

“What Defiles a Person?”

Mark 7:14-23

Pastor Espinosa

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. The Lord is concerned about and wants us to be concerned about what is on the *inside* of ourselves. What’s going on, on the inside? What is your internal condition? This is what counts. Everything else on the outside will really be determined by what is going on, on the inside. Fascinatingly, this dynamic of spiritual health – what is happening on the inside as that which is really important – is parallel to our physical health. If we have a disease or virus on the inside, then we experience all kinds of external symptoms on the outside and these go on to impact our entire interaction with the outside world. Again, what really counts is the inside. If the inside is good, then the outside is good. Even if the outside brings all kinds of challenges and problems, we experience the ability to cope when we are healthy on the inside and oftentimes experience God working through those outside problems for our good. It’s all about the inside.

All of this is consistent with today’s Old Testament reading from Deuteronomy 4. The Lord spoke to His people Israel and yes indeed, He was concerned about how they lived on the outside (keeping His commandments and actually doing them), *but* what was really important was their receiving and inculcating the Lord’s Word. So at verse 9, the Lord says, *“Only take care, and keep your soul diligently...”* That is to say, forget about the external obedience if the internal condition is not right. So again, what is really important is what is going on, on the inside!

The epistle from Ephesians 6:10-20 is a veritable *tour de force* about this principle. The six pieces of armor are really extensions of your internal faith, your internal spiritual security:

1. *The belt of truth refers to your speaking truth, but from where do the true words come? They come from the heart and the internal conviction that leads to the internal volition that you will speak the truth and not lie.*
2. *The breastplate of righteousness refers to your righteous deeds which protect your conscience against the accusations of the devil, but again, from where do these actions come? They come from the heart; they come from the Holy Spirit who generates all good and holy action from within...on the inside.*

3. *The shoes of the gospel of peace refer to your commitment to take the light of the gospel with you wherever you go. You resolve to travel with the gospel, be it at work or school, or wherever you are. But again, such a practice requires internal commitment and conscious discipline...these come from the inside.*
4. *The shield of faith speaks for itself right? Where is your faith if not within your heart? The seat of your decision-making...what you accept, what you reject...what you trust...the place where you make decisions as to what you will pursue or avoid. These things spring from the heart and determine whether or not you will lift up the shield of faith to extinguish the attacks of the devil.*
5. *The helmet of salvation is your internal constant hope that looks up to God so that you are continually – internally – reminded from where your help comes.*
6. *The sword of the Spirit is your reliance upon the word of God and yes, in a sense this Word is preserved outside of you objectively, but in this case, there is a living faith within us that yearns for this Word and prays that we would remain steadfast in it...as a result we claim it – on the inside – as our own and thus we are able to confess it! And speaking of prayer: we wrap all of these pieces of armor with prayer and prayer itself is the heart-beat of faith and where does faith reside? Answer: on the inside!*

And with such a clear overview of the paramount importance of the inside, we start to anticipate where this sermon is going. This morning pastor is going to tell us how to get our inside right. I'm going to tell you how to adjust your inside; how to align your internal condition. I'm going to give you the steps and principles for achieving internal, spiritual health. I'm going to give you some work to do to get your insides right...a spiritual form of drinking the green stuff for those of you familiar with digestive cleansing...right? No, I'm not going to do that, because Scripture says that your insides are already...the precise word is: "defiled."

Our Savior tells us exactly what is already going on in our inside and it isn't pretty. From our Gospel reading this morning Mark 7:21-23: ***"For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person."***

It's too late for me or anyone else to try to tell you how to clean up the inside. Our insides are a mess.

Several years ago we had this amazing golden retriever-collie mix, beautiful dog. Her name was Savannah, a fantastic dog. She was a great watch dog. No burglar would dare approach our home! She was tremendous with small children. They could tug on her fur all day and bounce on her and she wouldn't mind. A truly smart dog; a great family dog. But she did have her idiosyncrasies. Whenever we would give her a bath and see her brilliant coat just pop out again, she would invariably look for dirt: she just had to roll around in the dirt. She had this practice ingrained in her. It was stuck in her instincts and her mind. We couldn't get her change. That – as they say – was “just the way she was.”

People experience similar conditions. No, not literally rolling in dirt (I hope not), but we have internal maladies that just don't seem to go away. There are a myriad of internal emotional and mental patterns that raise real struggles from within. It is easy to classify these as non-spiritual, but all that is bad and causes suffering in our lives springs from sin. PTSD for example did not exist before the fall of man. Yes, we treat many of these things with the tools -- the God-given resources -- of therapy and medication, but they represent our internal struggles...how our inside condition can seem very constant with these struggles...these *internal* struggles.

