

## MY NOTES:

Review and Introduction

Traditions or Scripture (verse 1-13)

What Defiles a Person? (verses 14-23)

Gospel Transformation

*Definitive Sanctification — New Life*

*Process Sanctification—Joyful, Affectionate, Battle*



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**A New and Living Way**  
*A SignPost in Mark 7*  
*For the people of the Inversion Fellowship*  
*October 25th 2007*  
*By Reid S. Monaghan*

### MARK 7:1-23 ESV

<sup>1</sup>Now when the Pharisees gathered to him, with some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem, <sup>2</sup>they saw that some of his disciples ate with hands that were defiled, that is, unwashed. <sup>3</sup>(For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands, holding to the tradition of the elders, <sup>4</sup>and when they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they wash. And there are many other traditions that they observe, such as the washing of cups and pots and copper vessels and dining couches.) <sup>5</sup>And the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, “Why do your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?” <sup>6</sup>And he said to them, “Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, ‘This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; <sup>7</sup>in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’ <sup>8</sup>You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men.” <sup>9</sup>And he said to them, “You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to establish your tradition! <sup>10</sup>For Moses said, ‘Honor your father and your mother’; and, ‘Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.’ <sup>11</sup>But you say, ‘If a man tells his father or his mother, Whatever you would have gained from me is Corban’ (that is, given to God)— <sup>12</sup>then you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or mother, <sup>13</sup>thus making void the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And many such things you do.” <sup>14</sup>And he called the people to him again and said to them, “Hear me, all of you, and understand: <sup>15</sup>There is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him, but the things that come out of a person are what defile him.” <sup>17</sup>And when he had entered the house and left the people, his disciples asked him about the parable. <sup>18</sup>And he said to them, “Then are you also without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, <sup>19</sup>since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled?” (Thus he declared all foods clean.) <sup>20</sup>And he said, “What comes out of a person is what defiles him. <sup>21</sup>**For from within**, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, <sup>22</sup>coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. <sup>23</sup>All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.”

### KEY SIGHTINGS FOR TONIGHT

#### THE TEACHINGS OF MAN VS. THE WORD OF GOD

It is a historical reality and present temptation to follow man made rules rather than following Jesus. In his confrontation with the Pharisees Jesus clearly gives primacy to the Word of God over traditions created by human beings and culturally created forms of “godliness.”

#### CHANGE IS NEEDED AT THE HEART LEVEL

Jesus desires much more than a mere change of external things in our lives. He knows that a mere coat of paint to cover our brokenness will crack and crumble over time. No, instead of a simple pious makeover, he reminds us that the problem we have is not simply our poor religious performances. In order to transform us into new people and place us on a path of life, it requires radical heart surgery. It is what comes out of a man that makes him unclean, and it is a renewal and recreation of our very selves which we most desperately need.

#### GOD BOTH MAKES US NEW AND RENEWS US DAY BY DAY

There are two things God does in our lives to transform who we are. First, he gives us new birth, new life in a relationship with Jesus. Second, he calls us to cooperate with him in the life long process of sanctification (becoming more like him in holiness) where we put to death sin and follow Jesus. This is a work of his grace which we participate in by our choices. We trust, we obey, we repent, we believe, we follow certain paths and disciplines he has given us...yet it is God who does the heart surgery and renews us day by day through the journey.

## HOW DO WE CHANGE?

One thing is universally agreed upon on planet earth. Things are not perfect and things need to change. Some in pride situate the needed change only in others, fully confident of their own righteousness and goodness. They think, If THOSE PEOPLE would get their act together the world would be a better place. Yet, just in case I may be writing to some people who realize that they themselves might need to change, I hope this essay is of some help to you. In this brief discussion I have but modest goals. I first want to diagnose the problem of the human heart following the teaching of Jesus in seventh chapter of Mark's gospel. I then want to look at the biblical prescriptions and ways by which we actually change. In doing so I will touch briefly on Christian sanctification, the teaching or the Bible about how we are conformed to the image of Jesus where sin is defeated and we are changed. So following the great prophet Michael Jackson, lets start with the man in the mirror and ask him to make a change. And when we find out that we cannot change ourselves we'll land in a good place. The place of grace and transformation in the hands of our good God and Savior Jesus Christ.

