



Speaker:
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Sin that Defiles

Series: The Gospel of Mark • 23 of 23

10/17/2020 (SAT) | Bible: **Mark 7:14-23**

We're going to pick up our reading in Mark at Chapter 7 and verse 14. And we'll read to verse 23.

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Having rebuked the Pharisees for allowing their tradition to undermine the very commandments of God, Jesus turns to address the people in general. He explains it's not what things you *consume* that defile you spiritually. Instead, a man is defiled by the things that emerge from his *heart*. Remember, "heart" is used in scripture to represent a man's inner being. The heart is the core of a person, and this is where his mind, emotions and conscience are said to reside.

Jesus and the disciples go back to this house. It's likely the place where Jesus was living at this time. They ask him for clarification on what he's just said. We see that Jesus expresses his surprise that they don't understand.

I try to encourage people to be patient with those who don't understand something. If you think something's obvious, it's easy to get irritated when others struggle to grasp what you're talking about. Needless to say, Jesus wasn't being unfair to the disciples. He wouldn't have rebuked them for not understanding particle physics, for example. This is different. The lack of understanding Jesus picks up on from time to time is not due to lack of teaching but rather a dullness coming from a sinful heart.

The same goes for us. The Lord doesn't expect you to understand what "supralapsarianism" is; but you've heard the gospel. If there's any lack of understanding in a message as simple as the gospel one, it's due to spiritual blindness caused by sin. We know that, apart from a work of God, the world will not truly understand the gospel we present to them. **But they are to be blamed.** And let's go further. They're to be blamed for not even perceiving the existence and glory of God in creation.

Jesus, then, gives a sigh of disappointment and proceeds to explain further. The disciples are so lacking in understanding, Jesus has to go into a fairly crude level of detail. He reminds them things they eat come out the other end! The end of verse 19 talks of "purging all meats". I can't say how this should be translated, but it could mean no foods are now unclean.

You might think it wasn't at all unreasonable for the disciples to be confused. They come from a religious background that taught certain foods *were* unclean. But Jesus had been teaching them the true nature of the Mosaic Law, so they should've paid more attention and meditated on these things. Think about what it said regarding defilement and cleansing. We're told *it was never possible* the blood of animals could take away sin. So the cleansing these sacrifices brought were merely of a **ritual** nature. It's the same in the case of eating forbidden foods. It was important they didn't eat things which God had forbidden. But the defilement they caused was also of a ritual nature.

We don't mean these laws were pointless. Ritual uncleanness and cleansing were meant to teach the people about God's attitude to sin. Yet alongside these types of law were real and spiritual principles. The people sinned. And this brought spiritual defilement. They were meant to see past the provisions for sin in the form of sacrifice and see the future Redeemer.

Jesus gives the disciples a list. It's a list of some of the types of sin that come from a man's heart. *It's things like these*, he tells them, *that truly defile a man*. You see how he continues to impress on the people the need to think differently. At every opportunity, he turns the religious notions of the day on their head.

Matthew's gospel also contains an account of this episode. Matthew abbreviates the list though, focusing on external acts of sin. Jesus's list here is one of many throughout the New Testament. No single list should be taken as definitive. Jesus lists the sins he wants to list, not every type of sin in existence.

I'd like to work our way through this list. We only have time to spend a minute or two on each item. But I intend to work through them roughly in the following way. For each item, I'd like to think about how the word is commonly understood, then give an example of how it manifests itself in the present-day, and finally give an example of how a Christian might commit that sin.

1. Evil thoughts

The Greek word here indicates an internal conversation. People reason within themselves, and often what comes out of that internal dialogue is a thoroughly evil thought. Bad thoughts, then.

An example today would be con men. They sit at home thinking how they can take advantage of elderly people, say. They calmly draw up a plan in their mind of how to talk their way into a pensioner's home to steal their life savings. Where their consciences are at that time I've no idea.

And what about us? How might we commit this sin? Well doubting God for one. If you've ever questioned any of God's promises, you certainly had evil thoughts. Doubt yourself, Christian, but never doubt God. He's not like us. He is faithful.

2. Adulteries

This word is mostly used when referring to sinful relationships entered into by married people. In our culture, we might say so-and-so has been “carrying on” with the guy down the street.

