

 **Main Street**  
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



**Mark 7:14-23**

**“What’s The Problem?”**

(1<sup>st</sup> in the *Seven Deadly Sins* Series: Original Sin)

February 16, 2014

(6<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Epiphany)

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**“Following Christ From City Center!”**

MARK 7:14-23 "WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?"

7:2 Unwashed Hands Issue, Jesus Touched Lepers/The Dead

2) vv. 14-15 JESUS SPEAKS TO CROWD ON KOSHER FOOD LAWS, IMPURITY.

Expansion Of 7:6b-7, Is. Quote: Lips/Heart Contrast

a) v.14 Audience: People/ Call to Hear and Understand.

Hear Me, Double Appeal, Jesus Interprets Scripture

14 And he called the people to him again, and said to them, Calls Larger Audience To Himself  
 "Hear me, all of you, and understand: Solemn, 4:3, 9, 12; 6:52; 8:17, 21 Call To Hear, Move To Insider Status  
 Jesus Speaks For God; Oral Tradition Twisted Torah

b) v.15a Outside to Inside is Not a Problem.

Jesus As Authority, Issue= Kosher Food Laws

15 there is nothing outside a man which by going in can defile him; Punch Line! Foundation For Mission To Gentiles (7:24-37)  
 What Counts As Holiness Before God?  
 Ritual/Moral/Spiritual Pollution, Rejects Lev. 11-15, 17:15, Dt. 12 Food Laws!

c) v.15b Inside to Outside is a Problem.

v. 15 = One Of Jesus' Most Radical Words

Radical vs. Pharisaic Holiness Piety, Way Of Life  
 but the things which come out of a man are what defile him." Moral Pollution/Original/Actual Sin,  
 We Are Toxic, Spew Poison From Inside As Excretions

2') vv.17-23 JESUS SPEAKS TO DISCIPLES ON KOSHER FOOD LAWS.

Question = What Counts As Holiness? What Alienates? Not What You Touch!

a) vv.17-18a Audience: Disciples/ Call to Hear and Understand.

17 And when he had entered the house, Typical Place For Teaching Disciples (3:20, 9:28, 33, 10:10)  
 and left the people,  
 his disciples asked him about the parable. Riddle/Comparison/Figure Of Speech, vv.14-15

18 And he said to them, "Then are you also without understanding? v.14b, Rebuke, 4:13, 7:18, 8:17-21, 10:38  
 Rabbis Concerned About Interior Of Vessels, Not Flat Surfaces

b) vv.18b-19 Outside to Inside is Not a Problem.

Heart Does Not = Stomach

19 Do you not see that whatever goes into a man from the outside cannot defile him, Acts 10, Rom. 14:14  
 since it enters, not his HEART but his stomach, and so passes on?" Radical, A Bit Cross  
 (Mk. Footnote) (cleansing all foods) A Joke? But No People Are! Rom. 14:14, Acts 10:28 (3x Revealed To Peter)  
 Food Laws No Longer Divide Pious Jews From Pagans

c) vv.20-23 Inside to Outside is a Problem: Extended Commentary.

Heart = Center (Impulse/Thought/ Emotion) Righteousness = True Holiness, Hos. 6:6

20 1 And he said, Sinful Heart = Gen. 6:5, 8:21, Ps. 5:21, 66:18, 78:18  
 "What comes out of a man is what DEFILES a man (woman). Defilement Is Still An Issue  
 From Heart Comes Unfathomable Evil!

21 2a For FROM WITHIN, out of the HEART of man, Center Of Loyalty, Decisional Self  
 b come evil devisings<sup>+</sup>: Impulses/ Intentions, Category = Twisted Passions

6 Plural Nouns: Do *porneiai* 3 acts of fornication,<sup>+</sup> (sex outside marriage, pagans) **6/7 Actions**  
acts of theft,<sup>+</sup> (robberies, disregard of property rights)  
*phonoí* acts of murder,<sup>+</sup> (unlawfully taking a life)  
acts of adultery,<sup>+</sup> (intercourse with a married person, violate covenant)  
 22 *pleonexia* acts of coveting,<sup>+</sup> (greedy desire for another's goods/spouse, avarice)  
*ponereai* acts of wickedness, (deliberate malice, lack of moral/social values)

6 Singular Nouns: Feel 3' deceit,<sup>+</sup> Vice Lists, Rom 1:29-31, Gal. 5:19-21, 2 Tim. 3:2-5  
 (lies, cunning and treachery, fraud) **6/7 Attitudes**  
licentiousness,<sup>+</sup> (indecent, unbridled desire, lewdness, no restraint)  
envy,<sup>+</sup> (lit. evil eye, stinginess, grudging jealousy)  
slander,<sup>+</sup> (evil tongue, railing others, blasphemy to God)  
pride,<sup>+</sup> (arrogance, haughtiness, inflated self)  
foolishness. (moral and spiritual insensitivity, reject God, folly)

