word.

In our Gospel reading, today, however, Jesus is pushing back against the pharisees and teaching the crowds regarding something that *is* in the Bible – the Old Testament purity laws, specifically the food laws.

Is he saying they were wrong? No, this is the same Jesus who said not one letter of the Old Covenant will pass away. Matt. 5:18 But he *is* saying we don't have to hold to them, in their dietary specifics anymore... What do we make of that?

And the temptation, as New Testament Christians who have never had to submit to any food laws, is to think the Old Testament purity laws didn't matter. And, "finally Jesus is getting around to dismissing them!"

But then why did God give them in the Old Testament? What was their purpose?

And if we come to the conclusion that they are merely *dismissed* by Jesus – it can lead us to believe that perhaps the Old Testament and its laws was “God’s first attempt at saving the world, but then it didn’t work, so I guess he needed to try again and come down and save us.”

This not only divides the bible in two, with a meat cleaver, but it also undermines God’s plan and design through history to unfold his plan of salvation.

So I challenge you not to read this Gospel lesson and see Jesus as dismissing the purity laws. But rather, in the New Testament, *magnifying them!* And, even better, and as you know: using them to point to himself as their *fulfiller*.

But one question at a time. Why would God put these laws in effect in the first place during the Old Testament? And the answer is right in our reading from Deuteronomy – so that the world might see his people as a peculiar people, as a holy people set apart, different from the world, and there-by ask about who they are, and who their God is, that the world might know Him.

This doesn’t change in the New Testament! We are still God’s peculiar, different people!

Sure, we eat pork, like the rest of the world, but look at that list Jesus points out today: What a peculiar person you would be, indeed, if you, unlike the world, didn’t have these things spewing out of you? What odd people would we be If we fought against this brokenness in us and the world? And maybe someone would notice, and maybe someone would ask about our God.

But then again, which of us are pure enough so that none of these come out of us? Which of us keep the command that well? Which of us have been able to stop the leaking, to treat the symptoms so perfectly we can hold it all in? And in this respect, as is true of all Christ’s teaching

in the New Testament, he does not take the Old Testament laws and make them easier, no, he makes them *harder*. More difficult to keep. He does this with lust. I tell you anyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. Matt. 5:28. And I would point out that the list he gives today does seem to give particular emphasis to sexual sins. As if he knew, as if those purity laws of old, were supposed to point us past the symptoms and cause us to see the ill state of our impure hearts... But its not just lust he makes more difficult to avoid. He does the same with murder, and we walk around saying, “Hey I haven’t killed anyone.” Are you so sure? Jesus says “But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment.” Matt. 5:22. And John helpfully clarifies in his first letter: “Whoever hates his brother is a murderer” 3:15.

And now, today, Jesus does the same with purity, he does not make it easier because he lets us eat more food and wear clothes with two fabrics, and so on – no he makes it harder. It goes way beyond food, always has, always will. It goes to what comes out of your heart.

And which of us stand pure now?

And as we look at and confess the darkness in us, now, maybe now, like that person leaking bile all over their lives, maybe now we are reminded to come back, once more, to the doctor – the Great Physician. The Old Testament people were pointed to this Physician via the Word, the Sacrificial System, and the prophets, yes they knew a Savior would come. We, in the New Testament are pointed back to that same Savior and his cross. And in either Testament the law, though its expressions look a bit different, does the same thing again –it points us to Jesus.

Jesus. Sinless. Never a lustful thought at any daughter of God. We see Jesus, ever faithful even as he dies. We see Jesus whose words are truth and life. We see Jesus who cleanses lepers, raises the

dead, forgives sins. And we see him dying. His heart pumping, struggling, we see him bleeding, dying.

Is that pure enough? Perfect enough a sacrifice?

It seems so. Why? Because the sky goes dark, because the earth quakes as it's Maker dies.

Because the curtain tears. And, most notably, because that heart starts beating again. Death is undone. Something beyond what any doctor could muster. So then could His Word be true that he can make New Hearts in us? That beat again even after death? That beat purely, free from the disease of sin?

Yes.

And we see a foretaste of it now as we are called New Creations. 2 Corinthians 5:17, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" Is! Present tense! All his people of faith, claimed by him, all who receive his gifts, in the eyes of the Father are healed, clean, and pure. And one day, when he sees us to his kingdom, the disease will finally die for good, but you, child of God, will be free of the stains of sin. That's his promise, that is what he has worked for, in the Covenants, and in his Cross.

In the meantime, yes, we fight the good fight. Why wouldn't we? Jesus has given us his life and a new life, what better way to say thank you than to uphold his law? But as we fall short, when we wretch back up that bile from our dark hearts, yes, even in the failures: praise God, because those failures— those do not lead us to despair. No. They are, yes, painful reminders that we are still diseased, but may they also continue to drive us back to the Great Physician.

Jesus. He is your purity. And he *is* yours. His Word in your ears, eyes of faith to see that, yes, in reality, in History, he is Risen Victorious! Let alone the washing of the Water, let alone the food

he gives, body and blood for you – for more than just your stomach. These are not accidents!

These are gifts, that you may know beyond a feeling that you actually are forgiven, and washed clean of every spot and stain and an heir of the Kingdom. Rejoice, brothers and sisters, Jesus has made us clean. Amen.