

# Morbid Anatomy: The Root of Sin

Ignorance and Insight: Part 8  
Mark 7:14-23 (Mt.15:10-20) 3/2/2018

You can't fight the sin problem in your life effectively unless you understand the root cause of that sin. If you want to get to the bottom of the problem so you can have lasting change, here are some questions to ask yourself:

- What wrong decisions led to the sin, and what inclinations of your heart led you to decide that way?
- What were your motives? What feelings and emotions led to you being vulnerable to the temptation you fell to?
- What thought patterns resulted in those emotions?
- What perspectives did you have that led to sinful reactions?
- What sinful attitudes or desires caused you to look at things from those perspectives?
- And what caused those attitudes? What was the origin of the desires (all desires come either from God or from the world—1 John 2:16)?
- What is your heart in love with that it should hate?
- What is your heart apathetic about that it should love?
- What were you hoping in?
- What were you trusting?
- What were you seeking?
- What wrong beliefs are underneath all this?

You're short with your spouse, don't just say, "I need to watch my tongue." Ask yourself, *Where did my selfish attitude come from? What pattern of thoughts nurtured that attitude? And what started those thoughts? Why did I want to think them?* Keep going deeper until you find all the internal culprits, and work at severing those roots. Otherwise you'll pick the apple or pull the weed of a sinful behavior and 5 more will grow right up after it.

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**Mark 7:14** Again Jesus called the crowd to him and said, “Listen to me, everyone, and understand this. **15** Nothing outside a man can make him ‘unclean’ by going into him. Rather, it is what comes out of a man that makes him ‘unclean.’” **17** After he had left the crowd and entered the house, his disciples asked him about this parable. **18** “Are you so dull?” he asked. “Don’t you see that nothing that enters a man from the outside can make him ‘unclean’? **19** For it doesn’t go into his heart but into his stomach, and then out of his body.” (In saying this, Jesus declared all foods “clean.”) **20** He went on: “What comes out of a man is what makes him ‘unclean.’ **21** For from within, out of men’s hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, **22** greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. **23** All these evils come from inside and make a man ‘unclean.’ ”

## Introduction: Uncleanness

If I asked you to think of a time in your life when you felt dirty on the inside—morally soiled... , you probably wouldn’t have to think too hard. Even people who claim they don’t believe in moral absolutes, or they don’t think there is such a thing as sin—even those people have times when they feel it. They might use different words—instead of dirty or unclean they feel inadequate, unacceptable, unfit—a sense that there is something wrong with me, I don’t measure up. Whatever words you use to describe it, the problem of uncleanness was not unique to the Pharisees of Jesus’ time. It’s a problem for every human being on the planet.

If you’re going to meet with someone who is important to you—a job interview, a first date—you clean up, brush your teeth, get a haircut. What are you doing? Getting rid of uncleanness. You don’t want to look bad or smell bad or be repulsive in any way.

And that’s especially true if the person you’re meeting with is God. All of religion is about how a person gets cleaned up before meeting with God.

## Jesus' Topic: The Source of Uncleanness

Now, in the first 23 verses of Mark 7 Jesus teaches all about uncleanness. And you would expect that his main point would be the solution to uncleanness—how to become clean before God. But that's not his point. He doesn't say anything in this passage directly about the *solution* to moral uncleanness. The whole thing is about the *source* of uncleanness.

Why? Because the solution won't work if you don't first understand the source. To deal with the problem of sin it has to be severed at the root. Most people try to deal with their sin at the level of actions. "From now on, I'm going to stop doing this." Or maybe they will even say, "I'm going to stay away from the influences that push me into that sin." And for most people, that's about as far as it goes. Fighting your sin problem by stopping your bad behaviors is like trying to kill an apple tree by picking the apples. No matter how many you pick, new apples keep coming. If you want to stop the apples from coming, you've got to cut the thing down at the root.

Or to put it another way, you can't fight a war if you don't know who the enemy is. It won't do any good for you to master warfare if you are fighting the wrong people in the wrong country. You've got to know your enemy.

And if you're wondering how important this is, just look at how long Jesus' response to this question about uncleanness is. It's one of Jesus' longest speeches in the whole book. Usually Mark spends the great majority of his time describing Jesus' actions and only gives just little snippets of Jesus' words. That's Mark's style, but here he makes a rare exception and records a long answer from Jesus. And that long answer comes in three phases addressed to three different groups. Phase one is to the Pharisees and Scribes—we studied that last time. Phase two, he speaks to the crowd. Phase three is in the house with his disciples. And all of it gets recorded in the Bible. So Jesus' response here has "important" written all over it.

And here's something interesting—this whole thing is a response to the Pharisees' question about handwashing. And in this whole, long answer, Jesus never says one word about handwashing—never even mentions it.

Jesus often did that—someone asks something and he skips by the pretext and goes right to the heart of the real issue. They confront Jesus about a *ritual*; he gives them an answer about *ritualism*. They ask him about a point of religion and he responds by demolishing their entire religious system.

And that's another reason why this is such an important topic because if you get it wrong... , it will corrupt your whole approach to worshipping God and you'll end up far from God just like the Pharisees.

## The Disease of Legalism

If you don't understand the source of uncleanness—what it is that makes you unclean in God's sight, you will very quickly become infected with the disease of legalism. If you grow a garden, no matter how perfect that garden is, if you let it go, in a very short time it will be a mass of weeds. And in a similar way, no matter how pure and biblical and God-honoring your spiritual life is, if you let it go, it will drift in the direction of legalism. And when that happens, the harder you try to become clean before God, the dirtier you get, and the cleaner you feel. Legalism is an absolute spiritual catastrophe, and every one of us is prone to it, and it's impossible to avoid unless you understand the source of uncleanness.

## Phase 1 Scribes and Pharisees

So, phase one of Jesus' response. They ask why the disciples don't do the handwashing ritual, and Jesus says, "Because that's just human tradition. It's not in the Bible and so it's worthless for curing uncleanness. Just look at you guys—you do the handwashing and you're as unclean as they come. You are hypocrites who are far from God and you don't even let people honor their parents and your worship is in vain."

So in phase 1 of Jesus' response we learn that there is no human solution to uncleanness. None. Not psychology, not religious tradition, not clever problem solving—all those things do is make the problem of uncleanness even worse. It's all dirty soap. The more you scrub, the dirtier you get.

