

August 29, 2021

St. Mark 7:18b-23

“The Love of God in Our Struggle with Sin”

- I. What Goes In.
- II. What Comes Out.
- III. What Comes from God.

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St. Mark 7:18b-23:

Dear Friends in Christ,

Emile Durkheim was a French sociologist, a social evolutionist, who has been "cited as the principal architect of modern social science." His years were 1859-1917. He made this observation:

It can no longer be maintained that there is one, single morality which is valid for all men at all times in all places. We know full well that morality has varied.... The purpose of morality practiced by a people is to enable it to live; hence morality changes with societies. There is not just one morality, but several, and as many as there are social types. And as our societies change, so will our morality. It will no longer be in the future what it is today. ("TRUE FOR YOU BUT NOT FOR ME", by Paul Copan, Bethany House, Minneapolis, 2009 Revised Edition, p.88)

What Durkheim and others from the past and present advocate is not a provable absolute of an ever "evolving" morality to enable people to live. It's the absolute of sin that brings about the decay and demise of decency and the love to cherish and protect life. It is a failure to understand the history of the rise, decline and fall of one culture after another, and death itself.

The President of Augustine College in Ottawa, Canada, John Patrick, observed:

In the whole of human history, guilt has been a troubling existential reality, and the only solutions that have worked involve words like *atonement*, *sacrifice*, *repentance*, *restitution*, *grace*, *mercy*, and *justice*. Yet none of these words merits a place in the index of our textbooks. Instead, we spend millions on antidepressants, tranquilizers, self-help books, alternative medicine, meditation, and sundry other placebos.... (Touchstone, July/August 2012 issue, p. 21)

The purpose of the church is not to find skillful ways to feed what people want for the sake of numbers and money, much less to embrace the latest thinking. It is to direct our focus on . . .

THE LOVE OF GOD IN OUR STRUGGLE WITH SIN

I. What Goes In.

Our text begins:

"Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled." (Thus he declared all foods clean.)"

The reason Jesus said this is because of what is revealed in these verses from Mark chapter 7:

"Now when the Pharisees gathered to him, with some of the scribes...they saw that some of his disciples ate with hands that were defiled, that is, unwashed..."

"And the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, 'Why do your disciples not walk according to the traditions of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?' 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; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines commandments of men." You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men.'" (vv. 1-8/portions)

You'll note that the Pharisees and scribes called their teachings "the tradition of the elders," trying to put an ecclesiastical importance to man-made rules and regulations. Jesus called them "commandments of men" and "traditions of men." The spiritual leaders were emphasizing that salvation was dependent not only what a person eats but, also, the cleanliness of hands.

I would think that all this is obvious to us. But what follows clarifies not only the tragic thinking of the Pharisees and scribes, but the tragic thinking of all who think there are qualities within us that make us worthy of God, and the tragic thinking that morality evolves according to what people want.

II. What Comes Out.

And he said, "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. (vv. 20-23)

Jesus didn't say "out of the heart of some men" but "all men." John Patrick of Augustine College also made this observation: "It is time to reintroduce courageously, even abrasively, specific religious understandings..." And here they are, some of the most basic and essential truths of God's Word: "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good; not even one. (Rom. 3:10-12) How's that for courageous and abrasive?

We can't hide from the truth and scrounge up euphemisms such as "The purpose of morality practiced by a people is to enable it to live," when, in fact, we're destroying decency and common sense in the name of social evolution. We're not progressing. We're openly transgressing and condemning ourselves. Listen again to the list: "Evil thoughts (which is enough to end the debate), sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness." If we can't find ourselves somewhere - or a lot of somewhere's in the list - then we're deluded and lost in self-deceit and self-righteousness.

The Holy Spirit had the Psalmist write, "I said in my alarm, 'All mankind are liars.'" (Ps. 116:11) And Solomon wrote, "...the hearts of the children of man are full of evil, and madness is in their hearts while they live, and after that they go to the dead." (Eccl. 9:3b) Just look at the thinking of the day? And then the words that stop us in our tracks: "...He know the secrets of the heart." (Ps. 44:21b) And there you are; what God's people have always courageously and abrasively understood: we are sinful and undeserving of God's love!

III. What Comes From God.

The question is: What are we going to do about the evil within that manifests itself in so many, many ways? Well, let's start with this from the Psalmist: "For our soul is bowed down to the dust; our belly clings to the ground. Rise up; come to our help! Redeem us for the sake of your steadfast love!" (Ps. 44:25-26) You see, it is the very purpose of God's Law to convict our hearts with the sadness and consequences of our sin. It bows our souls "down to the dust." It's what Paul cried out: "Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?" (Rm. 7:24) But it is the very purpose of the Gospel to lift us to Jesus, to this: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (I Jn. 1:9)

God isn't overlooking our sin. He isn't saying "okay" to what we might think are the "little" sins. What He did for our sins is poured out in the suffering, hell and bloody death Jesus endured. What we deserve! Recall these words of David:

Save me, O God! For the waters have come up to my neck. I sink in deep mire, where there is no foothold; I have come into deep waters, and the flood sweeps over me. I am weary with my crying out; my throat is parched. My eyes grow dim with waiting for my God.... O God, you know my folly; the wrongs I have done are not hidden from you. (Ps. 69:1-3, 5)

It would seem that the words that truly hit are, "O God, you know my folly; the wrongs I have done are not hidden from you." If we've been on earth awhile and take serious stock of our lives we see it, don't we? The same old sins of thought and word and deed keep coming back at us! And just when you think you've finally overcome something, it comes back, knocking at the door of the heart. The struggle is always there. Struggle, we must!

That's why the love of Jesus must be our constant goal. He and He alone can heal the wounded and guilt ridden heart. The Lord says, "I have blotted out your transgressions like a cloud and your sins like a mist..." (Is. 44:22) Gone. They're gone. His mercies are new every day.

This is what I want in my mind and heart each day: "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." (Rom. 8:1) No condemnation. None. But the struggle is always there and will be to the last breath. And so will the love of God in Christ. You see, it is about *The Love of God in Our Struggle with Sin*. We could never tire of hearing this.

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott