

May 20, 2012 by Steve Brandon



What Defiles Us?

Mark 7:1-23

1. Dirty Hands? (verses 1-13)

2. Dirty Hearts? (verses 14-23)

Every religion in the world is an attempt, in some measure, to answer the most basic question : "What must I do to be right with God." Or, in some cases, you might say, "What must I do to be right with the gods." It matters not whether we speak about Hinduism or Buddhism or Animism or Wicca or Islam or Judaism or Christianity. They are all seeking peace and blessing with the spiritual world.

Now, most religions answer that question by some sort of ritual that you must do -- offering incense, eating the right food, saying the right prayers, behaving in a certain way, attending religious gatherings. The Hindus and Buddhists place food before their idols. The Animists worship their ancestors. Wiccans use magic to harness the powers that reside in nature. The Muslims pray toward Mecca seven times each day. And the Jews of Jesus' day followed their traditions.

Christianity is unique. Rather than seeking outward conformity to religious activity, Christians seek an inward transformation. Rather than a focus upon the activities that one does, the focus is upon our faith in Jesus Christ -- His death and resurrection, which imputes righteousness to us. And from our faith, then, flows a heart for God that expresses itself in love and good deeds.

One of the parallel questions that can be asked as well is this: "What defiles me before God." Or, in some cases, you might say, "What defiles me before the gods." In other words, "What puts distance between me and God?"

Again, most religions answer these questions by the neglect of rituals. Not offering the incense. Not eating the right food. Not saying the right prayers. Sinning in some way. Missing the religious gatherings.

Again, Christianity is somewhat unique. For believers in Jesus Christ, the distance isn't so much the result of the day to day status of our religious duties as it is the core of our being. By nature, we are alienated from God and hostile to God, having wicked hearts. But, God, by His grace, transforms our hearts and gives us a soft heart toward Him. Whereas once we were unclean, now we have been washed by the blood of Jesus.

These are the sorts of questions that we will see in our text today. Questions of being made right with God. Questions of what defiles.

In our study of the Gospel of Mark, we come this morning to the beginning of chapter 7. Our text covers the first 23 verses. I have entitled my message, "What Defiles Us?" That is, what creates distance between us and God? I want to begin by reading the first 13 verses, ...

Mark 7:1-13

The Pharisees and some of the scribes gathered around Him when they had come from Jerusalem, and had seen that some of His disciples were eating their bread with impure hands, that is, unwashed. (For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they carefully wash their hands, thus observing the traditions of the elders; and when they come from the market place, they do not eat unless they cleanse themselves; and there are many other things which they have received in order to observe, such as the washing of cups and pitchers and copper pots.) The Pharisees and the scribes asked Him, "Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat their bread with impure hands?" And He said to them, "Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written:

'This people honors Me with their lips,
But their heart is far away from Me.
But in vain do they worship Me,
Teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.'

Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men."

He was also saying to them, "You are experts at setting aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition. For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother'; and, 'He who speaks evil of father or mother, is to be put to death'; but you say, 'If a man says to his father or his mother, whatever I have that would help you is Corban (that is to say, given to God),' you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or his mother; thus invalidating the word of God by your tradition which you have handed down; and you do many things such as that."

Here, we see Jesus again having conflict with the Pharisees. This is nothing new in the life of Jesus. The conflict began back in chapter 2, when Jesus declared that he could forgive sins, and proved it by raising the paralytic from the dead (2:1-12). The conflict continued when Jesus called despicable people, like Matthew, the tax-collector to be one of His disciples (2:14). And then, Jesus ate with the sinners and tax collectors (2:15-17). The Pharisees questioned Jesus for not fasting (2:18-22) and not keeping the Sabbath according to their customs (2:23-28). And after Jesus healed the man with the withered hand (3:1-5), the Pharisees went out and immediately began conspiring with the Herodians against Him, as to how they might destroy Him (3:6).

Our text before us comes in the context of Jesus doing some incredible things. He fed five thousand people (Mark 6:33-43). then, he walked on the water and healed many at Gennesaret (Mark 6:47-56). He was helping the people. He was coming with kind intentions, but was being rejected.

