

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 10/24/04 Brad Brandt

Mark 7:14-23 "Getting to the Heart of the Problem"*

Main Idea: Merely religious people live in bondage because of two basic misunderstandings. Jesus addressed them both in Mark 7:14-23. If you want to be free, you must take heed to His words and get to the **heart of the problem**.

I. There is a misunderstanding about spirituality (14-15).

A. Religion takes an outside-in approach.

1. If we do the right things, we'll be right with God.
2. If we don't do the right things, we'll defile ourselves.

B. Jesus takes an inside-out approach.

1. Our problem isn't external.
2. Our problem originates within us.

II. There is a misunderstanding about sin (17-23).

A. We must recognize the source of sin (17-19).

1. It doesn't come from the outside.
2. It doesn't have to do with diet.

B. We must recognize the severity of sin (20-23).

1. Sin begins in the heart.
2. Sin develops in the mind.
3. Sin shows up in our actions.
4. Sin results in defilement.

C. We must recognize the solution for sin.

1. I have a corrupt heart.
2. I need the cross.

Response: Ask yourself these questions...

1. Am I right with God?
2. Why do I think I am right with God?

Religion produces bondage. Christianity sets people free.

Last week I received the following story from ABWE missionaries, Antonio and Diana Navarrete, serving in Mexico City:

"I watched a very old and feeble woman slowly enter the cathedral. She fell to her knees in the entrance and crawled toward the last bench. I don't believe she stayed there because of not being able to physically continue, but rather because she somehow felt unworthy to go closer to the statue of the virgin before her. I invaded her private worship as I spied on her with my telephoto lens. She poured out her heart and cried and repeated the prayers written on the seven cards she pulled out of her bag. Then she stood, took a deep breath, went forward and placed a kiss on the virgin's foot, turned toward the door and slowly made her way out. I lost sight of her and began to look for my family. As I stood in the courtyard with them, something compelled me to look back at the cathedral. She was standing there alone in the huge doorway. My gaze turned to where she was looking. A wedding party was heading toward the entrance. They were laughing and hugging each other. They almost knocked her over as they began to pass. She looked so sad. And even though her mouth would say "I am fine. I am strong and I have my religion and the virgin." Her eyes said, "Someone please tell all the years of coming here and confessing and reciting prayers will be worth it and will earn me something." I decided to approach her but was not able to as more members of the wedding procession came between us. When the path was clear she was gone .

"As we looked out over this city of an estimated 33,000,000 people, I realized there are around 250 people

whose lives are directly affected by Iglesia Bautista Misionera (Missionary Baptist Church). Add another 5,000 indirectly by contact with members of the church. Another estimated 2 million who belong to a "Christian" church elsewhere in the city. That leaves 30,994,750 people without the hope of salvation."

Again, people who have religion are in bondage, but people who have Christ are free. There's a world of difference between the two. True Christianity liberates. Mere religion can't do that.

Why not? What is it about religion that produces bondage and how is Christianity different? The answer boils down to this. Merely religious people live in bondage because of two basic misunderstandings. Jesus addressed them both in Mark 7:14-23. If you want to be free, you must take heed to His words and get to the *heart of the problem*.

I. There is a misunderstanding about spirituality (14-15).

What does a truly "spiritual" person look like? How is spirituality attained? The woman in Mexico City equated spirituality with religious activity—going to a cathedral, reading prayer cards, kissing a statue—to be *spiritual* you must do those things.

For the Muslim spirituality requires strict adherence to the teachings of the Koran—and so he bows towards Mecca and says his prayers at set times each day, he fasts during Ramadan, and so on. You must do these things and others if you want to be spiritual.

The Hindu has his approach. So does the Buddhist. So does the Mormon.

But when it comes to spirituality, true biblical Christianity is different in a very fundamental way. How so? Let's listen to Jesus...

Verses 14-15—"Again Jesus called the crowd to him and said, 'Listen to me, everyone, and understand this. 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.'"

