The Pharisees have accused Jesus' disciples of breaking the tradition of the elders. Last time we saw Jesus deal with the heart of the issue first, namely the issue of religious authority; Jesus' point was that only the Bible possesses religious authority for regulating the belief and practice of God's people; the tradition of the elders is not heaven-sent and is out of place when made superior to the Bible. For this reason, the charge of the Pharisees against Jesus is invalid.

In today's text, Jesus will return to the issue of purity. Remember that we aren't talking about physical hygiene here, nor even simply physical dirtiness and cleanliness. The issue here is ritual purity, that is, purity in terms of one's position and standing religiously, before God. Jesus has already shown that the Pharisee's hand washing is merely human tradition, and so is invalid as a religious authority. Now Jesus is going to go further and extend the principle even as far as the OT dietary laws! This is surprising because it constitutes nothing less than an actual change of OT law, an actual change of Scripture itself!

"Jesus takes the initiative in raising publicly a much more fundamental issue of purity which goes far beyond the limited question of the validity of the scribal rules for hand washing. No specific regulation is now in view, but rather the basic principle of defilement by means of external contacts which underlies all of the purity laws of the OT and scribal tradition." Let's begin by walking through the text.

TEXT

As a conclusion to his debate with the Pharisees, in v14 and 15 Jesus calls the crowds to himself and definitively states that defilement has nothing whatsoever to
do with eating. Notice Jesus has broadened the issue from merely hand washing now to include all eating whatsoever. It is even possible Jesus has in mind more than eating, as his seemingly all-encompassing description of everything from the outside might indicate. This perhaps then would extend even to touching things, such as dead bodies, unclean animals, or bodily discharges. But even if not, Jesus has just asserted a position which cannot possibly leave the OT dietary law intact.

On the contrary, defilement is a matter of what comes out of the man; we'll see in a moment Jesus is referring to whatever proceeds from the evil thoughts and plans of man's heart. This contrast effectively nullifies the defiling power of unclean foods and highlights rather the defiling power of the evil human heart. To put it another way, once again, Jesus moves the issue from ritual to morality.

In v17 through 19 Jesus has moved into a house with his disciples and they question him about his saying; Jesus is surprised they still don't understand and so he gives further private instruction, according to the principle we saw earlier in the Gospel that parables are given to outsiders and clear explanation given to insiders. Jesus restates that things from the outside, going into a man, cannot defile him, and Jesus' reason is that everything which goes into a man ends up being eliminated as waste (Jesus' language here is actually quite direct, literally saying that foods end up in the toilet). Food only reaches man's stomach and then is expelled from the body, and so cannot defile the man. In order to defile man, according to Jesus, food would have to reach man's heart. Now "heart" is often used in Scripture to refer to various aspects of the inner, spiritual part of man, whether intellect, emotions, will, or the center of one's personality. It is clear Jesus intends such a spiritual use here; the point then is that food comes nowhere near man's soul and so cannot really defile him. In order for something to defile man, then, that thing would have to have contact with his heart.

Now at the end of v19 we have a textual issue to address. There is some disagreement between our translations as to whether Jesus is saying that food
passes through the stomach, into the toilet, and thus the body is purged of the food, or whether Mark is recording Jesus' statement that food passes through the stomach, into the toilet, and then Mark makes an editorial comment, in parentheses, that Jesus has just officially cleansed all foods, so that in contrast with the OT dietary law, all foods may now be eaten. Consider the two following quotes on this issue:

"The syntax clearly marks out katharidzon panta ta bromata ('he declared all foods clean') as a parenthetical editorial comment, since there is no masculine singular subject within the reported speech to which it can relate (hence the emendations found in some MSS, representing attempts to 'correct' the syntax by those who failed to recognize the nature of the clause...). The subject therefore is Jesus (the subject of legei, v18), whom Mark thus interprets as 'cleansing all food' in the sense of declaring that it is no longer to be regarded as ritually 'unclean'. This is, as we noted above, a natural, indeed an inevitable, deduction both from the principle stated by Jesus in v15 and from its further elaboration in vv18b-19b where the progress of the food is shown to have no effect on the kardia."