I remember having lunch with a pastor who was going through some difficult times. His church was going through some financial difficulties. Furthermore, he had experienced some health issues. I hadn't met him, but wanted to encourage him. So, I took him out to lunch. My aim was to encourage him. He was a godly man and doing a good work. I wanted to help him press on through these difficulties. So, as I talked with him and sought to encourage him with the Scriptures, I would bring up some passages to help him. And he often questioned the translation of what I said to him. When he found out (not that he didn't know already), that I wasn't quoting the King James Version to him, he began to tell me of how the King James Version is the only version of the Bible that he accepts. I didn't spend much time arguing with him, because my aim was to encourage him. But, sure enough, when I sought to encourage him with another verse of Scripture, he again didn't receive it because I wasn't quoting it from the right version. I was unable to encourage the man because his belief in the King James Version (to the exclusion of all others) was getting in the way of my ability to encourage him.

This was a bit of what happened in the encounter that Jesus had with the Pharisees in our text. Jesus had been doing some real good to the people. And yet, the traditions that the Pharisees held to kept them from accepting the ministry of Jesus. Instead they turn hostile toward him.

In verse 1, the Pharisees are again coming against Jesus. And you can see the effort that they made to come. In verse 1, we see that "The Pharisees ... had come from Jerusalem." Remember, Jesus was ministering in Judea at the time. But, these Pharisees came from Jerusalem, a three days walk. They didn't merely stumble upon Jesus and His teaching. No, I believe that they came with malicious intent. They came to take Jesus down. That's the point of Mark 3:6 -- they were trying to destroy Jesus.

And so, they came, accusing His disciples of having dirty hands. This is my first point this morning:

1. Dirty Hands? (verses 1-13)

Is this what defiles us? "They had seen that some of His disciples were eating their bread with impure hands, that is, unwashed" (verse 2).

Now, in our day and age, we understand the importance of having clean hands. Studies have shown that about 80% of all infectious diseases are carried by our hands. According to the Centers for Disease Control, "Keeping hands clean through improved hand hygiene is one of the most important steps we can take to avoid getting sick and spreading germs to others." [\[1\]](#)

I remember my days working for Kishwaukee Community Hospital in DeKalb. Even though I worked in the computer department, I was instructed on how to wash my hands as there were many diseases floating around the hospital. Sick people were bringing them in.

Here's what I was told to do. Turn on the faucet. Apply soap on your hands. Lather it up for 20 seconds or more. I was encouraged to sing to myself, "Yankee Doodle Came to Town", which lasts about 20 seconds. And then, don't turn the faucet off with your hands, because you just used your dirty hands to turn on the faucet. It is contaminated. So, take the paper towel from the dispenser. As you are finished drying your hands, use the paper towel to turn off the faucet. And then, upon leaving the bathroom, don't touch the door handle with your clean hands. It too is contaminated. Open the door with your paper towel. Then, holding the door open with your foot, throw the paper towel away. Let the door close on its own.

That's how you keep from dirty hands (verses 1-13). But, of course, that's not what the Pharisees were concerned about. They weren't concerned with the health of Jesus. Mark explains the situation in verses 3 and 4.

Mark 7:3-4

(For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they carefully wash their hands, thus observing the traditions of the elders; and when they come from the market place, they do not eat unless they cleanse themselves; and there are many other things which they have received in order to observe, such as the washing of cups and pitchers and copper pots.)

The key is with the word, translated, "impure" (verse 3). Your translation may say, "unclean" (NIV). Your translation may say, "defiled" (ESV). That's the idea. Jesus was eating with defiled hands. They were defiled, not because the disciples were particularly sinful but merely because they didn't wash according to the traditions of the elders. The Pharisees paid close attention to their ritual purity. They didn't eat until they had ritually purified their hands. They didn't eat until they had ritually cleansed themselves from the defilement of the marketplace. They didn't eat without making sure that their cups and pitchers and pots were all ritually clean.

Here's how they washed. Their hands had to be clean of all sand and dirt and gravel. The water they used had to be the ceremonially clean water, held in large stone jars. They had to use at least one and a half egg shells of water. To wash, they held their hands with their fingertips pointing upwards and poured water over them, which had to run down to the wrist. Then, as they were still wet, their hands needed to be cleansed, by rubbing the fist of one hand into the palm of the other. Finally, they pointed their fingertips down and let the (now unclean) water run off their fingertips and on to the ground. Once they had done this, they were ceremonially clean and ready to eat. [\[2\]](#)

This was very important to the Jewish leaders. Listen to what William Barclay said about the importance of these things. "The man who ate with unclean hands was subject to the attacks of a demon called Shibta. To omit so to wash the hands was to become liable to poverty and destruction. Bread eaten with unclean hands was not better than excrement. A Rabbi who once omitted the ceremony was buried in excommunication. Another Rabbi, imprisoned by the Romans, used the water given to him for handwashing rather than for drinking and in the end nearly perished of thirst, because he was determined to observe the rules of cleanliness rather than satisfy his thirst." [\[3\]](#)

The reason why the Pharisees thought that it was so important was because of the way that they approached God. And they thought that this was their path to God -- being righteous, separated from sinners.