But it's not just about secretive liaisons in hotels. Think about the modern phenomenon of the dating site on the internet. Married people, for different reasons, often decide to go on these websites, acting as if they were single. In a way, it doesn't matter whether they follow through with it. Whether it only goes as far as flirting or results in an outward act, their hearts are already immersed in adultery. The world makes light of flirtation, whereas God sees it as it is: the first stage in adultery, which he utterly condemns.

The Christian should be aware that adultery can be of a spiritual kind also. We're said to be “married” to God. So if our affections wander to anywhere but God, we commit adultery. Be careful not to love the things of this world. If you love this world or the things of this world, you don't have the love of the Father in you. And, what's more, you've committed spiritual adultery.

3. Fornications

The Greek word used here is *porneiai*. It's where we get our English word “pornography” from. But fornication covers all kinds of sexual immorality. It's commonly used today to describe sex before marriage. And this sin is common and widely accepted today in the world.

If you choose to watch TV, as I do, you understand the storytelling is of the world. So we each put up with some degree of sinful behaviour in dramas and comedies. Most in my family are fans of the 90s sitcom, *Friends*. The gang of thirty-somethings in the program are created to be endearing to the viewer. By the world's standards, they'd make great friends. And they show a whole raft of virtuous behaviours like love, compassion, thoughtfulness, a sense of justice, and so on. Yet all of them quite happily engage in sexual liaisons outside of marriage.

The danger, then, is that viewers become desensitized to this particular behaviour. And it's partly due to these types of programs the world for the most part thinks fornication is quite acceptable. God, however, has not changed his mind. And it's still a sin.

Christians too can get entangled in sexual sins. I'll mention just one today: pornography. I use this as an example because it's not spoken of much. So no one's under any illusion, there are Christian men and women, including deacons, elders and pastors, are regularly view pornographic material.

Let me give you some facts and figures. Most parents believe their children would never do anything like this. In a survey, three quarters of all parents were sure their children had never used pornography. Of the children of those parents, **more than half** had in fact viewed pornographic material on the internet. Among married people, regular users are three times more likely to go on and commit adultery.

But it gets worse. In a survey in the States, **more than half of all respondents who class themselves as born-again Christians admitted to regular use of pornography**. Now that's not the whole picture. It turns out the more committed a professing Christian is, the less likely they are to commit this sort of sin. Further research showed where a profession was costly—that is, where a man or woman regularly subjected themselves to the ministry of God's word and prayed with the brethren—the percentage falls dramatically. Well would you believe it? God was right all along!

- If we walk in his ways
- If we walk in the Spirit
- If we listen to his word preached
- If we lean on God in prayer

...we shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.

4. Murders

Most people in society would define murder as killing an innocent person. And it includes that.

But for all the expressions of grief and horror coming from society in response to innocent people being killed, we hear virtually nothing from them for the lives ended in the nation's abortion clinics. In the week ending 2nd October this year, there were 321 deaths in the UK attributed to COVID-19. Almost all the victims were elderly and had serious underlying health conditions. In the same week, **more than 4000 unborn children were dismembered and discarded in abortion mills around our country**. Twenty of these little lives will have been ended in the time it takes you to listen to this sermon. How can God bless a country that's so cruel?

Genuine Christians, of course, are generally not killers! But I'm sure you remember Jesus's teaching that hating someone is *like* killing them. That might sound extreme, but hatred for another is simply murder in embryonic form. And I'd say it's not at all uncommon for Christians to hate others, even other believers.

I counsel believers to think on this. The word of God makes it clear if you hate your brother Christian you don't belong to God. It doesn't mean if you've succumbed to this particular sin your salvation is lost, but it does mean you should go quickly to God in repentance. For as long as you hate someone, **you bear the marks of an enemy of God**. The sooner you go to him and plead the forgiveness of Jesus Christ, the better. I'd only add that hatred for *anyone*, Christian or not, is sinful.

5. Thefts

The Greek word from which our word "theft" came was *klopai*. It might just remind you of the word "kleptomaniac", which describes someone addicted to stealing stuff.

People generally understand what stealing is. But it's clear most people have blind spots with it. Some of the most honest people in society think nothing of sneaking out of work early. This is an example of how we can steal from our employers.