Referring to the beginning of v20, France says "A new introductory formula, elegen de hoti, ("And he was saying") further confirms the parenthetical nature of v19c, after which the discourse needs to be reintroduced."

So, from the above, based on both grammar and the repetitive introductory formula, as well as the necessary implications from Jesus' foregoing statement that nothing man eats can make him unclean (especially as we compare this declaration with the fact that the OT law forbade many foods as unclean), I think it is best to take the end of v19 as a parenthetical, editorial comment by Mark, in which Mark clarifies that Jesus has just pronounced all foods to be ritually clean and religiously acceptable for consumption. In other words, Jesus has just brought an end to the OT dietary law! And this is the way the sentence is translated by such versions as the NAS, ESV, RSV, NRS, NIV, NET and NAB. Versions which take the other
option would include the KJV, NKJV and the Geneva Bible. It is also worth mentioning, as is pointed out in the quote above, that we do have textual variants at this point, likely from scribes who did not recognize the end of the sentence as parenthetical, and who therefore attempted to smooth out the grammar by changing certain words.

So, after all that, what we have here is one of the most definitive statements in the NT about Jesus bringing certain aspects of the OT law to an end. We are looking at a momentous turning point in redemptive history. For at least 1,500 years before the time of Christ God's people functioned according to certain rituals which were religiously binding; ignoring these rituals could result in banishment or even death in some cases. But at the coming of Christ we reach a new moment with significant changes, and this is one of the changes.

Jesus has made clear what does not defile men, namely food or any other material thing from the outside which might enter his body. Now in v21-23 Jesus proceeds to tell us what does defile the man.

What defiles a man is his own evil heart and the evil things which proceed from it, that is, those things which come out of the man. Jesus uses the term "evil thoughts" or "bad thoughts" to speak generally of the evil ideas and plans which occur in the heart and eventually issue in evil attitudes and acts.

"They are described first by the broad term 'bad thoughts', which directly governs the verb 'proceed', after which a long list of nouns follow in apposition, spelling out what form the evil thoughts might take...'Bad thoughts'...therefore serves as an umbrella term for all the more specific vices which follow, some of which are expressed as actions rather than thoughts or words, but all of which originate in the heart, the seat of thought and will."

So the evil thoughts are the mother, residing in the heart, giving birth to various evil actions and attitudes. The vices listed by Jesus are self-explanatory; Jesus may
have some general purpose of referring to some of the ten commandments, though that's not certain. Either way this is a general catalogue of the kinds of vices common in men; they all come from the heart, out of the man, and are the things which really defile men, in contrast to failing to observe food rituals.

**THEOLOGY**

1. The central theological issue here is that of purity and defilement. And the first thing we have to do is clarify what we mean by these terms. It is plain that we are talking about more than mere physical hygiene or cleanliness, since through this text and the Bible these issues impact a person's relationship to God, and it is obvious that one can be both physically dirty and ritually clean, and vice versa, at the same time. In this sense, to be dirty is to be out of favor with God, having offended him by something we've done. To be pure or clean is to somehow be in right standing with God, and for our relationship with him to be in good shape, free from offense or transgression. The whole subject assumes God has set boundaries for our conduct which, if we transgress, we become dirty, and if we maintain, we remain clean/pure. If we transgress and become dirty we may be cleansed through performance of ritual or sacrifice, which returns us to right standing with God. So, purity and defilement end up basically being ideas concerned with our position before God and the maintenance of that position. At issue in the text is, not exactly what makes you clean, but what makes you dirty. And Jesus' contribution to the subject is just that hand washing, foods, and everything merely outward and physical do not actually make a person defiled, that is, they do not affect a person's relationship to God, however they are handled. All such things are irrelevant to a person's standing and position with God. We may eat or not eat, wash or not wash, touch or not touch, and our standing with God, for good or ill, isn't affected one bit. What then, according to Jesus, does cause us to be defiled, if not the preceding elements? Immorality, in a word. Conduct which breaks the moral law of God, conduct which does not live up to the standard of loving God and loving men, biblically defined. Eating pork does not affect your
standing with God but theft, murder, lying, and debauchery do. In fact these things defile you. They make you filthy dirty before God, not in terms of hygiene or the body but in terms of your soul, the part which God is most concerned with. These things put men out of favor and ruin their relationship with God. But foods, discharges, animals and even dead bodies do nothing whatever to affect a man's standing and relationship with God.