23 2'b All these evil things Each Destroys Community, Philo = 150 Items, //1QS 4:9-11  
 a come from WITHIN, Evil = Inspired By Powers Other Than God, All Are Impure  
 Not Eliminate Impurity; Redefine It; All Are Impure  
 1' and they DEFILE the man (person). Ritual Purity Replaced By Radical Ethical Purity  
 Prophetic Protest, Amos 5:21-57; Hos. 6:6, Is. 1:11-17, Micah 6:8, Defiled = Unfit To Approach God

**THE TEACHING OF THE U.M. ARTICLES OF RELIGION ON SIN & EVIL**  
(The *U.M. Book of Discipline* 2102: 65-70)

**Article VII: Of Original or Birth Sin** (We enter the world as rebels against God with a continual bent to evil)  
**Original sin** standeth not in the following of Adam (as the Pelagians do vainly talk), but it is the corruption of the nature of every man, that naturally is engendered of the offspring of Adam, whereby man is very far gone from original righteousness, and of his own nature **inclined to evil, and that continually.**

**Article VIII: Of Free Will** (Sinners cannot turn to God on their own, but only with God's constant help)  
The condition of man after the fall of Adam is such that he cannot turn and prepare himself, by his own natural strength and works, to faith, and calling upon God; wherefore we have no power to do good works, pleasant and acceptable to God, without the grace of God by Christ preventing us, that we may have a good will, and working with us, when we have that good will.

**Article IX: Of the Justification of Man** (We make no addition to the grounds of salvation; we only trust)  
We are accounted righteous before God only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, by faith, and not for our own works or deservings. Wherefore, that we are justified by faith, only, is a most wholesome doctrine, and very full of comfort.

**Article X: Of Good Works** (The goods works that follow faith as its fruit have no power to remove sin)  
Although good works, which are the fruits of faith, and follow after justification, **cannot put away our sins**, and endure the severity of God's judgment; yet are they pleasing and acceptable to God in Christ, and spring out of a true and lively faith, insomuch that by them a lively faith may be as evidently known as a tree is discerned by its fruit.

**Article XI: Of Works of Supererogation** (You cannot do more than God requires or put God in debt)  
Voluntary works—besides, over and above God's commandments—which they call works of supererogation, cannot be taught without arrogancy and impiety. For by them men do declare that they do not only render unto God as much as they are bound to do, but that they do more for his sake than of bounden duty is required; whereas Christ saith plainly: When you have done all that is commanded you, say, '**We are unprofitable servants.**'

**Article XII: Of Sin After Justification** (Those who fall into sin may- by God's grace- turn back to God)  
Not every **sin** willingly committed after justification is the **sin** against the Holy Ghost, and unpardonable. Wherefore, the grant of repentance is not to be denied to such as **fall into sin** after justification. After we have received the Holy Ghost, we may depart from grace given, and **fall into sin**, and, by the grace of God, rise again and amend our lives. **And therefore they are to be condemned who say they can no more sin as long as they live here;** or deny the place of forgiveness to such as truly repent.

**Article XX: Of the One Oblation of Christ, Finished upon the Cross** (Chris's offering alone is sufficient for sin)  
The offering of Christ, once made, is that perfect redemption, propitiation, and satisfaction **for all the sins of the whole world, both original and actual;** and there is **none other satisfaction for sin but that alone.** Wherefore the sacrifice of masses, in the which it is commonly said that the priest doth offer Christ for the quick and the dead, to have remission of pain or guilt, is a blasphemous fable and dangerous deceit.

**Of Sanctification** (It is expected that we grow in Christ as the power of sin is broken and cancelled)  
Sanctification is that renewal of our fallen nature by the Holy Ghost, received through faith in Jesus Christ, whose blood of atonement **cleanseth from all sin;**

**3 Dimensions Of Cleansing From Sin**

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| (-) whereby we are not only <i>delivered</i> from the <b>guilt</b> of sin,<br>but are <i>washed</i> from its <b>pollution</b> (i.e. its defilement, stain),<br><i>saved</i> from its <b>power</b> , | Sin as objective guilt. <b>Delivered. (1)</b><br>Sin as corruption. <b>Washed. (2)</b><br>Sin as an alien and potent personal force. <b>Saved. (3)</b> |
| (+)   | and are enabled, through grace,<br>to love God with all our hearts and to walk in his holy commandments blameless.                                     |
|   | God strengthen us in grace to love and walk in a new life.<br>Love & Live!   |

## WHAT’S THE PROBLEM?

*“Then are you also without understanding?”*

Jesus often asked his disciples embarrassing questions.