And by the way, if human wisdom did work for fixing the problems of the soul, then Jesus wouldn't have bothered teaching about it. That's why there's nothing in the Bible about how to solve air pollution or noise pollution or brain surgery or rocket science. We can figure that stuff out on our own. Jesus only taught us things that are beyond the reach of human wisdom, and how to fix the human soul is in that category.

Never rely on human wisdom to make you clean. And don't ever let anyone put rules on your shoulders that don't come from the Bible. I don't care if it's a religious tradition the church has had for 1000 years... , or something your pastor has repeated so many times that everyone thinks it's in the Bible, or cultural expectations... —if someone tries to tell you it's binding on you, just say, "Show it to me in the Bible. If it's not there, it's not required for godliness.

## Phase 2 The Crowd

### What About Biblical Uncleanness Laws?

So that's phase one. Now Jesus very deliberately turns from the dumbfounded Scribes and Pharisees and speaks to the crowd. Phase 2 of his response is for everyone.

And once again, we're going to see Jesus ratchet up the stakes. He just shot down all the sacred traditions of the elders, but he's not done. He's going to take it a step further—a huge step.

#### 14 Again Jesus called the crowd to him

Usually the crowds gather themselves around Jesus and Jesus tries to get away from them. But this time he goes out of his way to gather a crowd.

#### 14 Jesus called the crowd to him and said, "Listen to me, everyone, and understand this.

That's the kind of wording OT prophets would use when they were about to deliver an oracle from the mouth of God. Jesus is signaling a big time, official, prophetic pronouncement. And when he says **listen and understand**, that implies that what he's going to say will require careful thought and reflection. It's not going to be easy to understand. Okay, so are we ready for the sermon?

#### 15 Nothing outside a man can make him 'unclean' by going into him. Rather, it is what comes out of a man that makes him 'unclean.'"

That's all. He doesn't say anything else. The people are standing there with their note pads—"That's it? Two sentences?" What is that?" Jesus spent almost as much time introducing his sermon than he did preaching it. He gathers everyone around, "Gather around everybody. Come on over here. Listen very carefully and make sure you get this. I'm about to make an official, prophetic, revelatory pronouncement from the mouth of God like Moses on Mount Sinai. Are you ready? *It's not what goes in; it's what comes out.* Then he walks away. End of phase 2. Now phase 3.

## Phase 3 The Disciples

#### 17 After he had left the crowd and entered the house, his disciples asked him about this parable.

They call it a **parable**, which means a hard saying. It was a hard saying because it seemed to contradict the entire OT. The Scriptures were loaded with laws about foods that make you unclean.<sup>1</sup> So how can Jesus say nothing you eat can make you unclean?

Why doesn't the crowd ask? Because they don't care. That's what parables do—they weed out the people who don't care enough to do some digging. But the disciples want to know, so they catch up to Jesus in the house and say, "You know when you said to the crowd 'Listen and understand'? "Well, we don't understand."

18 "Are you so dull?" he asked.<sup>2</sup> The word **dull** means *dumb*. Not a compliment. It's a rebuke. If they would have done what Jesus said to do—listen carefully and give it some rigorous thought, they should have been able to figure it out. So he rebukes them, but then goes ahead and explains it to them anyway.

## Two Kinds of Uncleaness

**18 ... "Don't you see that nothing that enters a man from the outside can make him 'unclean'? 19 For it doesn't go into his heart but into his stomach, and then out of his body.**

So Jesus is talking about the heart. This whole section is about the heart.  
Verse 6 – **their hearts are far from me.**

Verse 18 - **nothing that enters a man from the outside can make him 'unclean'? 19 For it doesn't go into his heart**

Verse 21 - **For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts...**

I don't know of any theme more prominent in Jesus' teaching than pointing people away from externals and back to the heart, and that's what he's doing here.

In the OT, there are two kinds of uncleaness—symbolic uncleaness that has to do with your body and real, moral uncleaness that has to do with your heart. If you blaspheme God or murder someone, or commit adultery, steal, lie, worship an idol—if you do those things, your heart is unclean—repulsive to God. But on the other hand, if you do things like eat some non-kosher food or touch a corpse, or a leper, or have a baby—those things would cause *symbolic* uncleaness. It doesn't affect your heart; it's only symbolic. Those things were illustrations of sin, not actual sin.

And every once in a while the OT prophets would remind the people of that. Isaiah 1, Psalm 51, Deuteronomy 10, Ezekiel 14, etc –the prophets would remind the people that all the sacrifices, festivals, new moons, sabbaths, circumcision, all the external forms of temple worship—you could do all that stuff until you're blue in the face, but if your heart is bad, it's all worse than worthless. Those things were symbols, pictures, illustrations; but they weren't the realities. Reality is what happens in the heart.

The only part of you that can have real, moral uncleaness is your heart. That's Jesus' point in v.19. Jesus says, "If it doesn't go into your heart, it can't make you unclean." So nothing that happens to your body can defile you if it doesn't arise out of a dirty heart.

That's good news, by the way, for people who have been molested. A lot of times rape victims feel like they have been defiled. But your body can't be morally defiled; only your heart, and no rapist can do anything to your heart. Only you can.

So Jesus is pointing them back to the heart, just like the prophets. But that's not all he's doing. He's not just saying the heart is more important than the symbols. It sounds like he's eliminating the symbols altogether. His statement is absolute—*nothing* you put in your mouth can possibly make you unclean.

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<sup>1</sup> For example, Leviticus 11, and Deuteronomy 14.

<sup>2</sup> their lack of understanding becomes a major issue in 8:14–21

When he said that—used that strong of language, was he putting an end to the whole kosher system? Yep. And in case we have any doubt, Mark comes right out and just tells us.

### **19 ... In saying this, Jesus declared all foods “clean.”**

All those foods that God declared unclean in the OT law, now Jesus makes them all clean. Literally it says that Jesus said this, “**cleansing all foods.**” Jesus cleansed pork—and lobster and reptiles and birds—even meat sacrificed to pagan idols.

### **Romans 14:14 ... no food is unclean in itself.**

Jesus cleansed it all. In Acts 10 God commanded Peter to eat a bunch of non-kosher food. And God had to practically get into an arm wrestling match with him to get him to obey. Nothing was harder for Jewish Christians to accept than the idea of kosher food laws being set aside, which is why there are whole chapters in the NT devoted to this issue.