For the believer, more important than whether they take too long on their dinner hour in work is the issue of stealing from **God**. How can we possibly steal from God? Well, whenever we receive something good and fail to give God the credit, we rob him of his glory. We should keep in our hearts as a motto that verse which tells us all good things come from our heavenly Father.

6. Covetousness

I think most people would have some idea of what this means. They might define it as craving something to the point of obsession.

One of the most common ways in which people commit this sin is through an obsession with making money. The love of money has forever been the cause of a multitude of other sinful acts.

Money is okay. If one of you wanted to give me £100,000 one day, I wouldn't complain! It would help in many ways. But it wouldn't make us happier in any real sense. If being wealthier *did* make me happier, it will have exposed a fault in my walk with God. We're meant to be happy with our lot.

Covetousness in the believer can show itself in subtle ways. A wife's yearning for a better house. Her husband's daydreams of a flashier car. As with most things, legitimate desires can easily morph into covetousness. Greatly blessed is that man, that woman, that child, who's able to daily thank God for the clothes on their back, the food in their mouth and the roof over their head, and be content.

7. Wickedness

Cruelty. Violence. Bullying. They grieve God, and those who commit such things will not escape punishment unless they receive forgiveness from Jesus Christ.

There's wickedness all around us. Like you, I'm disturbed by various types of wickedness. Karen and I spent years campaigning on animal welfare issues, for example. There's animal cruelty all around us.

But a more recent phenomenon that grieves us both is bullying by school children. In this age of technology, most bullying now is not in the schoolyard but on social media. Gangs of wicked boys or girls can target their victim via the internet. It's just as bad as the type of bullying that took place when I was a child. Numerous school children have taken their own lives because they can't tolerate the daily torment from other school children they see on their own mobile phones.

The Christian is being wicked when they wish harm on someone. I don't mean you necessarily want them to get hit by a bus or anything. But I know many a Christian has secretly rejoiced at a brother's downfall.

It's a mark of a true follower of Jesus Christ that they rejoice when others do well. They may have had a run-in with another Christian in the past, but they rejoice to hear that person's son or daughter has turned to Jesus Christ for salvation.

8. Deceit

Everyone knows what it is to lie and cheat. The world is saturated with deceit.

It's only in the last few years I've discovered the biggest culprit in our society, guilty of deception on a massive scale, is the media. I mean by this the news outlets in particular. We know television daily promotes sin. But if you read the newspapers or watch the news on TV, you should be aware you're exposing yourself to machines of mass propaganda. The only way newspapers can survive is by creating sensation where there is none, and they can only do this by distorting truth.

If you're wondering why I'm so confident this is the case, I can tell you I speak from personal experience. My Christian views, views I know you hold also, have been taken by The Times, The Guardian and others and distorted to make me look bad. When the world's mouthpieces speak, the discerning individual should take it all with a pinch of salt.

On a smaller scale, we see this in a habit of some Christians. They'll take the words of a fellow Christian who they have some quarrel with, and retell them with their own spin. It's very simple friends: if you relay something about a fellow Christian with the intention of making them look bad, you commit several sins, one of them deceit. Remember: what you do to a fellow believer you do to Jesus himself.

9. Lasciviousness

Here's one most people won't know the meaning of. It's just not used today. It refers to an inward sensuality or lust. And I think everyone knows what lust means.

You will have observed over the past few years a gradual increase in sex on TV. Not just on TV, of course, but in magazines and on the internet. But if you made a habit of flicking through the TV channels each evening, you'd come across all sorts of stuff. Sex scenes that a few years ago would only have been seen on X-rated films. Nakedness presented as normal. Sexual deviancy represented in every new film and drama series. As society's moral values have gone into rapid decline, it's given the green light to people to express their deepest desires. And chief among them is this lust.

Lust, like all sin, has no upper limit. A society gradually abandoned by God will continue to push the boundaries of sin, and only the mercy of God himself will contain it.

Lust isn't all about sex. If, by the grace of God a believer has escaped the temptations of sexual lust, he may still fall into lust for other things. Some may lust for greater luxury and ease in their lifestyles. But they should heed the warning in Revelation aimed at those enjoying a comfortable lifestyle. They risk becoming independent of God, and Jesus will "spit them out of his mouth", as it were. The true warrior in Christ's army should always be ready to suffer in his warfare.