### MARK 7 : 1 8

**I**n October 2006, Kennesaw State University unveiled *Spaceship Earth*, a 175-ton sculpture created by renowned Finnish-American sculptor, Eino. The grand sphere, 15 feet in diameter, was made of 88 pieces of blue Brazilian quartzite covered with 2,400 bronze pieces, all topped with a life-size bronze of the famous environmentalist David Brower astride the globe. According to the school’s website, the sculpture emphasized the school's mission of "educating good stewards of place.”

Three months later, the sculpture suddenly crumbled. After investigation, officials summarized the disaster in three words, “The glue failed.” The nightly news showed Brower now crushed beneath its pieces. An engraved phrase, “Our fragile craft," was visible amid the debris.<sup>1</sup>

It was a noble project with a message to inspire the young to be world-changers. But Humpty Dumpty took a tumble, and for a while Kennesaw State lived amid the rubble of a grand project gone sour. What happened? “The glue failed.”

This story is a window into the biblical story of the fall from Eden and the later mature Christian understanding of what’s gone wrong with us and our world.<sup>2</sup> The glue of love and attraction that bonded us to God was loosened by the offer of an attractive lie to which we agreed with horrendous consequences. The world is now not *what it was*- innocent and perfect, and not *what it’s going to be*- which is spectacular beyond imagination because of resurrection at the end of the age, but *what it now is*- a place where glue fails and we live amidst a magnificent rubble.

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<sup>1</sup> AP, "175-Ton Sculpture Collapses At Kennesaw State," [www.kennesaw.edu/spaceshipearth](http://www.kennesaw.edu/spaceshipearth).

<sup>2</sup> See page 3 above for a summary of canonical U.M. teaching.

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This is our world and us in it: lured towards and now fallen into the rebellion of disobedience, now partners with evil, now cloaked in ignorance, now marinated in original sin and its seven deadly offspring, now intrigued with vice, now stalked by death and full of regular episodes of outright horror: wars, natural disasters, plague aplenty, unspeakable human neglect and cruelty. Original goodness and beauty remain visible as a reminder of what we've lost and what we seek. Creation and we along with it have been spoiled but not destroyed, defaced but not erased, debilitated but not obliterated. Bad as things are, they are not as bad as they could be, but nothing is left untouched. All parts are affected; we live in a troubled world and in this great lump of pain and hope together.

The whole has fallen into bondage because of a combination of human folly and outside provocation. Forces are let loose in every life from the center outwards that perpetuate a problem which no amount of education, no advances in technology, and no amount of merely human good will can change. Utopia is an illusion oversold by dreamers and politicians; there are no secular substitutes for the kingdom of God. And if we don't get the diagnosis correct, then the deep cure God offers in Jesus comes off as a trivial addition rather than a total replacement of all other schemes. If you don't know it's cancer, you have no reason to take the radiation and chemo. It really is this bad; we all die from it, and the fact that we moan and complain and make excuses more than we examine it is part of the problem. The Christian doctrine of original sin has great explanatory power; it's a hard and a hopeful word.<sup>3</sup>

To make sense of our location, chapter three of Genesis tells a sophisticated story about a naive couple who lived naked and unashamed in a perpetual vacation spot where all is supplied, even an appointment with God each evening to catch up on the day's events. Then one day a talking snake arrived- which should have been a big warning! and with sophistication borne of long practice planted doubts about current arrangements. Has God said? Should you not? Could he be bluffing and keep the best for himself? Isn't it beautiful, and tasty too? Share it together. No more innocence. Time to grow up and be adults, and that requires *the knowledge of good and evil*. Wouldn't you love to be your own little gods?

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<sup>3</sup> The Augustinian anthropology has five interlaced components: 1) all show evidence of the disease in behavior, 2) all come hard-wired in this condition, save only one, 3) the behavior is wrong and sinful (i.e. against God), 4) we are fallen into a state that violates our given nature, and 5) only the intervention of divine grace can lift us from the pit (Alan Jacobs, *Original Sin* (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 2008), 270-271).

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So our ancient mother believed the lie, and on it she- and then Adam, her all too willing accomplice, acted. The sweetness of forbidden fruit turned instantly bitter in a cascade of consequences as innocence evaporated, nakedness and shame appeared, guilt was unveiled, and so began the long project of running away from God and trying to make life work on our own, which is the experiential reality to which the little word *sin* points. Blaming, pain, curses, alienation and death followed. One of their sons killed the other over religious envy, and so the awful intergenerational effects became clear.<sup>4</sup> The snake lied; God did not; they were deceived, and now everything is changed. Forces had now been let loose in them and the world over which they were given charge that could not be controlled, only restrained by law and custom and force and fear. God set firm boundaries, and so out they went from Eden to face a life for which they were not created. Dust they were, and to the dust they would return. The purity of innocence had been corrupted; God was no longer met in pleasant afternoon strolls; moral pollution entered and twisted their God given-passions and appetites all out of shape. Alien impulses and strange desires now haunted them from within. Fear, uncertainty, dread, guilt, shame, revulsion, terrifying dreams, fighting for survival. Before this awful chaos erupted, there was no conflict. They were at harmony in all four dimensions:

- 1) within themselves: peace of mind,
- 2) with each other: perfect love and acceptance between them,
- 3) at home in their environment: a wonderful place to live, and
- 4) in delightful peace with their Maker: “Praise God from whom all blessing flow.”