So, Jesus started by throwing all their traditions on the junk heap where they belong. Then he pointed them away from religious forms and back to the heart. But then he goes all the way and cancels the entire system of kosher foods that have defined the Jewish people for thousands of years. Nothing you eat can make you unclean.

## **The Source of Evil**

### **Evil Influences Are Not the Source**

In fact, Jesus’ didn’t even limit the statement to just food. *Nothing* from the outside can make you unclean. And this gets us back to our initial question—what is the source of evil? When Jesus says it doesn’t come from anything outside of you, that’s not just a revolutionary idea for Jews; it’s revolutionary for all people. We all naturally think we are infected with our uncleanness or inadequacy from external influences. That’s why we think we can deal with our sin problem by just avoiding certain influences and making a decision to change.

Different people have different ideas about where evil comes from, but it’s always from outside of us. Religious people think defilement comes from religious taboos. For secular people it’s cultural taboos. For conservatives, it comes from TV and movies and video games and the Internet. The psychologists say it’s imposed on you by people who mistreat you. If someone does evil things they say, “He must have been abused as a child.” Or maybe it was toxic masculinity or trauma, or bullying. The social justice crowd will say, “Evil comes from rich oppressors and the greatest source of evil of all—corporations.”

### **Source: The Human Heart**

Jesus says, “None of those are the source.” So what is it? Where does evil come from?

**21 For from within, out of men’s hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, 22 greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly.<sup>3</sup> 23 All these evils come from inside and make a man ‘unclean.’**

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<sup>3</sup> Liberal scholars have assumed this list couldn’t have come from Jesus because it sounds so Pauline to them. So they assume it was added later and put in Jesus’ mouth by the church. But all these sins are found in the OT. Ten occur in the LXX, while another is used in two other translations of Hosea. More significant is the recovery of a pre-Christian Jewish parallel in 1QS iv. 9-11.

What is the source of evil? The human heart. All the things that make us filthy in God's sight originate inside our own hearts. Good luck avoiding bad influences, because the worst influence in your life is your own heart. And it's incurable.

### **Jeremiah 17:9 The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?**

That's Jesus' answer to the question of the source of uncleanness, and it really shouldn't be any big surprise. It's self-evident. I don't know of any passage in the Bible that is easier to prove than vv.21-23. How can you deny it? Even the people who try to deny it—all they do is transfer the origin from their heart to some other person's heart. If you say it comes from TV and movies, how do the evil influences get into all that evil programming? Human beings. If it comes from evil corporations, what are corporations? People! No document ever committed an evil act. No legal entity ever committed an evil act independently of people. Only human beings do evil acts. If you became evil by the influence of your parents—what are they? Human beings.

No matter how hard you try to push it off to another source, the origin of evil always ends up being the human heart. Who can deny that adultery or murder or stealing or any of these others come from the human heart? Where else could they possibly come from? Even if someone pushed you into it, why would you be pushable? People say, "I can't help it—she just pushes my buttons." The only way that can happen is if your heart has buttons. No one ever pushed Jesus' buttons. They treated him just as bad as people treat you, but no buttons got pressed. He faced all the same evil influences we face, but none of it took because there was no corresponding evil in his heart to make him receptive to it.

At the beginning I asked you to think of a time in your life when you felt especially dirty. Most likely you thought of some evil action you performed. But here we find out that action wasn't what made you unclean. You were unclean long before you did it, which is why you did it. We tend to think we are what we do, but the truth is, we do what we are.

So Jesus brings a crushing indictment on the entire human race here. Look at how ugly this list is. Our hearts are like a wasps' nest. You kick it and a whole swarm of stinging, biting horrors rise up out of it.

## **Application**

And that's where the passage ends.

### **23 All these evils come from inside and make a man 'unclean.'**

Then Mark moves on to the next event—Jesus leaves the country. "Your hearts are hopeless cesspools and evil factories. The end." That's kind of abrupt. Where's the conclusion? Jesus is going to make us stop and go back through the passage and find the conclusion in what he's already said. And as I did that—combed back through the passage to see the points of application, there were 4 that stood out.

## **Exposes the Wrong Solution**

### **Legalism Useless**

First, in our war against sin, this passage exposes the wrong solution: namely, legalism. Now that we know the real source of evil, can you see how utterly useless legalism is? Look again at the horror show in vv.21-23. When you see all that wickedness in our hearts, which one of the Pharisees' rituals is going to do anything about that mess? Handwashing? What religious ritual anywhere in any religion will do even the slightest thing about the sickness of the human heart?

For that matter, we could include the symbolic laws of God himself. Are you going to solve the problems of the human heart by avoiding shellfish?

In fact, we could even include God's moral law. Not even the moral law of God has the power to change the human heart. God says "Do not covet," and all that does is make me want to covet even more.

Romans 8:3 says the law was powerless to justify us because of how evil our nature is. You can't cure the uncleanness of the heart by law keeping any more than you can cure a dog of rabies by putting a muzzle on it.

## **Judging Others**

And when we understand that, we will abandon legalistic solutions, which will totally change the way we judge ourselves and the way we judge others. As long as I'm focused on external rules, I'll always be pointing the finger at people who break the rules that I don't break. But if I realize that the heart is the real issue, how can I pass judgment on you? I can't even see your heart. I can see if you smoke a cigarette or drink a beer or yell at your wife or do less work in the church than I do. But I can't see what you spend most of your day loving and craving and hoping in and trusting in. If you do a sinful action, I don't know if that's the delight of your soul, or if it's a momentary failure that you hate with all your inner being. I can't see if your repentance is phony or real.

Did you know that no one ever uses the word "hypocrite" in the Bible except Jesus? Jesus used it 17 times; no one else ever uses it. Why? Because a hypocrite is someone whose words and actions don't match what's in their heart. And no one knows what's in the heart except God.

Now, there are some Christians who think they are the exception to that. They imagine they know people's motives, or what other people are thinking. They think that's what the gift of discernment is. They think 1 Samuel 16:7 says "Man looks at outward appearance, but me and God see the heart."