10. An evil Eye

The “eye” part of this, *ophthalmos*, gives us our English word “ophthalmologist”. But this isn't merely about an eye, but an *evil* eye. And what this is describing is **envy**. Bitterness.

It's been said jealousy is a desire to hold on to things you have, while envy is about not wanting others to have nice things. If you observe people in society carefully, you'll without doubt see this evil eye.

Someone might get a nice new car. Their circumstances may change so they're able to move into a house in a nicer area. They might get promoted in work or graduate from university. Curiously, among those who they regard as friends, there'll often be those who aren't happy about these things. They'll remain friends with the other person for the rest of their lives as long as they perceive them as being on the same sort of “level” as them. Friendships can come to an end because one of the parties buys a posh new car!

There is envy in the church of God, of course. For all kinds of things. The one I've chosen as an example is one that perhaps affects pastors more. You have this pastor who works hard. He delves into the scriptures. He preaches faithfully. He loves the congregation, and prays for them regularly.

And a faithful shepherd of a flock will surely pray for their spiritual revival; that Jesus Christ would be lifted up in their hearts and cause them to glorify God. How would such a man feel if, after many years of hard work with very little spiritual change in the people, he sees another church flourish. The people are becoming more devoted. New disciples are being added to the number each month. And what's worse, the place is not as theologically sound.

It's very easy for one of God's pastors to fall into temptation here. They'll find themselves despising the other congregation and maybe even being angry at God himself for blessing the wrong church!

No matter what differences of opinion, arguments, or whatever I've had with previous churches I've been at, I'd rejoice to hear God was pouring out his Spirit on them. Why would I not want people in this city, this country, to be more dedicated to God than they've previously been? Why would I not want the name of the Lord Jesus Christ magnified more now than it was this time last year? May God keep me from ever developing this evil eye towards other churches or other pastors, but rather help me to pray earnestly for them.

11. Blasphemy

This word has traditionally been used to describe saying bad things about God. You might remember a few weeks ago I touched on the issue of blasphemy. I explained it was any type of slander about someone else. You recall I said we weren't to slander God, other people, or even Satan.

The average person in our society wouldn't usually blaspheme God in the normal sense of the word. But it's just as serious even if it's done indirectly. For example, think about those who promote an anti-Christian worldview. They might promote atheism or naturalistic evolution. In this, they declare God is **not** the Creator. If he exists at all, he's a cruel or

impotent bystander. Some are more direct. Richard Dawkins, darling of evolutionism, engaged in a long rant against God in one of his books, calling him a genocidal maniac. Every word a man speaks will be answered for, the Bible says.

A believer will rarely be found that outright slanders God. They might when under some particular oppression of soul. But if the charge of blasphemy can be levelled against us for slandering **others**, it won't be nearly as difficult to find culprits within the churches.

Gossip is rife even in the congregation of God. And it's slander because the intention of the one who spreads it is not a holy one. When you spread a rumour, you don't allow the subject a chance to explain anything. The rumour could even be completely false! Better to not say anything at all. After all, all you lose is the sinful thrill you get from gossiping.

12. Pride

To be proud is to be “stuck up”. It could be an inward feeling or could come out in things we say or how we dress. The sad truth is society now thinks pride is a *good* thing. Maybe it's always been that way, I don't know. But today we have groups proclaiming they're proud to be white. Other groups tell us they're proud to be black. We have pride marches, pride month and pride history events. People are told to be proud of who they are, as if it's some kind of achievement just being alive!

A subtle example we see that permeates all of society is parents and grandparents being proud of the children. I admit: sometimes a parent will tell their child they're “proud” of them as an expression of love and support. We should say something else, really.

But when they're talking to other parents about them, it so often becomes tied up with outright boasting. When a parent or grandparent tells you in detail about a child's exam results, they claim it's just for your information. They're just sharing the good news with you. They're happy for their son or daughter, and they're sure you will be too. Are they *sure* it's just about spreading good news? They're not saying it because of how it reflects well on them and their family, no?

Just to be clear: if a non-believer tells me about some achievement by their child or even themselves, I am NOT going to be impressed. How happy do you think I can be their kid got into a top university if they're enemies of Jesus Christ? If they're grandchild is “doing really well for themselves”, as they call it, all I'm seeing in the future is an easier path to an eternal hell.