Life was a good and delicious whole with no breaches or barriers, but not now and no longer. Reality is torn, and in that moment a great ripping sound tore its way through creation. The heart of the human person was no longer a clear spring but a polluted swamp. They blamed each other and avoided responsibility. But what was most telling for the future was a broken relationship with the One who first blew breath in their lungs. Theological distance set in, and with it deep alienation. God was no longer the first thing on their minds and premiere in their affections. The lights were permanently dimmed, and ever since we have lived in the shadows.

This is the great story of catastrophe we have come to call *The Fall*. And without it as the first story after the story of creation, the story of Israel and eventually

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<sup>4</sup> Gen. 4:1-16.

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of Jesus and his people makes no sense at all. A great beginning- creation, a great catastrophe- sin and evil, then a long recovery- Israel, and a surprising revelation - Jesus, follow at the end by a great restoration: these are the five great acts of the drama: creation, catastrophe, covenant, Christ, final consummation in God's kingdom come down. We have a cosmic problem for which God's grace in Christ giving us a new heart and finally a new world is the only adequate answer.<sup>5</sup>

The current Methodist statement on this awful reality is sharply formulated.<sup>6</sup> It's an abbreviation of what we received from our mother- the Church of England- and it is coordinated with at least seven other statements in the *Articles of Religion* having to do with the same issue of sin- its origin, its effects, its misunderstandings, and its cure- so it's not a minor but a major topic, even if it has been largely ignored in our lifetimes in favor of the teaching of evolutionary optimism and the teaching of inevitable progress. Some says we arrive with a blank hard disk and that the virus-laden software of the world corrupts us, but that is not the truth. We come with alien programs pre-installed. It is the job of the church in our day to fling this offensive article of the faith in the face of all merely human optimism that we can fix or improve things if only we try hard enough or get the social engineering finally working. We know better! What is broken cannot be addressed without God's preserving grace insulating us from the worst effects of sin and God's enabling grace waking us up and pointing us towards Christ. Here it is:

“Original sin standeth not in the following of Adam (as the Pelagians<sup>7</sup> do vainly talk)”- meaning it's not just what we act out and might have avoided, “but it is the corruption of the nature of every man” - in other words, it's who we have become at the center of the self, a corrupted, mixed, ambiguous nature,

“that naturally is engendered of the offspring of Adam”- which means no one is exempt, not one of us but only Jesus the sinless Savior-

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<sup>5</sup> On Methodism as *heart religion*, see Fred Sanders, *Wesley on the Christian Life* (Wheaton, ILL: Crossway, 2013), Chapter 3, “Heart Religion,” 73-102.

<sup>6</sup> *The Book of Discipline 2012*, 61. On Original Sin as a common Christian teaching, see Ted A. Campbell, *Wesleyan Beliefs* (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 2010), 26-27, 42-44, 76-77, 98-99, 219-221.

<sup>7</sup> On Pelagius as a modern motivational speaker, see Jacobs, *Original Sin*, 50ff.

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“whereby man is very far gone from original righteousness, and of his own nature inclined to evil, and that continually” - which is not an optimistic statement about self-esteem and human potential and the possibility for real moral progress.

Several years ago I sat with a circle of friends and asked, “What’s wrong with our world?” The first person gave a one-word answer, “Sin.” That was correct, but I wanted more. Each in turn used words like *selfishness* and *meanness*, which I took as accurate symptoms. When it came round to me I asked again, “What’s wrong with the world?” and- after a pause and sober look round the room- gave the answer, “I am.” What’s wrong with the world? I am. What’s wrong with the world? You are. I’m just like every one who opened the womb with one exception. Jesus loved every person he met, but this is how he sees us, with no illusions about what’s on the inside or what we’re capable of. I have the disease, the symptoms and the signs; so do you. It’s why we spend so much energy protecting our private thoughts from inspection.

Sin is not just doing bad actions; it’s deeper than the surface of life; it’s a corruption and defiling of the center of the self, the heart, the human nature that was originally good and pure and full of light but is now spoiled and dark. I am a mixed bag, a polluted stream, aware of God and the right and the good and the pure and the holy, but also weighted down and drawn at a primal level in the other direction, and unless I receive this teaching of original and continuing sin as a true map of reality, I cannot understand either my world or the depths of my own experience because I am a battleground. I am a tug of war, and left on my own the results are not good for me or for you.<sup>8</sup> This is not cynicism or pessimism or negativity or despair or the loss of hope; this is biblical realism, and it mocks all our naive efforts at self or social improvements. I am a disciple- been at it hard for forty years, and still I would not want my private thoughts and the emotions to go public, and neither would you, so give thanks for a God who mostly keeps our secrets!