### What's Wrong with Us?

Years ago the British Journalist GK Chesterton was asked along with others to write an essay for the London Times responding to the question "What is wrong with the world?" Chesterton wrote back a simple editorial which read: Dear Sirs, I am. Sincerely yours, G. K. Chesterton. Of course he had much more to say about the problems of the world and he did indeed write an essay dealing with this question.<sup>1</sup> Yet Chesterton's understanding of the question and his pithy response shows something profound and unique in the Christian worldview.

Perhaps one of the more offensive, honest and easily verified teaching of Jesus and his apostles is that of the sinfulness of human beings. Other worldviews present man as essentially good or morally neutral, it is simply his behavior that is out of line. If we only teach a person the right things he will act better—hence there is a sort of belief today in salvation by education. Yet in the face of this is the fact that sin is found both in the simple and the intellectual elite. In fact, the most educationally sophisticated nation of the 20th century perpetuated the most evil of crimes in recent history. Nazi Germany was not an ignorant people, but a sophisticated child of enlightenment thinking which resulted in atrocities unspeakable. When we are honest we see that we all have sin in us, it is not simply "out there" in others. Today many secular thinkers such as Steven Pinker of MIT are finally rethinking the "man as basically good" shtick teaching that human nature is in fact bent towards doing bad things.<sup>2</sup> The problem is that he reasons that we are genetically predetermined to be selfish, fight each other etc. and we have no choice in matters anyway. For in this view we are but the machinations and fluctuations of DNA with no heart or soul left to speak of. Of course many other secular minds do not want such a dark view of ourselves and Pinker has his critics.<sup>3</sup> Thankfully, Jesus presents a much different picture of the problem of the human condition, one more devastating, but ultimately one that brings liberation to all who believe.

In Mark chapter 7 we find Jesus teaching a parable to some religious folks about what makes us unholy or unclean before God. While today's secular minds might say our DNA makes us bad, the ancient religious person thought it was all manner of external things which separated them from God. Being around the wrong people, eating the wrong foods, not maintaining proper hygiene or even some aspects of the human body itself were what made people unholy. These external things would make us dirty and unacceptable to God. Jesus blows this idea up with a simple statement that it is not what goes into a person that makes them unholy, it is what comes from his heart that is the problem. In other words, Jesus diagnoses is much more severe than we would like. He does not say that we are sinful because we do sinful things. His teaching is that we do sinful things because our very hearts, the center of who we are, are sinful. So what is wrong with me. I have a sinful heart, a heart that turns from God and attempts to live life my own way. I will have all things on my terms, my own morality, my own way of treating people. So Jesus teaches us that what comes out of a person is what defiles him. "For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person" (Mark 7:21-23). Our world is filled with all of these things—and they come right out of human beings not from evil aliens from galaxies far, far away.

### Sanctification—How the Sinner is Made Holy

The Bible's teaching on sanctification, or becoming holy, is wide and deep and beyond a full treatment in the junk drawer. There are several views on the subject so for those interested I refer you to the discussion in the book *Five Views on Sanctification* edited by Stan Gundry. The following will simply be a summary of the biblical teaching about how sinners becoming more saintly—in a real, not religious, sense of the term. A quick definition is in order—this one is from the late Anthony Hoekema and I find it covers the breadth of the topic concisely:

*We may define sanctification as that gracious operation of the Holy Spirit, involving our responsible participation, by which he delivers us from the pollution of sin, renews our entire nature according to the image of God, and enables us to live lives that are pleasing to Him.<sup>4</sup>*

Many see sanctification as a work of God which takes place over time but begins at a definitive point in a person's life. We will discuss it in these two ways, new life given and life change over time. To these we now turn.

## New Life Given

When a person gives her sin to Jesus, begins to trust him alone and his work on the cross for them for her sins, she becomes a Christian, a person forgiven by and reconciled to God. At this point many things take place which the Bible describes in beautiful language. The person experiences a *new birth* (John 3:5), he becomes a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17, Galatians 6:11-15) and is set free from slavery to sin to walk in newness of life (Romans 6). All of this is done by God, by his grace, through the work of Jesus on the cross and the Holy Spirit's direct regenerating power. This is a work of God the Trinity and is not a result of the believers own efforts, it is something accomplished for her and applied to her.