Remember when Jesus said those words. The Pharisees and teachers of the law had just come to Him from Jerusalem (1). They'd come to trap Him, having already decided to kill Him (3:6). They criticized Him in verse 5, "Why don't your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders instead of eating their food with 'unclean' hands?" In other words, your disciples aren't spiritual because they don't obey our Jewish traditions.

Last time we commented that the Jews had two sources of authority. One was the Scriptures. The other was the tradition of the elders. The first came from God and the other came from man. The traditions were originally supposed to help people obey the Scriptures, but over the years the traditions began to distract people from the Scriptures.

Jesus didn't mince words in responding to the Pharisees. "You are hypocrites," He told them (6). "You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men (8)." "You nullify the word of God by your tradition (13)." "You do many things like that (13b)."

You could cut the air with a knife at this point. Matthew says that Jesus "offended" the Pharisees (15:12). You can see why. What they called white He called black. There was no middle ground and He wasn't about to pretend there was. Mere religion and biblical Christianity don't mix.

But Jesus wasn't done. Mark says that having rebuked the Pharisees Jesus turned and began to address the crowd. "Listen to me, *everyone*," He proclaimed. It's one thing to differ over minor issues, and when that happens there should be charity. But this was a bedrock, foundational matter. How does a person get right

with God and stay right with God? That's the issue. It's about *spirituality*. In verse 15 Jesus shares a little parable with the crowd that illustrates two very different approaches to being spiritual.

A. Religion takes an outside-in approach. Consider Jesus' word picture, "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.'"

Here was the Pharisees' approach. It's the approach of every form of mere religion. Simply stated, it goes like this.

1. *If we do the right things, we'll be right with God. Conversely...*

2. *If we don't do the right things, we'll defile ourselves.* It's an *outside-in* approach to spirituality. Do what's right and you'll have a clean heart. Don't do what's right and you'll have an unclean heart. Go to cathedral, read a prayer card, kiss a statue, and you'll leave with a clean heart—of course, you'll need to keep coming back. Pray to Mecca, observe Ramadan, and you'll have a clean heart—at least for today.

But let's not fail to look in the mirror. How do we often view spirituality in our circles? Go to church, give your tithes to God, have a daily quiet time, work in the nursery, *do these things* and you'll be spiritual.

You say, "But shouldn't we go to church, give to God, spend time in His Word daily, and serve in church ministries?" Yes, but the question is *why*? Do we do those things to make ourselves spiritual? Some say yes. Religion says yes. Religion takes the *outside-in* approach. Not Jesus.

B. Jesus takes an inside-out approach. Hear Him. "Nothing outside a man can make him 'unclean' by going into him [the direction isn't outside-in]. Rather, it is what comes out of a man that makes him 'unclean' [the order is inside out]."

The inside-out approach recognizes two realities ignored by the outside-in approach.

1. *Our problem isn't external.*

2. *Our problem originates within us.*

It's a simple illustration but it makes the point. Take a pig, any ordinary pig will do. Bring him into your house. "Do *what*?" you ask. "But he's dirty!" Okay, then clean him up. Get the soap and scrub-brush and give him a bath, then let him come inside and live with you. After all, he's clean now, isn't he? You say, "Maybe now, but he won't stay clean." Why not? It's because his nature hasn't changed. He still loves the mud. You can't change his nature by giving him a bath—or a thousand baths. You can't change the nature of a creature by working outside-in.

A teen does drugs and messes up his life. What does he need? Some say he needs education—teach him how to clean up his life. Others say he needs a new environment—show him how to clean up his life. But that misses the mark. His problem is much deeper. His problem is that he doesn't *want* a clean life, a life that loves God and others. He wants a life full of things that please him. And even if you succeed in getting him off drugs, he's still controlled by a love of himself that will in time manifest itself in other sinful ways. His problem isn't merely external—that he puts drugs into his body. It's internal—that he has a heart that wants to put drugs in his body.

Religion seeks to clean up the outside, foolishly thinking that if you do that you'll eventually reach the inside and create a spiritual person. But religion fails every time. Jesus does what no religion can do because Jesus takes a fundamentally different approach, an *inside-out* approach, one that addresses the real problem. "It is what comes out of a man that makes him unclean," He said.