So whenever some earnest believer makes an appeal for transparency, “Pastor Phil, why not share with us what’s *on your heart?*” I know two things. They’ve not inspected theirs recently, and they do not have access to mine. What you really want is a highly selective sifting of what I find within, the good, the stuff that comes from

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<sup>8</sup> See Paul’s parallel and paradoxical confession in Romans 7:13-20. For a fresh statement of original sin, see Francis Spufford, *Unapologetic* (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 2012), Chapter 2, “The Crack in Everything,” 24-53.

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Christ, not the other stuff which Jesus exposed in his disciples when he took them aside in private and notified them what his spiritual X-ray vision revealed, “For from within,” he said, “out of the heart of man, come evil devisings....” after which he listed twelve symptoms of the underlying disease of sin, one- in other words- for each of his twelve companions!<sup>9</sup> And since three- and perhaps four- have explicitly to do with what we narrowly term *immorality*,<sup>10</sup> I’m sure they were relieved he did not attach names to specific vices else we would know more about Peter than that he was a coward or more about Thomas than that he was a doubter!

What we are sure of is that in this mirror each disciple saw a reflection of what was within, so each could say, “He’s talking about me.” Heads were down and it was silent for a while after Jesus gave a customized list that started with sexual immorality and ended with complete moral foolishness, that included both habitual actions as well as feelings and attitudes. That he knew them on the inside was at once sobering and hopeful. From time to time I pray, “Lord, you know it all- the good, the bad, the ugly, and the hidden; that you keep calling and using me is a great encouragement.” As someone once said, “The one who knows us best loves us most.” I’m counting on that! Jesus is not naive about any of us! That he was willing to suffer such pain for the likes of me is what makes him so attractive.

You know him by a stage name and by his notorious rejection of all we value, but his given name is Brian Warner, and here is his confession about life:

“Initially I was drawn into the darker side of life. But it's really just human nature. I started to learn that everything that's considered a sin is what makes you a human being. All the seven deadly sins are man's true nature- to be greedy, to be hateful, to lust. Of course you have to control them; but if you're made to feel guilty for being human, then you're going to be trapped in a never-ending sin-and-repent cycle you can't escape from, and you're going to be miserable. Ultimately you'll be living in your own hell. So there's no need to worry about going to hell, because hell will be on earth.”

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<sup>9</sup> If, as I have displayed, vv. 20-23 are a 6:2 chiasm (1-2-3 // 3'-2'-1') with *evil devisings* (v.21) an *evil things* (v.23a) as the innermost frame for the vice list, then what we have are two grouping of six for a total of twelve, thus one for each disciple, which I take as a homiletical if not a strictly exegetical insight!

<sup>10</sup> *Coveting* in the tenth commandment includes someone else’s spouse.

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Brian Warner is the shock-rocker Marilyn Manson. In a sermon titled "Sin 101: Why Sin Matters," Pastor Brian McClaren responds to Manson's thoughts:

“He says there's a certain naturalness to sin. He says feeling guilty for being human can lead to misery. He talks about a cycle of sin and shame many of us know something about. He's right when he says you have to learn to control sin even though it feels so natural. I think he's wrong in what he says about having hell on earth, because there are a lot of ways to experience a hell on earth. One is to be plagued by guilt and shame for sin, to live in what he called a never-ending cycle of sin and shame, but the other is to fail to control sin, to let sin take over your life or take over our culture and our world.”<sup>11</sup>

McClaren takes the confession of a man who has- so far as I can see- utterly turned away from God, and tickles out the truth between his lines of despair. If we spurn the grace of God and surrender ourselves to unredeemed human nature, we do nothing but create pain for ourselves and others. It's why we have laws and police and prisons and penalties. But there is one who has the power and the love to give us a new heart and new desires, to so remake us from the inside out that the only adequate image is *new birth into a new life*. The real point of a depth analysis of the insidious powers of sin and evil is not to leave us sitting discouraged in our moral mess but by a presentation of our darkness to make Christ all the brighter, to create in us a keen desire to move towards him in faith to receive the cure only he can offer.

What God offers in Jesus makes no sense apart from the doctrines of a good creation now fallen into sin, evil, and death. This is the disease for which Jesus is God's best medicine. It is not the residual good in our world that needs explanation so much as what's wrong. To assume the good is a reflection of our being stamped with God's image. Good health is a given; we go to a doctor to find what's wrong. Goodness finds a deep response, but evil is always a spoiler. Beauty is our native land; ugly is what raises questions. Life is our original state; what requires an answer is the problem of death. The cluster of teachings the church offers around the issues of original and continuing sin are a comprehensive answer to an issues that will not go away. What's wrong with our world? With me? Is there hope?