The proper washing of hands is only one in a whole line of things that the Pharisees kept. They had meticulous rules to keep themselves pure. They had meticulous rules regarding the tithe that they gave to support the temple. They were careful to describe what you could and what you couldn't do on the Sabbath day and how you were to offer sacrifices.

If you notice, they did these things because they were according to the traditions of the elders (verse 3). And that's where they got in trouble. Rather than following the word of God, they followed their traditions. It's not like they were oblivious to this. No, this was their standard operating procedure. They believed that the law was vague and with changing times, it needed clarity. And so, they clarified the law with traditions of their own, detailing how to apply the law. And they sought to approach the LORD through their traditions. So, they placed great value on their oral traditions, and considered them to be as equally binding as the law. That's why they asked Jesus (in verse 5), "Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat their bread with impure hands?"

I did a few searches in the Pentateuch. There was nothing in the law that explicitly told the people to wash their hands before they ate. And I couldn't find any instructions relating to washing your hands before you eat. There are many instructions about washing clothes (Lev. 11:25,28; 13:6; 15:22). There are some instructions about washing the leprous portion of one's skin to be checked by the priest (Lev. 13:54-56). There is an instance of the elders washing their hands after giving a sacrifice for an unsolved murder (Deut. 21:6). But, nothing about washing hands before eating.

The tradition of washing was strong, as it was in their tradition to wash their hands in this manner. And, for them, a transgression against the tradition was like a transgression against the law. Jesus' disciples had transgressed the tradition. They had dirty hands (verses 1-13)

Jesus cuts to the chase in verses 6-8, ...

Mark 7:6-8

And He said to them, "Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written:

'This people honors Me with their lips,
But their heart is far away from Me.
But in vain do they worship Me,
Teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.'

Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men."

Jesus goes to Isaiah 29, and describes their fundamental problem. They say the right things. They honor God with their lips. But, that's all that it is -- lip-service. Their problem is that they so focus upon the externals that they miss the internals. Their hands are clean. They pay their tithes. They did very little on the Sabbath. But, they missed the heart.

And the result was that all of their efforts came short. "In vain do they worship Me" (verse 7). In other words, they failed in their worship. They gave their money. They sang their songs. They brought their sacrifices. But, in the end, it got them nothing. They failed the "worship" class. They received an "F".

Do you realize that you can come to church, dressed in your Sunday's best, and sing all of the songs with much volume and hands raised, and listen to every word that is spoken and prayed, saying, "Amen" to it all, and God still looks upon your worship with a frown rather than a smile?

God said this to Israel, as recorded in Amos 5:

Amos 5:21-24

"I hate, I reject your festivals,
Nor do I delight in your solemn assemblies.
Even though you offer up to Me burnt offerings and your grain offerings,
I will not accept them;
And I will not even look at the peace offerings of your fatlings.
Take away from Me the noise of your songs;
I will not even listen to the sound of your harps.
But let justice roll down like waters
And righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

Israel hadn't abandoned their worship. Rather, they had simply not lived how the Lord had called them to live: with justice and righteousness. They honored the Lord with their lips, but their hearts were far from the Lord.

In our text, Jesus was addressing the fundamental problem of the Pharisees. The problem is that they held to their traditions and neglected the commandment of God (verse 8). In verses 9-13, Jesus demonstrates one instance where this is the case.

Mark 7:9-13

He was also saying to them, "You are experts at setting aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition. For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother'; and, 'He who speaks evil of father or mother, is to be put to death'; but you say, 'If a man says to his father or his mother, whatever I have that would help you is Corban (that is to say, given to God),' you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or his mother; thus invalidating the word of God by your tradition which you have handed down; and you do many things such as that."

Jesus began with two commandments: "Honor your father and your mother" (from Exodus 20:12). "He who speaks evil of father or mother, is to be put to death" (from Exodus 21:17). And then, Jesus brought up the practice of identifying something as "Corban," that is, dedicated to the Lord.

Here's how it worked. Your parents are getting older. They have come upon some hard times. They have developed some needs. They have need of a few animals for their small farm. You have a few animals that could help them. But, you have identified them as "Corban." Your animals have been dedicated to the Lord. Thus, you cannot give them to your parents. It sounds spiritual. But, in actuality, it was a way to protect your own assets, founded upon greed.