But that's absurd. We don't have that power. Try it—right now. Take a good, hard look at me and tell me, am I coveting something? How much do I love my wife? Which of my actions tonight had prideful or selfish motives mixed in with good motives? You have no idea.

Focusing on the heart really spoils the party when you want to be critical of people—especially since, while we can't see others' hearts, we can see our own. And it's not a pretty sight. If we are even a little bit honest with ourselves about what goes on inside our own heart, how could we possibly be critical of others? If you see someone smoke a cigarette, or fail to use his turn signal, or whatever it is that typically makes you critical of people, but then you look into your own heart and see that whole, disgusting hornets' nest in vv.21-23, are you really going to be critical of that other guy? It's the pot calling the kettle black, except you can't even see their blackness; only your own.

## **Exposes the Real Problem**

Can you imagine the difference it would make in our judgmentalism in the church if we understood that only the heart can be unclean, and only God can see the heart? If we really believed that, instead of justifying ourselves and condemning others, we would always have the perspective that we are the worst people we know. I would think of myself as the worst sinner I know because I've seen the filth in my own heart—I see it every day. But I've never seen your heart.

How would that change our marriages? Or our parenting? We tell our kids, "I can't believe you did that. I would never dream of doing that." Oh really? Why not? Are you not a sinner? What if circumstances were different? Can you be so sure you would never even dream of it?

When you say, "I would never dream of doing something like that," what if Jesus were standing right there, and said, "Would you like me to remind you of some of the things you have dreamed of doing? Let's just start with your teen years, and I'll just remind you of some of the thoughts you have entertained over the years." Is your heart really so much better than their heart?

With as much exposure as we have to our own evil, why is this even an issue? Why does Jesus even have to tell us this? It should be the most obvious fact in our entire existence? So why do we need to be told? Here's why:

## Arrogance

Did you notice the last two items in the list of evils in vv.21-23? **Arrogance**—and **folly**. That means we're fools and we're proud of ourselves. That's quite the combination. Our folly is the reason why human wisdom can't ever be the solution to our uncleanness problem. How can my own heart figure out a way to clean itself what it produces is folly? Obviously, nothing I could ever do could solve the problem because I'm the source of the problem. If you want to purify some water that you drew out of a filthy well, you're not going to be able to do it with anything that comes out of that well. If my heart is the problem, then nothing my heart comes up with will solve the problem. Neither will any solution from any other sinful, human heart.

All of that should be obvious, but it's not because another evil our hearts constantly produce is pride and arrogance! You would think a heart that is this twisted and perverse and diseased would want to crawl under a rock in shame. But instead it's puffed up with pride and arrogance and looks down on others. That's why we need Jesus to point out the obvious to us, that the source of our evil is our own hearts.

Probably the biggest reason we're so attracted to legalism is so we can justify ourselves. If I want to feel good about myself, it's a whole lot easier to go down a checklist and say, "I didn't touch that, and I didn't eat that, and I didn't go to that movie or do this action or say these words, I went to church and Bible study and prayed and read my Bible, etc."—that's a whole lot easier than looking at the heart asking things like, "How much did I love God? How much did I hate evil? What were my attitudes? If I stick with heart issues, justifying myself gets a lot harder.

## Motivation to Seek Cleansing

But the purpose is not to condemn us or discourage us. It's to motivate us to seek cleansing. We won't get serious about dealing with the problem until we know how serious the problem is. When people make excuses for not seeking hard after Christ, it's because they have no idea how dirty they are.

When I was a kid, I spent a summer on my uncle's dairy farm. The barn had a stall for each cow where they would all stand while being milked by a machine, and behind all the cows there was a trough which caught the ... mess. I won't ruin your night by describing it other than to say what was in that trough was about the consistency of a milkshake. Well, one sad day, guess who slipped and fell into that trough. Imagine me going into the house and my aunt says, "Take a shower." And I say, "I don't know--people who take showers think they are cleaner than everybody else. In fact, I've known people who have taken a shower and then got dirty again." "Don't worry about those people. You need a shower." "But there are so many different brands of soap out there. How do I know for sure which is the best one? It's hopeless." "Take a shower." "There are plenty of people out there a lot dirtier than me." If I argued that way, it would be clear that I really didn't think I had a problem. But the reality was, I was desperate to be cleaned. All I wanted was for someone to point a hose at me and turn it on full blast and get all that stuff off of me. Jesus is doing us a huge favor in this passage because if you're covered in manure but you're not desperate for a shower, someone needs to come along and let you know what it is you're covered in.

## Morbid Anatomy

So this passage isn't as morbid as it sounds. If you want to cure a disease, you have to figure out the cause. You'll never have success fighting sin until you deal with the heart issues underneath the sinful behavior.

One of the classes doctors have to take in medical school is called morbid anatomy. Morbid anatomy is a field of study that examines diseased body parts. Now, if a med student enrolls in Morbid Anatomy 101, is that morbid? No, not if you want to cure diseases.

Our granddaughter, Abigail, had to be taken in an emergency C-section because she wasn't moving. What was the solution to that? Get her moving? No, they had to figure out why she wasn't moving. Turns out it was because she wasn't getting enough oxygen. But that still wasn't the root cause. Why wasn't

she getting enough oxygen? Trauma to her major organs. What caused that? That was caused by a problem with the mucus in her body being too thick. Why? That was caused by her body failing to retain enough salt. What did they do—get a salt shaker and salt her? No, that still wasn't the root problem. What caused the salt problem? It was a genetic disease (cystic fibrosis). That's the root cause, and now they know how to treat the problem. I'm so thankful for doctors who have studied morbid anatomy.

That's exactly what our sin problem is like. We say and do evil things, and we try to deal with it just by changing our actions. Taking the motionless baby and moving its arms or throwing salt on it. And we don't have success because we don't get to the root cause.

## Complexity

And in this list Jesus gives us in vv.21-23, that's not just a random list of sins. It's a course on morbid anatomy of the heart that gives tremendous insight into the nature of the problem. Notice how complex the heart is. Sometimes psychologists will criticize biblical counselors for being overly simplistic when we talk about problems being rooted in the heart. But here we see it's anything but simplistic. Just as your body has a lot of different organs and tissues and complicated systems that are all interdependent, the non-physical part of you is the same way. Look at the variety of things Jesus lists here.