For several hundred years after the great event of Jesus, the church let its light

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<sup>11</sup> PreachingToday.com search under Mark 7:14-23.

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shine, first among fellow Jews, then increasingly among the Gentiles. Eventually the expanding mission drew the interest of the pagan religious establishment and government officials. Persecution was occasional, mostly local, but sometimes intense and Empire-wide with numerous martyrs who witnessed to their faith in Christ in death. The church lived in tension with the culture as a distinct minority.

But then, in the first quarter of the fourth century, the winds shifted. Emperor Constantine withdrew edicts of persecution, was converted, and it was not long before this persecuted faith became the faith of the Empire. The church had overcome the Empire and was now- because of its moral code and educated leaders- asked to join in running things and provide religious glue for the culture. Bishops became government officers; Emperors convened church councils; impressive basilicas were soon built for a church that- to this point- had no buildings of its own. It was a great miracle, thought many, and a new day. And it was. But something was lost in the acceptance. What did it mean to be a serious Christian when the stigma was now gone and many flooded into the churches because it was socially acceptable? Well, some thought, what if the front line of conflict with sin and evil is no longer between the church and the pagans but within the heart of the each Christian? In the heart rather than across the street?

The answer came in the birth of a spiritual revival whose institutions continue even today. It was- in effect- the first Christian youth movement, and its name is *monasticism*. The Egyptian desert was soon full of monks and hermits, living alone or in small groups at a subsistence level and taking up the rigors of the internal warfare against sin and the deceptions of demons.<sup>12</sup> And what these brave souls learned in their prayerful isolation they shared with others who made pilgrimage to seek their wisdom. They became spiritual guides to others in the ways of spiritual warfare and growth in the virtues and character of Christ.<sup>13</sup> One of these spiritual explorers was Evagrius, and he- and later on his student John Cassian- were the two most responsible for cataloging what we have later come to know as *the deadly sins*.

You see, if you're alone and isolated- which we rarely are, and if you are silent- which we rarely are, and if you look within at your heart in intense introspection- which we rarely do, and if you pray for hours on end and meditate on the Lord's

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<sup>12</sup> The classic is Athanasius *Life of St. Anthony*, available in several editions.

<sup>13</sup> See Benedicta Ward, *The Desert Fathers: Sayings of the Early Christian Monks* (New York, NY: Penguin, 2003), for this movement's insights and aphorisms.

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words and deeds in Scripture, something happens. An inner world opens; you begin to map the terrain of your deepest heart. You enter into therapy with the divine counselor- the Holy Spirit. And it was there- in intense desert isolation, that Evagrius over time catalogued what he found within, what he termed the *eight thoughts* or *demons* that attack the desert monk. First gluttony, then sexual impurity or lust, avarice or greed, sadness, anger, sloth, vainglory, and- last of all- pride.<sup>14</sup>

From within these impulses arise; they then form themselves into images in the mind's eyes, and if- and only if- we act on these images, do we actually sin and incur its consequence. So the wise monk will quench the fires early on lest they set him ablaze with the passions of vice. And since these eight were very near the headwaters of sin itself, all others flow from them, as when a river like the Mississippi splits and then divides again to form the delta. These are *the capital sins* in that they are the *heads*- the sources from which the others flow. It was a monastic psychology and spirituality to bring the heart to purity so that, in the words of Jesus, the believer might see God, as in the beatitude, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God," and- as someone once quipped- only the pure in heart want to! Think of this cataloging and analysis as an ancient form of psychotherapy, an exploration of the inner terrain of the deepest self, not just for curiosity or adjustment, but for serious discipleship. Only when I know what is within do I know how much I need the Lord's interior cleansing, and this is heart religion at its best.

The system of the eight deadly impulses soon caught on and spread as a tool for self-examination, and later for formal confession.<sup>15</sup> They were placed on a scale from the most carnal- gluttony and lust- to the most spiritual and deadly- pride. For each of the vices there was a healing virtue to be practiced as its cure, say chastity for lust, fasting and moderation for gluttony. In the sixth century several of the impulses were combined and envy given its own distinctive place so the list were was reduced from eight to the more highly symbolic seven, one to battle each day. Each in its own way, but particularly when practiced in combination, are deadly to the soul and finally to life itself. Original sin is the deepest root; the deadly seven are toxic fruits of the

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<sup>14</sup> On the early history and formulations, see Rebecca Konyndyk DeYoung, *Glittering Vices* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2009) 25-40; William H. Willimon, *Sinning Like a Christian* (Nashville, TN: Abington, 2005, 17-32; Donald Capps, *The Depleted Self: sin in a narcissitic age* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1993), 41ff.