Do you agree with Jesus? Many don't—and I mean *many*.

Almost one hundred years ago J. D. Jones wrote this observation, "I wonder whether even in Christian countries there are not a great many people who are far more troubled about dirty hands than they are about a dirty soul!" The fact is, we tend to stress the need for correct behavior and miss the point that it must come from a clean heart or it's little more than pharisaism.

Parents, this is critical for us. How you view spirituality will affect how you approach your task as a parent. Show me what a parent does with his children and I'll show you how that parent views spirituality, whether it's outside-in or inside-out.

Tedd Tripp offers the premise, "Behavior is heart driven, therefore, correction, discipline and training—all parenting—must be addressed to the heart. The fundamental task of parenting is shepherding the hearts of your children." Is that how you approach parenting, the inside-out approach? Many don't.

Paul Tripp writes, "Most of the parents I have worked with have this goal: to get their children to do what is right. Their goal is to control, direct, or guide the behavior of their children. To them, this is the heart of Christian parenting. So John, who has gotten poor grades, is forbidden to watch television until his grades are better, and Sue, who didn't return her sister's blouse after she borrowed it without asking, is told that she cannot borrow anyone's clothes for six weeks. Solutions? Yes, outwardly, but no change of heart."

Then Tripp adds, "We need to ask why Sue thinks it is her right to take the possessions of others without permission and with no sense of obligation to return them. What is it about the way she thinks about herself and others that makes this behavior acceptable to her conscience? It is not enough to place behavioral boundaries around her. Our goal is to be used of God to expose and nurture the hearts of our children so that they want to behave in ways that please the Lord."

In other words, we need to get to the heart of the problem. What are our children thinking and wanting that produces the kinds of behavior we're seeing. In Tripp's illustration, John is getting bad grades, but why? "Why is John, a bright teenager, getting such poor grades? We need to realize that his grades are a window into the thoughts and motives of his heart. We need to consider what desires of heart lead him to use the time he needs for study on things of much less importance. Heart response and heart change are our focus because we know that what controls the heart will control the life."

And what's true of children and teens is true of adults. We do what we do because of what we're thinking and wanting in our hearts. We function *inside-out*.

Herein lies the trouble with mere religion. It tends to generate pride because it focuses on human accomplishment, but it can't really change people, not where the true problem lies. It rearranges the furniture in a person's life, but it doesn't fix the cracked foundation.

Religion is like walking up on a down escalator. You keep walking and walking and walking but get nowhere. You keep the rules and regulations, but you wonder why you have no peace in your heart. You wonder why you're still in bondage. The problem is your view of spirituality. The solution is to *get to the heart of the problem*. And there's only one who can do that, His name is Jesus.

There's a second misunderstanding that causes people to live in bondage. It's related to the first.

II. There is a misunderstanding about sin (17-23).

In the book *Gaily the Troubadour*, published in 1936, Arthur Guiterman wrote the following poem. Reading his observations, you wouldn't guess it was written nearly seventy years ago.

*First denistry was painless;
Then bicycles were chainless
And carriages were horseless
And may laws, enforceless.
Next, cookery was fireless,
Telegraphy was wireless,
Cigars were nicotineless
And coffee, caffeineless.
Soon oranges were seedless,
The putting green was weedless,
The college boy hatless,
The proper diet, fatless,
Now motor roads are dustless,
The latest steel is rustless,
Our tennis courts are sodless,
Our new religions, godless.*

Religion settles for god (small g). It offers a new view of spirituality accompanied by a new (quite unbiblical) view of sin.

What is sin and why do we struggle with it? If you want to experience true freedom you need to make sure you have a proper understanding of what sin is and how it functions. According to Jesus we need to grasp three things about sin.

A. We must recognize the source of sin (17-19). Verse 17—"After he had left the crowd and entered the house, his disciples asked him about this parable." Note that the setting has changed. Jesus is no longer talking to the Pharisees nor the crowd. He's entered a house and He's with His disciples. They don't understand the point of what He'd just said in verse 15, so they ask Him about it.

He replies in verse 18—"Are you so dull?' he asked." They'd been with Him for over two years by now. This wasn't some peripheral teaching, but a fundamental of His teaching. *Why do we sin?* They still didn't get it. It's tough for people once exposed to an *outside-in* approach to spirituality to see their folly. Part of the reason is due to a wrong view of sin.

How would you answer the question? Where does sin originate? Jesus made two things very clear about the source of sin.

1. *It doesn't come from the outside.* The Lord continues in verses 18-19, "Don't you see that nothing that enters a man from the outside can make him 'unclean'? For it doesn't go into his heart but into his stomach,

and then out of his body."

The typical first century Jew, like many folks today, held to the notion that man is born with a good heart. A child enters the world in a state of innocence. It's the external factors that corrupt him. Sin rubs off on him.

That wasn't Jesus' view. "Nothing that enters a man from the outside can make him 'unclean,'" He said, thus discrediting the notion of the Pharisees who said if you eat food without proper ceremonial washing first you will defile yourself. Wrong, Jesus said. Food is food, and it doesn't matter what kind of ceremony you go through before you eat it. Food goes into the stomach, not the heart. Sin doesn't originate on the outside, but as He'll say in a moment, on the *inside*. Furthermore...

2. *It doesn't have to do with diet.* Mark adds a parenthetical comment at the end of verse 19, "(In saying this, Jesus declared all foods "clean.")" With these words, Jesus was nullifying the need for the whole Mosaic, ceremonial system. He was doing away with dietary laws—that's why we can eat pork today, for instance. The Lord didn't explain this to the crowd at the time, but later He did to His disciples. Remember the vision He gave Peter in Acts 10? Listen to Acts 10:11-15:

"He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles of the earth and birds of the air. Then a voice told him, 'Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.' 'Surely not, Lord!' Peter replied. 'I have never eaten anything impure or unclean.' The voice spoke to him a second time, 'Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.'"

This was a staggering change for the Jews. There's a story in *Fourth Maccabees* about a Jewish woman and her seven sons. The Gentile authorities tried to force them to eat swine's flesh. Barclay sums up what happened: "They refused. The first had his tongue cut out, the ends of his limbs cut off; and then he was roasted alive in a pan; the second had his hair and the skin of his skull torn off; one by one they were tortured to death while their aged mother looked on and cheered them on; they died rather than eat meat which to them was unclean."

Here's the point. If you don't understand where sin originates you'll think you can manage it by living according to rules. But the fact is, you can't restrict sin by keeping dietary laws. It doesn't come from the outside. In reality, it comes from the inside and thus, the solution for sin must address the inside, the *heart*.

B. We must recognize the severity of sin (20-23). Verse 20—"He went on: 'What comes out of a man is what makes him 'unclean.'" There it is again. Just as spirituality works inside-out, so does sin. It's what comes "out of a man" that makes him unclean.

Sin is a lethal problem and here we learn four things about it.

1. *Sin begins in the heart.* "For from within, *out of men's hearts*, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality..." Jesus is going to list some thirteen sins in a moment, but note where it all begins. *In the heart.*

A man goes into a store and, when no one is looking, picks up a tool, sticks it in his coat, and leaves the store. He's a thief. What's his real problem? It's not his hand. You could cut off his hand and he'd find other ways to steal. He's got a heart problem, right? He has a heart that contains a host of wrong thoughts, such as: "Life is about me. If you've got something I want, I have a right to take it."

God has so much to say in the Bible about the heart. Here are several insights.

a. God values the heart.

1 Samuel 16:7 "The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."

Proverbs 21:2 "All a man's ways seem right to him, but the LORD weighs the heart."

b. God knows the heart.

Acts 15:8 "God, who knows the heart..."

Romans 8:27 "And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit..."

c. The source of our trouble is the heart.

Proverbs 4:23 "Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life."

Proverbs 22:15 "Folly is bound up in the heart of a child..."

Matthew 6:21 "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

Matthew 5:28 "But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart."

d. What God requires is a new heart.

