

Get to the Heart of Sin
September 11, 2016

There were a lot of problems in the news this week. The news was full of white collar crime, shootings, the continuing saga of the presidential race, civil protest, stock market fluctuations, and much more. We have global problems, national problems, state problems, neighborhood problems, family problems, and personal problems.

But mankind's number one problem has nothing to do with the stock market or who the next president will be. Our number one problem is how to get a right relationship with God. There are billions of people on our planet. The majority believe in a god and are working on solving the problem of getting a right relationship with God. And many know they have a sin problem.

As we look at the Bible today, Jesus has something to say about our sin problem. He puts it in terms of clean and unclean, an idea that His listeners were very familiar with. The use of these words, clean and unclean, is figurative, not literal. He is not talking about dirt. He is talking about things that affect a person's spiritual condition. You had to meet a certain standard of spiritual acceptability in order to be right with God. I think it will become clearer than that in a few moments. Let's read the passage and see what Jesus has for us.

Mark 7:14-23 (NIV) 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.' " After he had left the crowd and entered the house, his disciples asked him about this parable. "Are you so dull?" he asked. "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." (In saying this, Jesus declared all foods "clean.") He went on: "What comes out of a man is what makes him 'unclean.' For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and make a man 'unclean.'"

Jesus is speaking to Jews, who lived under the Law of Moses and were very familiar with the concept of clean and unclean. Let me give you a brief look at the concept of clean and unclean.

Under the terms of the covenant relationship that God had with the Jews, they were clean. But all kinds of things could make them unclean. They had to learn what those things were and avoid them. This was part of them being different from all the other peoples around them. In this next passage, God is speaking to the High priest of Israel.

Leviticus 10:10 (NIV) You must distinguish between the holy and the common, between the unclean and the clean, and you must teach the Israelites all the decrees the LORD (Yahweh) has given them through Moses.

God called His people to be holy, to be separate from and different from all the other peoples in the world. They were to live differently because they were HIS people.

So, for example, God details what kind of food they may or may not eat. There were certain animals, birds, fish, and insects they could eat, and certain kinds they could not eat. Eating the wrong kind would make them unclean. To be clean was necessary for worship in the temple. To be clean was necessary for a right relationship with God. To be clean was necessary for a right relationship to the rest of the Jewish community.

There were other things, other than certain foods, that made you unclean. Coming into contact with anything or anyone who was unclean, made you unclean too. Fortunately, this state of unclean was temporary. In most cases you could become clean again by the end of the day or week, though there were longer periods. A cleansing agent may have to be used as well, like fire or water. But some things, when they became unclean, had to be thrown away, like pottery or clothing. And even some people, if they got a disease like leprosy, had to be separated from the community until healed.

God called His people to be holy to Him, to be different from the rest of mankind. Now, all uncleanness had to be dealt with in order for a person to become holy. You had to be holy to have a right relationship with God.

God had intended to teach His people about their sin through such things as the rules of clean and unclean. Unfortunately, they usually missed the point. In this parable Jesus is making that point more clear. However, the Jews had become so preoccupied with the letter of the law that they rarely saw the purpose behind it. Even Jesus' own followers failed to grasp the point He was making and asked Him later the meaning of the parable.

Jesus is drawing a comparison about things that make you unfit for worshipping God. Jesus is pointing them to a much more serious problem than being unclean due to eating certain foods.

But not all the Jews missed the point. King David came to realize God's point after he committed adultery and murder. He realized that these sins had come from inside him. He realized that something inside of him needed to change. Psalm 51 is David's prayer after his sin was exposed. We're just going to read a part of it.

Psalm 51:10 (NIV) Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. (a disciplined, faithful spirit)

In Israelite thought, the heart was the center of the person. It was the center of the physical, mental, and spiritual life of each person. It was the place of the will and the desires. That is why David asked God for a new heart. He knew that his sin problem was a heart problem.

The same is true of us. **Our sin problem is a heart problem.**

We need to understand that sin comes from our hearts. Look at this important teaching about sin and our hearts in the letter from James.

James 1:14 (NIV) ...each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed.

You are tempted by something inside you, not something outside of you. You may be tempted by porn, something outside of you, but only because of some evil desire inside of you.

