



Truly Clean

Key idea:

Jesus teaches us that impurity, which is the violation of God's moral law, arises from inside our hearts rather than from outside sources, and therefore true cleansing is not a matter of external religious rites but rather an internal change of heart.

Key text:

Mark 7:14-23

Again Jesus called the crowd to him and said, "Listen to me, everyone, and understand this. ¹⁵ 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.'" ¹⁷ After he had left the crowd and entered the house, his disciples asked him about this parable. ¹⁸ "Are you so dull?" he asked. "Don't you see that nothing that enters a man from the outside can make him 'unclean'? ¹⁹ For it doesn't go into his heart but into his stomach, and then out of his body." (In saying this, Jesus declared all foods "clean.") ²⁰ He went on: "What comes out of a man is what makes him 'unclean.' ²¹ For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, ²² greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. ²³ All these evils come from inside and make a man 'unclean.'"

Key points:

1. Jesus and the Pharisees had radically different understandings of what made a person pure or impure before God.
2. Jesus taught several important things about true impurity:
 - a. Impurity comes from inside, not from outside
 - b. Impurity comes from moral sin, not violating religious trivialities
 - c. Impurity comes from breaking God's law, not human standards and traditions
 - d. Impurity includes thoughts, actions, and dispositions
 - e. Impurity arises from a sinful heart and nature
3. Because impurity is not ritual but moral, cleansing can never come from religious rituals.

4. Because sin is internal and deep, I need deep, internal cleansing, which is provided by the sacrifice of Jesus and the new covenant.

Questions for discussion/application:

1. What part of Sunday's teaching stood out most to you? Why?
2. Did the Pharisees think sin was ONLY ritual and external? If not, why was Jesus so upset with their understanding of sin and impurity?
3. How is the issue of the true nature of sin and impurity related to the issue of the source of moral authority (Scripture or the traditions of humans)?
4. Can I think of actions I consider sinful which are not actually listed as sinful in the Scripture? Why do I think these are sinful? Am I in danger of acting like the Pharisees in this area?
5. How does this passage affect my understanding of righteousness? Of holiness? Of sin, salvation, and deliverance?
6. Why do humans so often focus on external actions rather than the heart? How might this affect my relationship with my spouse? With my children? With friends or co-workers?
7. In John 18:28, the religious leaders were concerned about not becoming ritually "unclean" - while they were trying to have Jesus put to death! How is this an example of the very issue behind Mark 7:1-23? Have I ever acted in a similar manner?
8. What is the difference between "sin management" and true repentance and cleansing?
9. Given the deep nature of sin in the human heart, is repentance something that I only do to become a Christian or is to be a daily practice?
10. Who can I reach out to this week to share the Gospel or strengthen their faith?