**Evil thoughts**—that's a function of your mind.

**Sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery**—those are physical actions that come from an act of the will.

**Greed**—that involves your desires, your affections, and your values.

**Malice and arrogance**—those are attitudes

**Deceit**—will, speech, and values

**Lewdness**—that's someone who is unrestrained by social restraints or mores. So that has to do with attitudes and values.

**Envy**—desires, affections

**Slander**—words, attitudes

**Folly**—that's a product of your thinking, values, and perspectives.

When you sin, if you're really serious about getting the cancer out of there, ask yourself questions like these: What wrong decisions led to the sin, and what inclinations of your heart led you to decide that way? What were your motives? What feelings and emotions led to you being vulnerable to the temptation you fell to? What thought patterns resulted in those emotions? What perspectives did you have that led to sinful reactions? What sinful attitudes or desires caused you to look at things from those perspectives? And what caused those attitudes? What was the origin of the desires (all desires come either from God or from the world—1 John 2:16)? What is your heart in love with that it should hate? What is your heart apathetic about that it should love? What were you hoping in? What were you trusting? What were you seeking? What wrong beliefs are underneath all this?

You're short with your spouse, don't just say, "I need to watch my tongue." Ask yourself, *Where did my selfish attitude come from? What pattern of thoughts nurtured that attitude? And what started those thoughts? Why did I want to think them?* Keep going deeper until you find all the internal culprits, and work at severing those roots. Otherwise you'll pick the apple or pull the weed of a sinful behavior and 5 more will grow right up after it.

## Points you to the solution: Christ and his Word

One final point of application. When we look at this passage and see how severe our problem is, and we see that there's no human solution, what hope is there? Is there a power somewhere in the universe that can cleanse what is unclean? How about the guy in v.19 who cleansed all foods? If he has the power

to cleanse pork and shell fish and every other unclean food—foods that God himself made unclean to begin with, then he can cleanse anything, including our hearts.

## **Apply the Word to the Heart**

And how does that cleansing come? What method does he use to apply his miraculous, cleansing power? Go back to phase 1. How did the Pharisees get it wrong?. What did they do?

**8 You have let go of the commands of God**

**9 ... You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God**

**13 Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition**

That's very clear. The wrong way is human wisdom; the right way is God's Word. The power comes from Jesus Christ. The pipeline for that power is his Word. When you deal with sin in your life, keep digging until you have a handle on the complex of root causes—beliefs, attitudes, perspectives, values, and all the rest. Then find out what the Word of God says about that particular part of you and how to change it, and apply those principles through faith.

# Supplementary Notes

## Hard Saying

Now, you might read that and say, “How is that a parable? I thought a parable was a story. Not always. The word “parable” can mean “riddle,” or “hard saying.” Is this a hard saying? It was for them. What’s the definition of a hard saying? Any saying that’s hard. If Jesus says something and you don’t get it, then for you, that’s a parable.

A statement doesn’t have to be complicated to be hard; it just has to contradict something you believe. If I believe the earth is flat, and you tell me it’s round, that’s a hard saying for me. It’s not complicated, but it’s hard because it doesn’t fit my current beliefs.

So the disciples catch up to Jesus in the house and say, “You know when you said to the crowd ‘Listen and understand’? ‘Well, we don’t understand.’”

**18 “Are you so dull?” he asked.<sup>4</sup>**

## Symbolic but Important

In the message I said the kosher laws were symbolic, not moral. When I say that, I don’t mean to imply that they were unimportant or optional. Not at all. God demanded the death penalty for breaking some of the symbolic laws. They were very important. In the military, is standing at attention and saluting your superiors symbolic? Are stripes on uniforms symbolic? Yes. But are they unimportant or optional? No. If you refuse to salute when the General walks in, you’re going to be in a lot of trouble. The symbolism was important.

## Importance of Kosher to Jews

And the people understood that. The big heroes in the Jewish culture at Jesus’ time were the Jews who stood up to Antiochus Epiphanes. He tried to force the Jews to eat pork, and they died in their hundreds rather than do so. Fourth Maccabees (chapter 7) tells the story of a widow and her seven sons. When they refused to eat the pork, they tortured them to death in front of their mother. The first son had his tongue cut out, the ends of his limbs cut off; and he was then roasted alive in a pan; the second had his hair and the skin of his skull torn off, and on it went. And all they would have had to do to make it all stop was eat a piece of pork. Can you imagine being fried to death in a pan, and all you had to do to make it stop was eat a piece of bacon? That’s how big a deal this was to them.

It was a big deal, not only because of the uncleanness issue, but because the kosher rules were one of the biggest ways God made the Jews distinct from the rest of the world. Again, it was another symbol. God wanted his people to be holy—set apart from sin. And as an illustration of that, he made them different from all the nations in lots of physical, visible ways. They dressed different, spoke different, and ate different. So following the kosher rules was a big part of what gave Jews their identity. That’s one reason why Jewish Christians had such a hard time throughout the NT, because the gospel was requiring them to become one with Gentile believers, and that was just unthinkable. And we see in Acts 10 that a big part of what set them apart from Gentiles were the kosher laws. When God told Peter to go eat with a Gentile, he prepared him for that by giving him a vision of unclean food and telling him to eat it. So the kosher laws were not just a cultural preference. They were the essence of religion to the Jews.

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<sup>4</sup> their lack of understanding becomes a major issue in 8:14–21

There's no real parallel that I can think of for our culture. If you could imagine Jesus coming today and saying, "Go ahead and start using the F-bombs. That's fine now." Even if Jesus said you could do it, you probably still wouldn't, right? Or if he said "Adultery is fine now—go ahead if you want to." That would be hard for us to accept. You wouldn't be able to do those things because they would violate your conscience, even if Jesus legalized them. And that's what happened with Christian Jews. For a lot of people, eating unclean food really bothered their conscience. Now, that's not a direct analogy because those are moral issues, not ceremonial ones. But in their mindset, there was not difference between the two. In fact, if anything the ceremonial laws were even more important than the moral ones. And none more than the kosher laws. Another really, really big part of their identity was the Sabbath, and yet, as big a deal as the Sabbath was, Jesus bringing that to an end wasn't nearly as big a crisis as the kosher laws. There are a couple verses in the NT about Sabbath controversies, but there are whole chapters on the issue of what to do about non-kosher foods. Galatians 2, Romans 14, 1 Corinthians 8, Colossians 2, Acts 10 and 11, Acts 15). By the way, the fact that the kosher laws were one of the main things that distinguished Jews from Gentiles explains why Mark places this account right here in his gospel. He doesn't give any sequential marker, saying it happened before this event or after that event. He just throws it in here. But it makes sense because this is right before Jesus leaves Israel and goes into Gentile territory. Jesus is already tearing down the wall of hostility between Jews and Gentiles.