In this way, Jesus pointed out their hypocrisy. And in the end, Jesus said, "You invalidate the word of God by your tradition" (verse 13). Notice what Jesus adds at the end of verse 13, "And you do many things such as that?" In other words, this example of Corban is merely one of many instances in which Jesus could have demonstrated how they neglected the commandment of God and held to the tradition of men (verse 8). Can you think of any?

How about the events recorded at the end of chapter 2. The Pharisees were concerned about the disciples eating a little grain on the Sabbath (Mark 2:24). The disciples were hungry. They were ministering to others. They were only taking a little bit. And yet, the Pharisees questioned the fact that they ate at all. In Matthew's parallel account, Jesus quoted from Hosea 6:6, "I desire compassion, and not a sacrifice" (Matt. 12:7). In other words, "Pharisees, you are so concerned about keeping everything according to your customs, that you have neglected the heart of the commandments, ... to show compassion." There's an example of an instance in which Jesus confronted their hypocrisy, caring more about the minutia of their Sabbath regulations, but missing the heart of God.

How about the events recorded at the beginning of chapter 3. Again, it was the Sabbath. They brought to Him a man with a withered hand, "watching Him to see if He would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse Him" (Mark 3:2). Before healing the man, Jesus asked them about whether or not it is lawful "to do good on the Sabbath, to save a life or to kill?" (Mark 3:4). And they were silent, because they held to their traditional Sabbath keeping, rather than holding to the heart of Sabbath-keeping, which was to make the day a delight. Well, Jesus could have quoted from Isaiah 58:13, where the Lord called the Sabbath day "a delight." But, they made the day more about regulations, rather than about joy and delight.

Or, how about the way in which they fasted. Jesus said that they "put on a gloomy face, ...[and] neglect their appearance so that they will be noticed by men when they are fasting" (Matthew 6:16). In other words, they turned the practice of fasting into a way in which they might show forth how religious they were. They wanted everyone to know that they were fasting, so that they might evoke some pity. Whereas the real fasting that delights the Lord is the sort of fasting that helps others, "dividing your bread with the hungry, and bringing the homeless poor into your house" (Isaiah 58:7). In other words: depriving yourself so as to help others. But, the Pharisees had turned it all around and brought great attention to themselves in the matter, making it a matter of putting forth their own righteousness.

Or, how about their whole practice of giving. Oh, they gave alright. They tithed. Even when they gathered their spices from the harvest, they split up everything into the tithe, so that they might be sure to give God His share, right down to the ounce (Matthew 23:23). But, Jesus said, "You ... have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness" (Matt. 23:23). He affirmed their giving of the tithe, as it was in the law, but it was the manner of their giving that Jesus detested. Jesus likened them to those who "strain out a gnat and swallow a camel" (Matt. 23:24). In other words, so meticulous were they about making sure that they gave the tithe, that they missed the important things in the law. These are some of the ways that the Pharisees held to their traditions, and thereby neglected the commandment of God (Verse 8).

Now, before we get too smug, realize that we can easily fall into the same trap. There are some branches of Christianity that are known for piling rules upon rules for people to follow. Churches come up with rules regarding what you can do and what you can't do.

Alcohol. Nowhere in the Bible does it say that you are to abstain from alcohol. Drunkenness is certainly wrong. But, abstinence isn't a Biblical command. It might be the wise thing to do, but it's not commanded in the Bible.

Smoking. The Bible doesn't say anything about smoking (pipes, cigarettes or cigars). There are certainly reasons not to smoke. It's not healthy. It makes you smell pretty bad. But, the Bible is silent regarding smoking.

There are many more do's and don't's that Christians pile upon each other. Where you can go. What you can do. What sort of movies you can watch. What sort of television shows you can watch. What sort of music styles you can listen to. Whether or not instruments are allowed in the church. What sort of clothes you can wear.

How to school your children. How your children should find their marriage partner. What you can do on Sunday. What sort of music is permissible in church. What sort of programs are permissible in church. Can you have a youth group? A nursery? Children's Church?

What Bible translation you should read. Body piercings. Hair length. Debt. Diet. The list goes on and on of ways that people think themselves to be righteous.

The sad reality is that many think that they are Christians because of what they do. Many think themselves to be saved because they are members of some church somewhere and attend all of the services. They have received all of the Sunday School attendance pins.