But this is the very point of our Savior. He is the great Doctor; the great Healer, so He begins to bless you and me with a good, true, and accurate diagnosis: we are defiled from the inside. Defilement here in our Gospel from Mark 7 is not a physical problem, but a moral and spiritual condition. It means for something to be impure or unclean. St. Paul confessed his inner defilement at Romans 7:18:

“For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out.”

St. Paul describes the condition of defilement and his inability to fix himself. He understood in other words why Jeremiah wrote at Jeremiah 17:9:

“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?”

Our internal condition is overwhelming. It is a cesspool. And St. Paul therefore also knew why the Psalmist prayed as he did as recorded at Psalm 51:10:

“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.”

And here we get a clue as to what the only answer to this situation is. The parallel gospel to Mark 7 is Matthew 15. Matthew 15 adds an important element not found in Mark 7. Just before Jesus elaborates on the internal, heart condition of all people as to why they are defiled, he offers a couple of short parables. The first of the two is in Matthew, but not Mark and Jesus said:

“Every plant which my heavenly Father has not planted will be rooted up.” (Matthew 15:13)

The answer is that God must “plant” or create something other than the internal condition that is already there. That is, and to put it as simply as I can: God must plant *another* internal condition. So that the Christian winds up with two. Two insides.

I know that this sounds a little crazy, but it’s true; it is what Scripture teaches. It is what we must know. We want it to be tidier. We want to eliminate the old internal condition and replace it with the new condition. Some people misinterpret the meaning of 2nd Corinthians 5:17 which teaches that we are a **new creation and that the old is gone and that the new has come.**

This, however, does not mean that the old internal condition has been eradicated. It simply means that before God – in faith – your old internal condition is *treated by God or considered by God* as no longer binding; that is, as being dead. In other words, God does not hold the old, evil internal, messed up, cesspool condition against you. Do *you* still feel it? Yes. Do you still smell it? Yes. But does God in Christ hold it against you? Absolutely NOT!

But again that’s not all...

The Lord has in fact given you another internal condition. It is called faith. This is new, this is holy, and this is good. It is not a cesspool, it is God’s gift that ensures your salvation and your healing in the face of the other inside that attacks you...it is your protection; it is your greater identity.

It is that part of you – that internal part of you – that holds to Jesus Christ as the answer to all of that messed up stuff on the other inside part of you. To think that on account of Jesus, all of the internal crud: your evil thoughts, your fornication, your theft, your murder, your adultery, your coveting, your wickedness, your deceit, your licentiousness, your envy, your slander, your pride, your foolishness...all of these evil things from within that once condemned you and definitely defiled you, Jesus took from you and claimed as His own while He died – for you and me – on the cross.

So when Luther taught the pure Gospel, He taught it this way: *This is the most joyous of all doctrines and the one that contains the most comfort. It teaches that we have the indescribable and inestimable mercy and love of God. When the merciful Father saw that we were being oppressed through the Law, that we were being held under a curse, and that we could not be liberated from it by anything. He sent His Son into the world, heaped all the sins of all men upon Him, and said to Him: 'Be Peter the denier; Paul the persecutor, blasphemer, and assaulter; David the adulterer; the sinner who ate the apple in Paradise; the thief on the cross. In short, be the person of all men, the one who has committed the sins of all men. And see to it that you pay and make satisfaction for them.'*" (Luther's Works, American Edition, 26:280)

Our cesspool inside became the property of Jesus Christ. Now as far as the Father is concerned, you ARE clean. What He counts is the new inside, the other inside...the inside that is marked by faith. This faith trusts this simple truth: God no longer condemns me. He no longer sees my bad inside. He now counts my good inside; His gift to me of faith in Jesus as that which makes me His child; His beloved child and as far as He is concerned, His cleansed child; His washed child. This is who you are Christian. This is your real and greater identity.

God doesn't call you to clean the old inside. He has given you Jesus instead who made it His own. And now your new inside...your faith in Jesus lives in the full armor of God; treats God's law not as obligation, but invitation and delight; and knows that on account of Jesus, this new inside is the one that counts. This new inside means to the Lord you are no longer defiled, but you are His holy one. He has said so on account of Jesus...rejoice, live in this faith...and let your new inside lead you to live for Christ.