

MARK 7:14-23

CLEAN LIVING

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.' "

When you are standing in an orchard, do you recognize the trees by the fertilizer which the farmer spreads beneath the trees or by the fruit that the trees produce? In Matthew, Jesus tells us that it is the fruit that reveals the nature of a tree, and a man.

¹⁵ "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. ¹⁶ By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? ¹⁷ Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸ A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. ¹⁹ Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰ Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them. (Matthew 7:15-20)

St. Paul elaborates for us the nature of good and bad fruit:

¹⁹ The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; ²⁰ idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions ²¹ and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. ²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control. (Galatians 5:19-23)

Although things external to us can provide the "near occasion of sin," it is what we do that constitutes sin. After 2000 years of the church, we are unlikely to worry ourselves about dietary restrictions in the context of religion. Our error is that we tend to think that because we go to church and read our Bibles that we are in good shape, but the true test is how we live our lives. We will be judged by our fruits. Are they of the Spirit or of the flesh?

Father, save me from the self-deception of studying your word for edification only and not for transformation. Keep me ever mindful of your proclamation that my love for you is manifested through my obedience to your will. Make me your disciple and make my life a witness to your truth. Amen.