## Sort of Moral

One other thing about the distinction between moral laws and symbolic ones—in one sense the kosher laws were moral issues simply because it's always immoral to disobey God. But they are still different from what I'm calling the moral law, because moral laws are actions that are inherently opposed to the nature of God—like lying or stealing or unfaithfulness or idolatry. So God can require kosher laws or other symbolic things temporarily, and then at a later time do away with those laws, because they are only symbols and don't have any inherent conflict with his nature.

And in the case of the Pharisees, their devotion to the symbolic laws actually became immoral, because they lost sight of the spiritual realities that were being symbolized. It would be like if I said, "This ring is a symbol of my commitment to Tracy. So I'm going to be the greatest husband ever. I'm going to wear 20 rings!" Does that make me a better husband? No, it just shows that I don't understand symbols. A symbol doesn't become more symbolic or meaningful by doubling it up. If baptism symbolizes spiritual cleansing, and so you rent scuba gear and get baptized 40 meters under, you're not any cleaner before God than the guy who gets dunked in the horse trough. If anything, less because you don't understand the gospel.

If we want to compare the ring illustration with the Pharisees, it would be like this: Suppose my wife is starving, but I refused to sell all my gold rings to get her some food because selling my wedding rings would be a betrayal to my marriage. What if a mugger had a gun to her head and said, "Give me that ring or she dies." And I say, "Go ahead and shoot her. I'm not giving this up, because this is my *marriage*. I'm committed to my marriage." That's what the Pharisees were doing with the symbols God gave them for cleanness.

## They Could Have Known

And not just the Pharisees. As I said in the message, there is a gravitational pull the direction of externalism—focusing on religious forms instead of the heart, and it happened throughout Israel's history. For Jews in the OT, circumcision was a really big deal. But they forgot that circumcision was a physical act that was designed to be symbolic—illustrating spiritual cleansing. And so multiple times in the OT (Dt.10:16 ,30:6, Jer.4:4) God reminded the people, "You need to circumcise your hearts." Ezekiel 14 condemns the people for setting up idols in their hearts. The book of Isaiah begins with God telling the

people that he's had it with all their sacrifices and new moons and assemblies and all the rest because of the sin in their hearts. In Malachi 1 God tells the priests he wished they would just shut the doors of the Temple because of what was in their hearts while they were doing all the ceremonies. Psalm 51 is David's prayer of repentance after the sin with Bathsheba. And what he really, really wants is to be clean. He had soiled himself, he was filthy in God's sight, and he desperately wanted to be clean again.

**Psalm 51:16 You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. 17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart.**

That's in the OT! Even the words Jesus spoke to the Pharisees in v.6, **These people honor me with their lips but their hearts are far from me**—that's a quotation from Isaiah 29:13. The primacy of the heart over rituals and external things was nothing new—it's everywhere in the OT.

## **Purpose of the Kosher Rules**

So the heart was always the issue for God. But then someone might ask, "Then why did God command all those rituals and symbols?" They were necessary to teach the people that the problem of uncleanness could only be solved by God. They needed to understand, cleansing before God is a supernatural act—no human effort can get it done. A ritually unclean person could not enter the Temple. If you invented your own way of becoming clean—scrub yourself with soap or scrub yourself with a wire brush or take a bath in acid or whatever—nothing would work. The only thing that would work would be the exact ritual God prescribed, so the people would learn that only God could do the cleansing.

How did God do it? That wasn't revealed. It was hinted at in passages like Isaiah 53, but it couldn't be fully revealed until Jesus came. So the cleanness rituals, sacrifices, kosher laws—all that were like a stand-in until Jesus came. Once Jesus came, those all had to go so all eyes would be on Jesus. Jesus is the one who cleanses, and God doesn't want that spotlight to be shared with any ritual illustrations. We don't need the illustrations anymore because we have the reality.

## **Symbolism Took Over**

So God gave illustrations. But then what happened? The weeds took over, and their entire religious system coalesced around the symbols and they forgot about the realities. They got so caught up with the external rules of Sabbath restrictions and dietary restrictions and religious procedures... , they forgot the spiritual realities those things were symbols of. They thought they were being great Jews by practicing circumcision and offering sacrifices and observing the Sabbath and only eating kosher food... —avoiding any kind of symbolic uncleanness. That's what Jewish religion had become. The ritualism, the symbolism, the external forms—that was their whole religion. That was everything. That's why they kept adding more and more rituals and ceremonial rules, because if that's what religion is all about, then the more the better. If rituals bring you close to God, do twice as many rituals and you'll be twice as close to God.

## **Nothing Left**

Then Jesus came along and said, "As of right now I'm cancelling all that symbolism. That's done—you can forget about it." And they had nothing left. Can you see how devastating that was to them? When Jesus took away the symbols—all the rituals and sabbaths and sacrifices and circumcision and kosher laws, there was absolutely nothing left. That was their whole religion.

## **We all fall into legalism**

Elevating symbol above reality happens in every culture and in every person's life just like weeds happen in every garden. It's why they have shouting and fistfights at peace marches. We get caught up

with symbolism and forget about internal reality. Christians go online and debate about baptism. And their tone is full of venom and disdain and sarcasm and arrogance as they argue over a symbolic act. Symbolic of what? Spiritual cleansing. They soil themselves arguing about the best way to symbolize cleanness.

We all tend toward externalism. Don't you feel a lot cleaner if you get to the end of the day without having performed any bad actions than you do on a day when you did commit some evil actions... —even if the day you did the bad actions, your heart was good most of the day, and the day you didn't do any bad actions, your heart was terrible all day long?