2. Since the time of Moses God's people were required to abide by a dietary law, i.e. no pork, no shellfish, etc. In the coming of Christ that requirement comes to an end; we are no longer required to abide by such a law. This means no person is ever justified in prohibiting foods for themselves or others on religious grounds. Of course someone might avoid foods for reasons of health or hygiene; this is a good idea and we all do it to some extent. But such avoidance can never lawfully rise to the level of religious command, or else the teaching of Jesus is violated. And we must remember there is, to my knowledge, no evidence in Scripture that the dietary laws were given for the purpose of hygiene and health. It is possible this was one of God's purposes, but I know of no text of Scripture which teaches this. As we mentioned before, the purpose of dietary laws was to separate Jews from the nations and to maintain their right position before God, not in an ultimate sense, but in an outward sense. This was ritual and ceremony, not hygiene and health. And it is completely over; Christians have no dietary law to observe.

3. As we consider the theology of this text it is worthwhile to ask what rationale Jesus gives for rejecting God's own word concerning dietary law. Now the natural assumption for many, myself among them, would be that Jesus would just explain that in his coming a new situation has obtained in which the OT dietary laws no longer function in their normal and obvious role; perhaps Jesus might discuss how his coming fulfills what the dietary laws were really pointing forward to, say, the division between right standing with God and wrong standing with God, together with the cleansing which only Jesus can provide. Jesus does something similar to this when his disciples are accused of not fasting enough and Jesus answers with
the figure of new wine. But that is not Jesus' rationale here. In this case, Jesus' rationale is basically that it is obvious that what we eat has nothing to do with our spiritual condition before God, since food doesn't contact our heart; it only contacts our stomach and the toilet. In fact, Jesus seems to be arguing from the obvious nature of food, digestion, and man's spirituality. A man's stomach is obviously not his soul, so how could food, which only contacts stomach and not soul, have anything to do with his standing before God? But if this is really Jesus' argument, initially it would seem his reasoning calls into question the legitimacy of the dietary law in the first place! For if this reasoning from the nature of stomach and soul holds in Jesus' time, why wouldn't it hold equally in Moses' time when the dietary law was in force, and men had souls and stomachs? The utility of the rationale which I suggested above, based on the incoming of the New Covenant with Jesus, is that it appreciates the dignity of the dietary law as a legitimate institution of the past while still justifying its termination in the present. Jesus' rationale, at least initially, does not seem to do that. Now it is interesting that Jesus argues similarly in chapter 2 when his behavior on Sabbath is called into question. He points out David also broke the ritual law by eating the showbread, and yet he was faultless. What the example of David does is alert us to the fact that not even in the old covenant was the ritual law an absolute command, one which could never be broken for any reason without incurring guilt; we know because David broke it. Now Jesus does something similar in showing that the nature of food, stomach and soul disallow any idea of dietary law being absolute, not in Jesus' time, and I think we are forced to say not even in the time of the old covenant. What this does is reveal the provisional, temporary, limited status of ritual law even in the old covenant time. God never intended for ritual law to be an absolute and eternal reality; it was a provisional institution set up only for a time to accomplish certain purposes. Once its time was over God disassembled it and put it away, never to be established again. The problem is in the Pharisees' over emphasis of ritual law, to the detriment of moral law, by which they treated ritual as if it were absolute. I
suggest this may be why Jesus uses an argument, like his argument about Sabbath in chapter 2, which shows not only that dietary laws are no longer binding but that even when they were, they still were neither absolute nor anywhere near as important as God's moral commands.