Some have argued that human beings have in themselves the ability to turn to God on their own and obey him by their own moral ability. The ancient heretic Pelagius erred in teaching this long ago and many have followed similar teachings throughout time. Yet the Scripture teaches us that the solution to the human heart comes not from within but from a gracious and good God. He moves us from a dominion of darkness to the new kingdom and rule of Jesus. The Scriptures say many things about our initial conversion, our becoming a follower of Jesus, but one thing is clear—it is his work, not our own. His work changes us, puts thanksgiving into our hearts and excludes boasting. It is not by our own education, religion, morality, or will—that the human heart is changed, this remains the work of God alone. Theologians call this initial sanctification (to set apart as holy) as *definitive sanctification*. God no longer sees us as sinners but as saints. This is good news—gospel. Yet this begins the journey of life change where we become more and more like Jesus over time. Old habits, thoughts, indwelling sin must be fought and defeated by the power of God and the existence of new loves in our lives.

### Life Change—Joy, Affections and Battle

If all we were was "new" life would be somewhat easy. We would skip through the tulips of this world singing "hakuna matata" without a care in the world. Yet sanctification has a second part—the process by which God defeats indwelling sin and puts it to death in us daily. This process is one in which we have a role to play. He calls us to obey him, but we find that our hearts are prone to wander. So our lives now are mingled with temptation to go back to a former ways of life or to succumb to the lure of sin which faces us in the world each day. We are called to become more and more like Jesus and to he has given us means to this end—prayer, study, meditation, solitude, fasting, scripture, communion as well as others. He calls us forward in order that we might grow in righteousness and mortify, or put to death, the sin which can cling so closely. It is a process that begins when we come to Jesus and continues until we are made perfect by God in the fullness of the Kingdom of Heaven.

As we follow Jesus over time we find that we become more and more aware of our sin and how much we need the grace of the gospel. As we see our sin more clearly, the cross of Christ and God's grace towards us grows larger as well. God saves us by grace and also gives grace to us that empowers continual change as well (1 Corinthians 15:10) It is in the gospel, in thankfulness of heart, that our joy increases and gives us fuel in following him. We know he has paid our debt and that we never can repay him so joy rises in us that helps want to faithfully obey Jesus. If we ever make following Jesus a duty without delight we will find ourselves in empty legalism which Jesus rebukes so strongly in Mark 7:1-23. It is the gospel that saves, it is God who sanctifies us in the gospel. Our motivation for obedience and walking in God's paths is his gracious work for us in Jesus Christ. When we love him, we obey him. So our steadfast prayer is for the love of God to be poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5). In this way he receives glory and we receive joy and new affections for him that give us hope to fight sin tomorrow.

The British theologian John Owen years ago wrote a great work on the nature of our battle with sin. He taught that the Scriptures do not teach that we arrive at a state of complete sinlessness in this life but the power of sin over us can grow dimmer and dimmer over time.<sup>6</sup> It is a walk of faith to trust God, practice spiritual disciplines, and confess and repent of sin. It is in love and joy we do not grow weary and lose heart in this struggle, for it is indeed a battle. Our God has promised to complete the work he began in us so even in our darkest valleys and deepest failures we can get back up and live tomorrow. The author of Hebrews reveals to us the beauty of this race called life and he needs to be repeated as it sums up the process side of sanctification so well:

*Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.*

We indeed look to Jesus, who looked ahead to the joy of the mission of God accomplished on the cross. We look to him in joy and love so that we may rise and choose the path of life each day. God will one day deliver us finally and fully from sin and temptation so we are mindful of this as we fight the good fight together today. Remember, we are not alone in this thing, we walk together as his people the church—discuss your struggles with a friend today and do not forfeit the hope we have in the gospel.



### Notes

1. You can read some of fuller thoughts on the matter in his essay What is Wrong with the World? Available at <http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/etext99/wwwtw10.txt>
2. Steven Pinker, *The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature*, (New York: Penguin Putnam, 2002)
3. See Simon Blackburn's essay *Meet the Flintstones* <http://www.phil.cam.ac.uk/~swb24/reviews/Pinker.htm>
4. Anthony Hoekema, *Saved by Grace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989) 192.
5. Ibid 202-209. A great discussion of both definitive and process sanctification.
6. To read Owen's works see the recently published Justin Taylor and Kelly Kopic *Overcoming Sin and Temptation: Three Classic Works by John Owen* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2006)