The reason why churches get to this spot is because it is in our nature to have rules and regulations of ways that we can please God. That's why the world religions all have things for you to do and have rules for you to keep. We desperately feel like we need specific guidance on how to please God. But, know that many of these things are man-made religion.

I was really struck when we were in Nepal at how the activity of the Buddhists felt much like the Roman Catholic religion. Inside their shrines, a statue of the gods was front and center, just like the statues of a Roman Catholic Church. They often had pillows before the altar, where you could kneel and pray, such as the kneeling benches that surround the altar. Candles were burning. Incense was burning. When people walked into the temples, the devout would often bow to the statues. Prayers were repeated over and over and over again. They had many religious trinkets for you to purchase to place in your home or in your taxi cab or to hang from your rear-view mirrors.

And I was really amazed. There is something inside of us all that wants to tame our religion into something that we can feel and touch and do for God. The danger in legalism like this is that these things have a way of making you feel righteous. You are walking a clean, upright, and pure life. At least, it looks that way. And, it is dangerous. When you become more interested in religious things than you are in God and His work in you.

Then, beginning in verse 14, Jesus gets to the heart of the matter. His point is that our defilement doesn't come from dirty hands, rather, it comes from dirty hearts.

2. Dirty Hearts? (verses 14-23)

This is what defiles us.

Mark 7:14-16

After He called the crowd to Him again, He began saying to them, "Listen to Me, all of you, and understand: there is nothing outside the man which can defile him if it goes into him; but the things which proceed out of the man are what defile the man. [If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear.]"

With these words, Jesus tried to take the focus off of the externals, which the Pharisees focused their attention upon. He tried to help the Pharisees understand that what's going on in the heart is far more important. They missed it. On one occasion, Jesus said, ...

Matthew 23:25-28

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of robbery and self-indulgence. You blind Pharisee, first clean the inside of the cup and of the dish, so that the outside of it may become clean also. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. So you, too, outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

They were all into religious show on the outside. They were all into having clean hands for the world to see. But, they didn't understand that it's our dirty hearts that defile us.

Now, the Pharisees weren't the only ones who didn't understand this. The disciples didn't understand this either. We see them asking Jesus about this privately, beginning in verse 17, ...

Mark 7:17-23

When he had left the crowd and entered the house, His disciples questioned Him about the parable. And He *said to them, "Are you so lacking in understanding also? Do you not understand that whatever goes into the man from outside cannot defile him, because it does not go into his heart, but into his stomach, and is eliminated?" (Thus He declared all foods clean.) And He was saying, "That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man."

In other words, it's not the things on the outside that defile us. Rather, it's the things on the inside -- the things that come out of us -- that defile us. Now here how often Jesus emphasizes that the wickedness comes from within. In verse 20, He says, "that which proceeds out." In verse 21, He says, "out of the heart." And in verse 23, He tells them, "evil things proceed (i.e. they go out)."

Think about anatomy. When you eat food, it enters your mouth. It travels into your stomach, where it begins to be digested. It then moves on into your small intestine, where it is digested further. It then travels into your large intestine, where it is prepared to be eliminated. Finally, it

travels out the other end and into the toilet (verse 19).

But, did you notice? Nowhere in the digestive tract does your food pass through your heart. Things coming into our mouths, simply come out of the other end. They don't defile us. Our defilement doesn't come from dirty hands. Our defilement comes from dirty hearts. The Bible is abundantly clear that our hearts are dirty.

Shortly before the flood, "the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Genesis 6:5). When God looked around at those who were on the earth, He saw much wickedness. When God peered deep within our hearts, He saw much wickedness. We are wicked in the breadth of our sin. We are wicked in the depth of our sin.

After the flood, the LORD confirmed the same thing: "the intent of man's heart is evil from his youth" (Genesis 8:21). Jeremiah said, "The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it?" (Jeremiah 17:9). In other words, our hearts are deceitful. It's not so much that they deceive others. It's that they deceive ourselves.

I received a book in the mail this week entitled, "Into Thin Air." It tells the story of disaster that struck on Mount Everest on May 10-11, 1996. [\[4\]](#) As a pack of people made their ascent to the summit, a storm rolled in and claimed the lives of eight people attempting the climb. It's a classic book that I wanted to purchase for some time. I saw it in Nepal and thought about purchasing it to read on the airplane ride home. But, then, I noticed that I could purchase it for a penny on Amazon. So, I waited to order it until we returned home. It's a great book. I could hardly put it down.