<sup>15</sup> See Annemarie S. Kidder, *Making Confession, Hearing Confession* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2010) on the history and recovery of this practice.

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rotten root, and from them and their many combinations spring the whole vast array of human deception and misery. Think about it. Lust plus greed is prostitution; lust plus envy is adultery; greed plus sloth is get-rich-quick-schemes, gluttony plus pride is a fat man in speedos, and sloth plus anger is passive-aggressive, so you can have fun with this.<sup>16</sup> And so for well over a thousand years, this system of soul analysis, sin resistance, and spiritual warfare was a mainstay of Christian spirituality, and- in our day- is enjoying a minor renaissance in pop culture and in the church.<sup>17</sup> All seven are found in Scripture, sometimes in clusters as in the text before us today, but nowhere are they all listed together, which means they are a development from Scripture known as *holy tradition* and deserve our respect.

In 2008 the Josephson Institute- an L.A.-based ethics institute- surveyed nearly 30,000 students at 100 high schools nationwide. Among the findings:

“...64 percent cheated on a test in the past year; 30 percent stole from a store; 42 percent lied to save money; 83 of a 100 lied to their parents about something significant. Despite their transgressions, 93 percent said they were satisfied with their personal ethics and character, with 77 percent adding, ‘I am better than most people I know.’”<sup>18</sup>

It may be time for the recovery of a bit more rigorous standard. I am afraid that much of the shallow teaching about self-esteem leaves students feeling just great about bad behavior. The study of the seven deadly sins never has that effect because it lays bare the gnarled labyrinth of the heart. I did not come into the world as a blank clean slate. That is modern romantic nonsense. What I become is not just the fault of my parents or the larger culture. There is in me- in my heart and from the start- a system of ungodly impulses that, if followed and not resisted and then uprooted by the energies of God’s grace in Christ, will turn me into a truly rotten human being, a moral and spiritual danger to others, and take my life, perhaps now, but surely in the life to come because none of this rotten stuff will endure the light that is coming. I must understand the battle, and with Jesus take up the battle for my own soul. Sin

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<sup>16</sup> The chart is found at [www.i-am-bored.com/bored\\_link.cfm?link\\_id=23342](http://www.i-am-bored.com/bored_link.cfm?link_id=23342)

<sup>17</sup> Go to [www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-25214557](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-25214557) for the recent discovery of a wall painting on St. George and the dragon, including the seven deadly sins.

<sup>18</sup> David Crary, "Students lie, cheat, steal, but say they're good," [www.chron.com](http://www.chron.com) (11-30-08).

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must become my sworn enemy and Christ my dearest teacher and holy champion. And it was into this inner warfare that Jesus inducted his twelve closest followers by showing them what was in their hearts, like a surgeon bringing in a color photo of your cancer and asking, “Can I cut this out?”

When the Lord first called Abraham and created the Jewish people for himself, there was a problem. How to make them different and separate, even odd in order to keep them from copying the beliefs and habits of the surrounding nations. One way is to declare certain foods and practices as *unclean* and therefore *forbidden*. So if you eat what’s not on the *kosher* list, or if you touch what should not be touched, then you must go through a water ritual of cleansing or a sacrificial rite of offering to be put back in a category of being able to approach God in worship.<sup>19</sup>

Some of the prohibitions were hygienic, but others were arbitrary with the intent of marking God’s people out as different from the pagans around them; you can’t eat what they eat- ham or lobster, or do what they do- marry their near kin. And it worked well, but- like all religious regulations- was subject to misreading and misuse, which by the time of Jesus had become the special concern of a highly serious party of laymen, the Pharisees- who went so far as to take the standards that applied only to the temple priests and apply them to Jews in general. To be right with God meant keeping a long list of purity requirements, and you had to be especially vigilant about the insides of jars and other cooking vessels whose insides you could not see. Washing hands before meals was not about germs since there was as yet no germ theory and no microscopes; it was a precaution just in case you’d touched something ritually unclean so it would not be transmitted to the food and therefore into yourself thus making you ritually unfit for worship. It’s easy to see how such an involved system could end up majoring in minors and missing the point that God both expects and enables his people to be different in the deep sense. Jesus cared more about the insides of peoples than the interiors of jars and pots!

It happens that one day, when the Pharisees had set up a watch-Jesus-and-his-friends patrol the disciples failed to wash their hands before eating, thus violating one of the rituals of the holiness code. This led to a big debate with Jesus about who’s right with God, and we pick up on the debate in verse 14 where Jesus has just

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<sup>19</sup> On the system, see Bruce Chilton, “Purity and Impurity,” in Ralph Martin & Peter Davids, *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments* (Downer’s Grove, ILL: IVP, 1997), 988-96.