Christians aren't as likely to engage in this sort of boasting, perhaps. But pride lives in all of us, and its roots are very deep. And it can show itself in the believer in the most subtle of ways. Imagine someone praying in church and yet throughout this spiritual exercise feeling pride at their ability to put together such a beautiful prayer. Think of how a believer might quote scriptures, even telling you the exact chapter and verse, and secretly feel proud at their ability.

If unbelievers and believers, parents and grandparents, rich and poor, would truly understand their ability to do anything or possess anything comes from God, pride must surely vanish.

13. Foolishness

The last one on Jesus's list is about stupidity. Having no sense. It's most certainly not about any deficiency in intelligence. As I said to you last time, a person's very intelligence is given to them by God. And God dispenses it according to his purpose.

The stupidity Jesus speaks of isn't about people who can't spell or aren't good with numbers. This is something due to sin. If wisdom is sensibly taking what you know and applying it to your current situation, stupidity could be thought of as having the same knowledge but deliberately *not* applying it.

I watched a video on the internet a few months ago where a lad in his twenties was messing around on a skateboard. Not very dangerous, you might think. Except this lad was on the roof of a skyscraper! He was recording his antics as he did stunts right on the edge. It turned my stomach, and I couldn't continue to watch. *Such stupidity*, I thought. Putting your life on the line for some cheap internet fame.

What of the Christian? I refer you back to what I said at the beginning today. If the followers of Jesus Christ are unable to apply scriptural knowledge to their situation, they're to expect his rebuke. The disciples were at fault because they'd been learning at the feet of Jesus for a couple of years yet failed to really listen to him.

In our Bibles, we have more of God's truth than even the disciples did. And we're at fault if, reading the truth, we ignore it or fail to apply it wisely. We become foolish if, like the Pharisees, we get worked up about secondary issues and push the primary ones to one side.

And that's Jesus's list finished. He says these things for a reason. In focusing on specific sins, he penetrates the hearts of all unbelievers and shows how they are full of these things. It's through evidence of sin a man is brought by the Spirit to Jesus Christ.

In some ways, the Christian is no different. We entered this world much like everyone else. We were sinners from our mothers' wombs. Yet in the great mercy of God, we were made to be objects of his saving grace through the death of Jesus Christ.

Yet no matter how dormant our sin is now, it's still there—including all those things on Jesus's list. And from time to time, these things enter our thoughts, and sins are formed in our mind. And of these, some become fully formed into outright sins.

Now if all your sins make it only to the second stage, as thoughts, Jesus says you're still guilty of them. And it's for this reason I'd stick my neck out and say *each one of us has committed every sin on that list*. God can see our secret thoughts as clearly as if they were played on a widescreen television! Your bad thoughts about other people. Your desire for more things. Your pride in achievements. All open to the eye of him who sees all things.

Why would Jesus and his messengers think there's any benefit in reminding believers of the existence of sin in them? We're to ask God to help us search our hearts to uncover the sins that lurk within us. Is it to make us feel guilty? **Absolutely not.** We've been pronounced NOT GUILTY by the judge of all the world!

Not only does rooting out sin in us help us to stop displeasing our heavenly father, but it also reminds us just how much we have been forgiven for. Jesus said of the woman who washed his feet with her own tears her gratefulness was more because she'd been forgiven of more.

Job asks the question of how anything clean can come from something that is unclean. Friends, it's through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross by which the "clean you" came from the "unclean you". Jesus took on himself **your sin**. He owned all those seeds of sin within you. He took upon himself all those evil thoughts that have ever formed in your mind. And even when those thoughts broke out into brazen sin, he requested he be treated as if HE committed them.

- He was treated as if HE had robbed banks
- He was treated as if HE had been sexually immoral
- And he was treated as if HE had murdered innocent people.

All this and much more. *Wash your heart*, God tells the sinner. AND BY THE ILLUMINATION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, THAT SINNER REALISES THAT TO WASH HIS OWN HEART THROUGH HIS OWN EFFORTS IS IMPOSSIBLE. HE MUST RUN TO THE BASE OF THE FOUNTAIN OF THE BLOOD OF CHRIST.

What love! What love there is in God! Let me conclude by reading a few verses from Ephesians 3:14-21.

"For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named: that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height, and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God. Now unto him that is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end."

Amen.