4. Now after that point, we are in fine position to answer a certain charge which is popularly made against Christians in our day. Christians are accused of cherry-picking the Old Testament; in other words we are accused of enforcing the OT commands we like and ignoring the ones we don't. For example, I have seen supporters of homoism (short for homosexuality, obviously) accuse Christians of cherry-picking because we point out the OT texts which condemn homoism but we ignore the OT texts which condemn eating pork. After all we've been through already in this sermon, I think we can say such an accusation betrays substantial ignorance of Scripture and Christian Theology. Above all, the person who accusses Christians in this regard is guilty of not knowing what the founder of Christianity taught. It is Jesus who told us to go ahead and eat pork; and Jesus is not inconsequential to Christianity; he is its founder, ground and center! Christians are in the best possible position in their dietary allowance. On the other hand, Jesus repeatedly spoke against sexual immorality, under which heading every Jew in the first century (and Jesus was an orthodox, conservative, Bible-believing Jew) would have placed homoism. One of the greatest followers of Jesus, Paul, specifically condemned homoism as sin which led to judgment and which required repentance. But more to the point, based on what we've already seen in our text, Jesus holds the moral law to be superior and eternal, while holding the ritual law to be provisional and temporary. Anyone who attacks Christians in this way is really attacking Christ himself. And the charge can be broader than just the homoism issue. In general people will point to obscure OT laws, such as not wearing clothes with more than one fabric, and ask Christians why they are not obeying this rule, as if they have really scored a point against the Christian. One wishes these folks
might at least do their homework before wasting everyone's time with accusations that a 5 minute Bible lesson could clear up.

5. So much for the theology of purity and defilement. We have one more theological issue to deal with in this text, and that is the issue of Jesus' person and authority. Of course it is stunning almost beyond belief to have a man step forward and nullify part of God's own legal word, and we accept him and obey him! What kind of man has the right to take such action in terms of God's law and be believed?! Lewis said that in Jesus we only have 3 choices: Either we are dealing with a raving lunatic, or we are dealing with the devil of hell, or we are dealing with the Creator and Law-giver himself. What other kind of man, apart from these 3, would dare to nullify any part of God's law and teach others to same, and then repeatedly put himself in God's place?! What if today I stood before the church and announced that, though Jesus commanded us to baptized and eat the Lord's Supper, Truly, Truly, I say to you, we can do away with baptism and Lord's Supper from now on? My statement could only be described as either lunacy or wickedness, and we know very well no one would believe me. This is because no one has the authority to change, update, or modify God's legal word, save God himself. And so Mark is giving to Jesus the highest possible place; Jesus himself is giving to Jesus the highest possible place. Jesus is not a teacher to be studied, or a holy man to be followed, but a God to be worshiped. It is no surprise at all that the Jews killed Jesus; the surprise is that they didn't kill him sooner.

"Again in Mark, the teaching of Jesus is supremely authoritative, superseding the Torah itself. Similar to the earlier pronouncement on the Sabbath...in presuming to render a definitive judgment on a matter of divine revelation, Jesus assumes the role of God."

6. We're finished with the theology but I just want to close the sermon with one last point; I want to fill in something Jesus doesn't say, but which is said elsewhere. In discussing purity and defilement, Jesus tells us what does and does not make us
dirty, but in this text he doesn't tell us what can make us clean. Of course the list of
vices which Jesus mentions are acts which everyone has either committed or
desired to commit; and this both makes us unclean and shows us to be unclean. If
we were dealing with ritual law the solution would be to perform a ritual, perhaps
offer a sacrifice in order to be cleansed. But just as foods cannot make us unclean,
neither can mere ritual make us clean. Or at least, no ritual performed by mere
men. Because God did actually perform a ritual of his own when he led Jesus to the
cross. The sacrifice of Jesus is the central event of human history, and it is the One
Event toward which all other ritual sacrifices pointed. Whatever ritual men
performed before Jesus (or since) could only, at best, have the effect of maintaining
a man's relationship with God in an outward and temporary way. Not a one of
those bulls or goats actually cleansed the soul of the worshiper; but in the sacrifice
of Jesus such cleansing is available. If the death of Jesus is a ritual, then it is the one
ritual which can make you clean, and keep you clean. This is the solution to those
evil, internal thoughts which result in all the moral evil committed by men. Our
evil actions, flowing from evil hearts, have defiled us beyond hope of cleansing. The
ritual which is the death of God is the source from which alone cleansing from
defilement can come. Whoever is defiled should go to God and ask for the
cleansing which comes from that ritual.