## Imposing Standards on Others

And isn't it true that your natural tendency is to look down on people who don't perform the same kinds of actions you perform in your efforts to live out your faith? Here's how it goes: We read something in the Bible about our hearts, and we say, "Ok, I want to obey that. What can I do to put that principle into practice?" The Bible says, "Love your neighbor." That's not very specific. If I love my neighbor, what will that look like when I see panhandlers on the way to work? What if my child gets arrested on a DUI? Does love let him sit overnight in jail, or bail him out? We all have to answer questions like that, which can be difficult. But we wrestle through it and land on a conclusion: "Okay, I think this would be the best way to fulfill God's command to love my neighbor—this will be my practice when I see panhandlers..."

So far so good. That's exactly the way we should respond to the Word of God. The problem comes when I come up with a practice that I think best reflects love... , then I start focusing on that practice and forget about the actual heartfelt love! I give what I've decided to give, but I look down on them, I'm annoyed by them, I think of myself as better than them, and yet I think I'm obeying the command to love.

Or the other branch of legalism—I impose my practices on you. I expect you to have the same policy I landed on, otherwise you don't love those people. I come up with a policy for watching movies that is the best way to guard my heart, then I look down on you if you don't have that same policy. We need to remember—our policies for how to implement God's Word are not the same as God's Word.

And when a whole bunch of people adopt the same policy, and that goes on for a lot of years, that's when it becomes a binding tradition. And once that happens, it rises above God's Word in importance because it's easier to interpret than God's Word. It's easier to interpret because it's all about actions, not the heart.

You've probably heard the old joke—Do you know why Southern Baptists are against premarital sex? Because it could lead to dancing. That joke is funny because it gets a little too close to the truth. We set up a safeguard to keep us from breaking God's law, and before long we are more committed to the safeguard than to the biblical law.

## Did Jesus Really Make All Foods Clean?

Some argue that this passage doesn't really teach that Jesus made all foods clean. They say there's no way Jesus would have instituted such a massive, earth-shattering change in Judaism in such an off-handed way. The literal translation is this:

**18 "Are you so dull?" he asked. "Don't you see that nothing that enters a man from the outside can make him 'unclean'? 19 For it doesn't go into his heart but into his stomach, and then into the toilet." (Thus cleansing all foods.)**

Mark just throws that in—**thus cleansing all foods**. It seems like such a monumental upheaval of Judaism would require a little more verbiage than that. So they come up with strained interpretations to avoid Jesus cancelling the kosher laws.

One approach is to say the elimination process is what cleanses all foods, because after it passes through the system, it's not considered unclean. But that makes no sense, because what goes into the toilet is most definitely unclean (Ezekiel 4:12-15).

Another approach is to take it to mean the body cleanses itself of the food through the elimination process. But even if that's what it was saying, you still have the problem of Jesus saying very clearly that nothing that enters a man from the outside can make him unclean. Even without the phrase at the end about cleansing all foods, you have to deal with that statement.

Others have argued that if Jesus cleansed all foods in Mark 7, then why would it still have been such a big issue in the book of Acts? Wouldn't the church have just said, "Jesus settled this when he cleansed all foods"?

First of all, Paul did take that approach. For him, it was cut and dried.

### **Romans 14:14 ... no food is unclean in itself.**

As for why it was still a controversy, the answer to that is simple: it was still an issue for the same reason it's still an issue today—because this was such a hard truth for the Jews to accept. God told Peter in plain language to kill and eat the unclean animals in his vision.

**Acts 10:11 He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. 12 It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles of the earth and birds of the air. 13 Then a voice told him, "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat." 14 "Surely not, Lord!" Peter replied. "I have never eaten anything impure or unclean." 15 The voice spoke to him a second time, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean." 16 This happened three times.**

That's very clear. God commanded Peter to eat unclean animals, and when Peter refused because he had never eaten unclean food, God told him not to call impure anything God has made clean. Some have suggested God was only speaking of Gentiles, not unclean foods, but the context is very clear. It was unclean foods that God commanded Peter to eat.

## **The Source of Evil**

### **The List Structure and Definitions**

Just some quick comments about the list of evils in vv.21-23. There are 13. The first is **evil thoughts**, followed by two groups of six. The first six are plural, referring to individual incidents of that sin, and second group are all singular, referring to the overall condition of having that sin in you. The fact that **evil thoughts** heads the list would be a surprise to most people in our culture, because most people think of evil in terms of actions, not thoughts. If they have evil thoughts but don't act on them, they pat themselves on the back for being so self-controlled. But Jesus says, "No, evil thoughts belongs in the same list with things like stealing, adultery, and murder."

And if you wonder why that is, all you have to do is read more of Jesus' teaching and you find out that all the other evils in the list spring from evil thoughts. If you hate, you're guilty of murder. If you lust, you're guilty of adultery, etc. If you let your thoughts run in a natural direction, when you're done with those thoughts, you'll be even worse than you were to begin with. The sin inside us is like a fire, and evil thoughts are kindling.

**Sexual immorality** – This is the broadest term for sexual sin, including everything that the Bible forbids with regard to sexuality (adultery, fornication, homosexuality, incest, lust, etc.)

**Theft** – You know what that is—stealing, finding stuff before it's lost. **Murder** – Then the next three, **adultery, greed, malice** correspond to the first three.

**Adultery** is one form of **sexual immorality**.

**Theft** and **greed** go together (the act of stealing comes from the attitude of greed).

And **malice** and **murder** go together (**malice** is ill will toward someone).

**Deceit**—fraud, treachery, trapping someone with bait.

**Lewdness**—That's when someone goes off the deep end with indecency, debauchery, sensuality with disregard for social/moral standards or mores.

**Envy**—lit. the evil eye. That can refer to stinginess (Deu\_15:9; Sir\_14:10; Sir\_31:13) or for envy. Envy is when you feel unhappiness at someone else's good fortune. It's the exact opposite of rejoicing with those who rejoice.

**Slander**—abusive speech, hurting someone's reputation

**Folly**—moral stupidity (the fool in Proverbs)

**23 All these evils come from inside and make a man 'unclean.'**

The fact that you have all that in you is what makes you unclean before God.

## **Still Feel Guilty**

And even people who try to deny the existence of any set morality or absolute moral standard, if they look at that list, would have to admit those things are bad. If Jesus would have listed the worst sins—failure to love God, failure to fear God, idolatry, blasphemy, etc., then most people wouldn't really think of them as being all that evil. But Jesus chose a list that pretty much everyone can see as really evil.