You may be tempted to get drunk, but only because of some evil desire in you. You may be tempted to steal, but only because of some evil desire in you. You may hit someone this week, but only because of an evil desire within you. You may insult someone this week, but you will do so because of some wrong desire in your heart. Have you ever done something you regretted and kicked yourself, asking, "Why did I do that?" The next question to ask is, "What sinful desire, expectation, belief, etc. caused me to do that?"

Jesus is saying that all of our sinful words and actions come from evil desires in our hearts. We are only tempted by certain things because of the desires inside of us. And that is why not everyone is tempted by the same things. Their desires are different. You may be tempted to steal, while another person is not. The desires of your hearts are different.

Now Jesus' point was that the major source of our uncleanness is responding to the evil desires in our hearts. The more important uncleanness is that which comes from the evil in our hearts.

Sin is not only what we do, but what we are. Most of us tend to think of ourselves as being good people who sometimes commit sins. God disagrees. God says we are sinful people who sometimes do good.

We sin because we are sinners. We are born with a sin nature. Sin comes natural to us. You can see this in a child who is only one year old. You can see self-will, disobedience, and rebellion against authority. We commit sins because sin is our natural, spiritual condition. We sin because of the evil desires in our hearts.

We need to get a new heart.

Like David, we need a new heart. God sent a series of prophets to the Jews to call them to recognize their sinful hearts and repent. Let's look at the message of the prophet Ezekiel.

Ezekiel 18:31(NIV) Rid yourselves of all the offenses you have committed, and get a new heart and a new spirit.

His message was not just, "You all need to shape up." His message was also, "You have a heart problem."

We can only get a new heart from Jesus. The Jews who tried responding to the message of the prophets could only improve themselves a little. Instead of really cleaning up their hearts, they learned just how messed up their hearts were. They could never get good enough.

This was exactly God's intention. He knew they could not become fully obedient. He knew they could not rid their hearts of all their evil desires.

God wanted the Jews to realize they needed a savior.

Only God can give you a new heart. You might think that it would be an easy job to change your heart. It is not so. Dieting is easy in comparison. Working out every day is easy in comparison. And many of us know how hard those things are. No, getting a new heart is very, very difficult. One of the other prophets spoke to this.

Jeremiah 17:9 (NIV) The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?

It is beyond our cure, but not God's. We cannot fix our own heart. We cannot improve ourselves enough to win or earn a right relationship with God. Fortunately for us, God is in the heart transformation business. The Holy Spirit of God is our spiritual cardiologist, intent on doing heart surgery on each of us.

This is not a one time event. It is an every day process. Every day I struggle with my own heart. My heart is not fully changed yet. I am still getting to the heart of my sin. After 50 years of being a Christian there are still wrong desires in me. And the Holy Spirit is still doing surgery on me.

But there is something for us to do in this process.

Do the surgical pre-op work that you can do.

- **Ask God to change you.** Like David, ask God, invite God to give you a new heart.

Medical doctors can only read your physical heart. They have no instruments to see into your spiritual heart like God can. You need to take your heart to God for spiritual surgery.

- **Ask God to reveal the evil desires in you.**

Psalm 139:23-24 (NIV) Search me, O God, and know my heart...See if there is any offensive way in me...

Ask God to diagnose the sin problem in your heart and to show you the cure.

- **Spend time with others who also are seeking a new heart from God.**

Hebrews 10:24-25 (NIV) And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another...

Many years ago I would meet with two friends three nights a week to lift weights.

Our weight lifting sessions became discipleship sessions too. As we lifted, we talked about what it meant to be a disciple of Jesus. We talked about our fears, our victories, our frustrations, our goals. We talked about what Jesus was saying to us in our prayers. We encouraged each other, taught each other, prayed with and for each other. That group of three was one of the most life changing times in my life and it wasn't sponsored a church sponsored program. It didn't take place in a church building or even a living room. We were in a basement of a small house. We were working together on giving our hearts to Jesus.

You need to be in such a group too. Spending time with those who have the right kind of heart will foster the growth of the new heart God is giving you.

Christian, are you still in the process of getting a new heart? Or has the process broken down? Maybe you have gotten tired of the process. Maybe you have allowed selfish attitudes to spring back to life in your heart. Maybe your heart is full of YOU instead of full of Jesus. Turn back today. Turn your heart back over to Jesus.

God wanted the Jews to realize they needed a savior, a rescuer. He wants us all to realize that today. Are you in a relationship with Jesus? Have you laid your sins on Him? Have you given Him your life? Have you made that decision public? Have you followed His command to be baptized? Have you followed His command to be a witness?