Matthew 5:8 "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God."

Matthew 22:37 "Jesus replied: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.'"

Psalms 51:10 "Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me."

e. What we lack is the right kind of heart.

Genesis 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."

Jeremiah 17:9 "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?" (see also Rom 1:21)

f. What God gives is a new heart.

Ezekiel 11:19 "I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh."

Acts 16:14 "One of those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message."

2 Corinthians 4:6 "For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ."

Yes, the Bible has much to say about the *heart*. Jesus taught, first, that sin begins in the heart.

2. *Sin develops in the mind*. "For from within, out of men's hearts, come *evil thoughts*, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery..." Note the order again. Sin starts in the heart and as we'll see shows up in action, but it develops in the mind. The human heart is not good by nature. It's evil. It's depraved, and consequently entertains "evil thoughts" (*dialogismoi kakoí*), that is, evil thinking and reasoning.

3. *Sin shows up in our actions.* "For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, [here are the actions...] sexual immorality [any sexual activity outside of marriage], theft [taking what isn't yours because you want it; that includes loafing on the job], murder [Jesus said that includes anger without proper cause], adultery [breaking your marriage vow by pursuing someone other than your spouse], greed [living for material things and for selfish purposes], malice [iniquity, wickedness], deceit [the lack of truthfulness in what you say and how you present yourself], lewdness [licentiousness; sensuality; to be unrestrained in moral attitudes and behavior], envy [lit. 'evil eye,' a Semitic term for 'stinginess'], slander [to defame or blaspheme another, including God and people], arrogance [pride] and folly [it refers to the lack of sense in the area of morals]."

So sin starts in the heart, develops in the mind, and shows up in our actions. Finally...

4. *Sin results in defilement.* Verse 23—"All these evils come from inside and make a man '*unclean*.'" Don't miss the final word, "unclean." There is a condition of moral uncleanness. Sin makes a person unclean in the sight of a holy God. Sin defiles.

The fact is, the problem is worse than religious people think. The Pharisees had a narrow view of sin, seeing it in terms of the breaking of rules and regulations. Jesus showed it's much deeper. We do sinful things because we have a sinful heart.

You say, "We're in bad shape." Yes, we are, due to the source and severity of sin. Thankfully, however, God in His grace has provided a solution.

C. We must recognize the solution for sin. To experience it I must admit two things.

1. *I have a corrupt heart.* Many people think if they just "do good things," God will overlook their sin and accept them. But that's like scrubbing gravestones. You can wash a gravestone but it doesn't change the fact that you're standing in the realm of the dead. You can't deal with sin merely by doing cosmetic cleanup on the outside. The remedy for sin requires we admit the painful truth—*I have a corrupt heart*. Then, and only then, am I ready for the second admission.

2. *I need the cross.* Listen to J. D. Jones again, "When I think of it all, I am tempted to cry out, like the leper, 'Unclean! Unclean!' For, like John Bunyan, I feel that sin and corruption do as naturally bubble out of my heart as water bubbles out of a fountain, until, like him, at the sight of my own vileness I fall deeply into despair. But there is One who can make my defiled heart clean again."

His name, of course, is Jesus Christ. There is no soap powerful enough to cleanse sin stains from the human heart. Only one cleansing agent can do that. 1 John 1:7—"...The blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin."

Oh beloved, ponder this. Jesus died on the cross to rescue people with corrupt hearts. If we will admit our need of Him, God will forgive us of our sins.

Response: Ask yourself these questions...

1. *Am I right with God?* Do you know for sure that if you died today you would go to heaven? Are you sure you are right with God?

The Pharisees thought they were right with God because of their good deeds, but Jesus said they had a wrong view of spirituality and of sin. They weren't spiritual. They were lost sinners. They needed to be saved. What about you?

It's possible to answer the first question yes, and be wrong. You can think you're right with God and not be. The second question is critical...

2. *Why do I think I am right with God?* Are you trusting in Christ alone for your standing with God, or in something else? "No one comes to the Father but by *Me*," He said. There is no other way. Make sure you are trusting Him—and Him alone—today.