Now, our culture tries their hardest to put their heads in the sand when it comes to evil in the human heart. They rename everything with innocent-sounding terms. They don't have sin; they have ... issues. Who could be blamed for having an issue?

They don't have an unforgiving, vengeful heart; they just have baggage. Dysfunction. Imbalance. Disorder.

They're not guilty of sexual immorality; they're just passionate. It's not arrogance; it's self-esteem. It's not folly; they just have insecurities.

But for all their efforts to convince themselves of that, they still act like people who are unacceptable, unfit, and broken; and who desperately want to become acceptable, worthy, and restored.

Even though they deny the authority of God's Word, and they set up their own standards of good and evil that justify them, still, no matter how much they dumb down the standard, they still fall short of whatever lame standard they come up with, and they are left feeling unclean—unfit, unlovable, not acceptable, not valuable. And they go to all kinds of lengths to remedy that feeling.

And when they search for a solution, it's always a human solution which is why it never works. And it's almost always an effort to separate themselves from whatever they think the source of the evil.

So they run from this influence or that influence, trying to outrun the condemnation that's right on their heels, but none of it works because you can't outrun your own shadow.

That's why monasticism doesn't work.

You can't escape the disease when you're the carrier.

## **Stubborn Human Nature**

Very few people understand how deeply ingrained evil is in human nature. One of the most fundamental markers of human nature is the mistaken belief that we can change human nature. After the enlightenment, everyone was convinced mankind had turned the corner on finally improving human nature. All it took to solve the problem of evil was a little education. Mankind had finally lifted itself out

of the dark ages and an enlightened eutopia was just around the corner. Some people attributed it to capitalism, others to communism, others to scientific advancements, others thought it was psychology, others pointed to religious factors. At that time, postmillennialism got really popular (the idea that the church would get more and more influential until it finally ushered in the glorious millennial kingdom on earth prior to the Second Coming). People looked at the graph of progress and said, “Yeah, I can see that happening.” Then came WWI and WWII and put the entire human race back to square one. All the theories fell apart. Postmillennialism became much less popular in theological circles. Human nature turned out to be a harder to change than everyone thought. All our efforts to reach enlightenment, utopia, or world peace fall apart because of what we are.

I always get a kick out of it when I hear some educated, erudite, know-it-all on a talk show saying, “Those who fail to understand history are doomed to repeat it.” Every time I hear that I think, *Yeah, that’s true, but so are those who do understand history.* Everyone is doomed to repeat the follies of the past because those follies didn’t come from lack of education; they came from the evil in the human heart.

Each new young generation looks at the older generation and says, “We’re not going to make those mistakes.” And every generation grows up and does the same, stupid things because they have the same, sin-sick hearts. Mankind doesn’t make moral progress as time goes on. The church does, and cultures influence by the church benefit from that, but as a whole, mankind makes no moral progress. Every baby born into the world brings with it the whole problem all over again.

Years ago a friend of mine got an i-pad and he was raving about it, and he told me, “You’ve got to get one. It will make you a better person.” He was joking, and it was a funny joke because of how absurd it is. Technology doesn’t make us any better, does it? Technology, modern medicine, all the advancements of our day; they’ve made life better in many ways. But has it made man any better? No. Look at the list in v.21-23. Has mankind made any progress on any of those in the past 150 years? Or 2000?

## **Uncleanness comes from the heart**

And yet the world still tries to cling to the fantasy that the human heart is essentially good. He had too much to drink and beat his wife, but he’s a good-hearted man. Some teenager does all kinds of horrible things, “Yeah, he did that, but he’s a good kid.” You hear that kind of thing all the time: “She’s not a bad person.” “He’s good at heart.” “Human beings are basically good.” A heart can’t be any better than the deeds it produces. What kind of insanity pulls up a bucket of black sludge from a well and says, “No doubt at the bottom the water is clear as crystal”?

This is self-evident, and yet our culture is so blind to it. They are mystified whenever there is a mass shooting. “What could possibly cause someone to do that?” And their first guess is always mental illness, even though the vast majority of people with mental deficiencies are not violent. But that’s always their assumption. Then they get someone like the Las Vegas shooter who showed no indication of any mental deficiency, and they are completely stumped.

Some people say, “Maybe it’s the guns themselves.” But that doesn’t work because other people have guns and they don’t commit murder. So what could possibly cause something like that?

Then Jesus comes along and says, “How about evil in the human heart?” “Oh, that’s ridiculous! The human heart is good, not evil. People are fundamentally good at heart.” Then where does evil come from? It’s obvious. It has to come from the human heart.

We all want to think of humanity as being divided into two groups—the good guys and the bad guys. But that doesn’t work. There might be better guys and worse guys, but evil can be found in every heart. Lot’s of it. No matter how many people you can find who are worse than you, any honest person has to admit we all have a part in what makes the world a miserable, broken place. Plenty of people have groaned about how broken this world is after some encounter with me.

## Political Ramifications

It is ignorance of human nature that enables socialism and communism to survive. So many people now in our country clamoring for socialism. “Let’s take the money from the rich people and distributed fairly to those who really deserve it.” Capitalists argue that the more you do that, the more you destroy incentive, which reduces risk and production, which results in less wealth all around so that very soon there is no money to distribute to the poor people. But aside from that economic argument, just think about the colossal ignorance of human nature that is required to support socialism. Let’s say it works. Let’s pretend there is enough money in the pockets of the rich to put everyone in a good place financially if we just distribute it fairly. And let’s pretend that the rich people would keep producing all that wealth so that we could keep redistributing it to the people who lost theirs or squandered it or whatever. Let’s pretend all that’s true. We can solve all society’s problems if we just take money from the evil, selfish, greedy rich people and redistribute it fairly. Here’s my question: who are these sinless angels who will be in charge of that program? Who are the politicians who can be trusted to redistribute all that money fairly rather than keeping it for themselves, or giving it to those who promise to get them reelected?

Secondly, if the people with money are evil and selfish and greedy, what’s going to happen when you give that money to other people? Will those other people—those oppressed people, when they get that money, will they be selfless and generous and magnanimous?

This world just has its head in the sand when it comes to human nature. Are rich people selfish? Yes. But so are politicians and poor people. Evil doesn’t come from income inequality; it comes from the human heart—every human heart.