The book tells about the role of experienced guides in helping you get to the top. They are paid large sums of money to show you how to get to the top. They are paid large sums of money to help you get to the top. But, they are also paid large sums of money to be a clear-thinking mind when your life is at stake. In the high altitude, it is difficult to think clearly.

When the summit of Everest is in sight, people often get, "summit fever." They see the peak. They have paid a boat-load of money to get to the peak. It costs near \$70,000 to climb Mt. Everest with a guide. And so, they will ascend to their death. It has been said that getting to the top of Everest isn't the challenge. It's getting back down again that's the challenge in the thin air with danger all around.

The guide is there to make good decisions for you. Often, when people are suffering from a lack of oxygen in the brain, they become delirious and cannot think rightly. That's why you pay the guide -- to make good decisions for you. Before the summit ascent, they have a "turn around time." If you aren't within spitting distance of the summit, you need to turn around and head back down. You won't have the oxygen to last. You won't have the energy to descend. You won't have the daylight you need. The guide sets that time. You pay the guide to enforce that time.

Our hearts are like brains that have been oxygen deprived. They are deceitful. The LORD is our guide.

In the next verse of Jeremiah 17, we read, "I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind" (Jeremiah 17:10). "There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death" (Proverbs 14:12; 16:25). That's why people will make poor decisions, even against all counsel. Their deceitful minds have persuaded them that it's the right thing to do. But, disaster is the result. That's why people commit adultery; they think that it will bring them happiness. But, it is actually the way of death.

Our hearts are not righteous. Our hearts are wicked.

In Romans 3:10, Paul quotes Psalm 14, "There is none righteous, not even one." We aren't good creatures, who happen to be defiled by not eating in the right way. We aren't good creatures, who slip into defilement by something we didn't quite do right. No, we are evil creatures, with evil that arises from within. And this is what Jesus is getting at in our text. It is from within us.

"Why do people do wicked things?" It's because their hearts are filled with evil thoughts.

"Why do people commit fornication?" It's because their heart is filled with fornication.

"Why do people steal?" It's because their heart is filled with thefts.

"Why do people murder?" It's because their hearts are filled with murderous thoughts.

"Why do people commit adultery?" It's because their hearts are first filled with adultery.

"Why do people take what is not theirs?" It's because their hearts are filled with coveting and wickedness.

"Why do people lie?" It's because their hearts are filled with deceit.

"Why do people pursue sinful pleasure?" It's because their hearts are filled with sensuality.

"Why do people tear down with their words?" It's because their hearts are filled with envy.

"Why do people say wicked things against other people?" It's because their hearts are filled with slander.

"Why do people boast of what they have and can do?" It's because their hearts are filled with pride.

"Why do people do foolish things?" It's because their hearts are filled with foolishness.

We are not clean. Our hearts are defiled.

Take Paul as an example. From his youth, everything was done right. He was born into the tribe of Benjamin, arguably the most-favored tribe. He was circumcised on the eighth day. He was a Pharisee. He was zealous for the law. And, he said, "as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless" (Phil. 3:6). And yet, the same man said, ...

Romans 7:15,18,24-25

For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate. ... For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not. ... Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? Thanks be to God through Jesus

Christ our Lord!

When it comes to thinking about our sin, there are really two options. The first is to think of our sin being externally caused. In other words, we sin because of what others have (or haven't) done to us. We have been deprived of the love we needed. Or we have been deprived of a supporting environment. Instead, we have found ourselves in a sinful environment. Our sin is an imitation of the sin around us. There is some truth to this. When you gather around sinners, you will be tempted to sin with them (Proverbs 1:10). But, environment isn't the driving factor in our sin. Rather, environment helps to bring out what's already within us.

The second way to think about our sin is to look within. Fundamentally, we sin because of something within us. In other words, we sin because we are depraved beings. Our environment will induce our sinful hearts to do what they want to do. We are depraved beings, not deprived beings. Jesus said, "That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man" (Mark 7:20). This is why we need our hearts transformed, rather than mere moral improvement.

Our hearts are bad. We are depraved. This is why the New Covenant included promises like the following: "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances" (Ezekiel 36:26-27).

The world thinks we have an external problem, and that we can fix it internally by changing ourselves. But, truly, we have an internal problem that needs an external solution. Only an external source -- God -- can fix it. This is what we have in the gospel! God needs to come in and give us new hearts.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on May 20, 2012 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] <http://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/>

[2] William Barclay, The Daily Study Bible Series, The Gospel of Mark, pp. 164-165

[3] *Ibid*, p 165.

[4] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1996_Mount_Everest_disaster