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**Mark 7:14-23** ..... **15**

separated himself from the Pharisees and is now addressing the crowds on primary and secondary matters. And while it seems common sense to us that God is not so concerned about what goes in your mouth then out in the sewer as with the filth that comes up and out of your heart, to them it was a big deal. Verse 15 was- by Jewish standards- one of Jesus' most radical statements because it broke down a major barrier between them and the pagan world. He- in effect- modified whole sections of Old Testament law in a single sentence. Why? Because as the divine agent, God the Son, he had the authority to do so. "There is nothing outside a man *which by going in* can defile him," thus rendering kosher laws secondary in a single sentence.

But still a man or woman can be defiled and unfit for God's presence, and that is addressed in the second part of the saying, "but the things which come *out of a man* are what defile him." It's not what goes into you but what comes out that offends God. The problem is not taste not or touch not; the problem is the heart. What goes in one end comes out the other, and at the far end you can't tell the difference between a clean lamb chop and an unclean ham sandwich, "Do you not see," he said, "that whatever goes into a man from the outside cannot defile him, since it enters, not his heart, but his stomach and so passes on?" and here most translations clean up the crudity of the language a bit. The stomach is a food processor, but the heart is a sin generator, and it doesn't touch the center of who you are- for good or for evil- its doesn't much matter; it's a pass-through. Jesus was not into surface religion but heart transformation; he came to reclaim the center of the self, the citadel of the soul, the command and control center of the human person and there build a new world.

Now remember who the audience is. Not the Pharisees, not the crowds, only the disciples in the setting of a private home. "Gentlemen," he said, "Are you also without understanding?" the answer to which is "Yes." What makes us spiritually unclean is what's already in us, "For *from within*, out of the heart of man, come evil devisings...." Food is clean; we are not. Food is innocent; we are not.

Where does the impulse to sin arise? In the mind? Yes, but not initially. That's where the picture and plan are formed, where rationality adds ordering and the imagination plays out the scenario of greed or gossip, adultery or murder. But it does not come from there. It arises from a deeper reservoir, from the heart- not the blood pump or the seat of emotions, but the center of the willing self- the place where God's image has been defaced and taken hostage. Unless Christ gives a new heart and new passions, nothing changes; it's all on the surface. In effect he said, "Until I am *in you*, nothing much changes since you cannot change yourselves apart from my grace and soul-level surgery, and just to prove it let me tell you what I see in your hearts."

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Twelve disciples, twelve vices, twelve examples of the corruption of the human person and their relationships, six wicked habits followed by six wicked attitudes, three of which - and perhaps a fourth- have to do with the misuse of our bodies as male and female. And look what the very first one is, *porneia* in Greek, a blanket term for sexual immorality of all sorts. *Adultery*, possibly *coveting*, and *licentiousness* round out the four- so one third of the total. Jesus is not surprised at ancient or modern obsessions. There was not a stronger or more reprehensible word in all of the Greek moral vocabulary than the word behind *licentiousness*, which refers to public, shameless, perversity.<sup>20</sup> Theft and murder echo the Ten Commandments, as do deceit and slander as forms of false witness. Each list of six ends with a general catch-all term, *acts of wickedness* in list one and *moral foolishness* in list two. Which leaves us with two: envy and pride. Wanting what is not mine because God has not given it to me is envy, and pride- which some say is mother to the six other deadly sins because it desires what belongs to God alone, which is first place and all the limelight. “All these evil things come from within,” said Jesus, “and they defile the person.” They leave us stained and weakened.

Friends, this is the stuff Jesus sees when the Holy Spirit hands him a CAT-scan of our hearts, not our achy-breaky hearts but our inky-stinky hearts. My problem is not you or the bishop or Lori; my problem is not even my enemies- if I have any; my problem is not even the devil because if this stuff was not already in me he would have nothing at all to appeal to and no place to land his forces.<sup>21</sup> My biggest problem is my heart and what it spews forth. What’s wrong with the world? is the question, and the only right answer is, “I am.” This is not me attacking your precious and fragile self-image; this is not an assault on basic worth but an affirmation of it. Jesus is telling us what he sees and what he smells. We are worthy to be told the truth!

We will spend a Sunday with each of the seven deadly sins. Today was just a reminder where they all come from. At the end of this series, we will hopefully have a much better understanding of the depth of our problem for which Jesus is the only cure. Listening to the merciful Jesus tell us the truth about ourselves is what it means to walk in his light. There is no other path to freedom and the love we seek.

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<sup>20</sup> See G. Thomas Hobson, “*aselgeia* in Mark 7:22,” *Filologia Neotestamentica*, Vol. XXI, 2008, 65-74 where the argument is made that this technical term includes homosexual practice as well as other forms of shameless sexual perversity.

<sup>21</sup> This is the insight of James 1:1-14, “but each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desires....”

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