

Mark 7

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Thoughts from Deacon Adam

Whenever people accuse Him of breaking God's rules, Jesus explains that rules were meant to lead us to relationship, and not vice versa. Truly righteous actions can only come from a heart that is under the influence of God's love, because God is focused on the heart behind the behavior. Good fruit comes from a good root.



Therefore, whenever we are lacking that dynamic, heart-changing connection with God, then all our efforts to be good, and to try to act loving are just endless adventures in missing the point. A pharisaical, pseudo-spiritual tail-chasing. The fruitless will-power worship of all the empty rules, the moral lists of "should's" and "should not's" that we keep rehearsing in vain, hoping for holiness. This kind of focus only serves to keep us, and others, confused about spirituality, hiding the face of our Father and distracting us from what He is really saying and doing.

And yet, we often prefer to pay attention to the idea of what we should be saying and doing, a kind of self-centered theology. As if human effort could somehow overcome vice and produce virtue. This kind of work may feel productive and powerful, as if struggling to improve ourselves might be God's will for us, as if working harder might be the responsible thing to do. However, it is right in the terrible depths of our weakness that *His* strength can finally begin to come forth in us.

Instead of reaching for yet another strategy to fix and change ourselves, it may benefit us to learn to live right there, in the midst of all our weaknesses, long enough to notice God's forgiveness, peace, and power begin to rise in us. This may be the hardest and most humbling kind of repentance. Repentance from self-reliance to utter childlike leaning-back into the strength of God in us, one moment at a time.

The interior change of repentance comes only from encountering God's personal goodness, deeper and deeper still. Whatever we do flows naturally from what we are. We can only give what we have. We can only give what we *are*. And we are always giving what we have. We can't help it. What we are, is always influencing what we do, both good and evil.

Aesop's Fables tells the story of a scorpion who asks a frog for a ride across the river. The frog asks the scorpion to promise not to sting him and the scorpion agrees, pointing out that such aggression would be illogical since stinging the frog halfway across the river would simply cause them both to drown. Nevertheless, that is exactly what happens and while they are both sinking, the frog gasps, "Why?" And the drowning scorpion simply responds, "It's my nature."

While this is an admittedly dark tale, it dramatically illustrates how both the light and the darkness within us are always overflowing out of us to the world around us, all day, every day. By our words, by our actions, and even by our very presence. Jesus tells us that the kind of person that we are, is

continually made known by the desires coming out of us. Desires determine decisions. We do different when we want different.

It may be embarrassing to admit, but we are all led by the desires of our hearts. We may spend our lives accumulating knowledge, and we may place so much confidence in our minds, but the mind always serves the heart. What we want influences how we think. All our reason, in which we trust, continually conforms to our desires, and bows down before the throne of the heart.

This is why God says that the heart must be changed. And the heart can only be changed by overwhelming amounts of Unconditional Love, crashing in on us, healing our broken “want-er.” Until then, we continue to want that which is not good for us. So, Love goes to war. God fights for us. For our attention. For our hearts.