

Just to give you the heads-up, this is going to be a 2-part message. There's way too much in this for just 1 Sunday.

In Mark 7:14ff, Jesus said:

Mark 7:14-23 (ESV)

¹⁴ "Hear me, all of you, and understand: ¹⁵ There is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him, but the things that come out of a person are what defile him."

Later on, the disciples asked Him, "What do you mean by that?", and He said, "What? Don't you lot get it either???"

... ¹⁸ Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, ¹⁹ since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled?" (Thus he declared all foods clean.) ²⁰ And he said, "What comes out of a person is what defiles him. ²¹ For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, ²² coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. ²³ All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person."

Jesus revealed, that the very problem with sin, is 'it's a heart issue'...

- Sin isn't a result of external factors;
- It's not because 'things were done to me', that I'm filled with sin;

- Nor is sin a sickness. It's not something that I've caught from somewhere, and therefore I need to be healed of it...

Sin, is a heart problem. **What comes out of a person is what defiles him.** And it's out of the **heart** of man, that comes every kind of wickedness...

And that's why living by a 'moral code', or by 'a system of ethics', is incapable of freeing us from sin... Even the Old Covenant Law:

- was helpful in letting us know what's right and wrong;
And
- it was sorta lifegiving, in that it provided an interim measure for obtaining the forgiveness of sins,,

But any system of rules – even the Old Covenantal Law, is **incapable** of truly freeing us from sin.

If wickedness comes out of the heart, then what's needed, is a changed heart...

In 1967, (in Cape Town, South Africa), Christiaan Barnard performed the world's first human to human heart transplant. It was a remarkable achievement, and much celebrated around the world. (even though the recipient of the heart only lived 18 days).

The survival rates today are far better, with 69% of recipients living for more than 5 years with their donor heart...

But the statistics remain grim.

- *100% of donors die;*
- *100% of recipients eventually die; and*

And science has now confirmed, that 100% of all humans, eventually die.

The thing is, the **un**spiritual person has the attitude that “‘extending my life, so that it’s as long as possible’, or perhaps ‘indulging myself, so that the life I have, will be as pleasurable as possible’, is the best that I can do”... Whereas the **Spiritual** person realises the importance that this life is short, and therefore it’s important that our hearts are right before God...

As amazing as a medical heart transplant might be, far more critical, is a Spiritual heart transplant. And this is something that The Lord told us He was going to do. He told us this through the Prophet Jeremiah. He said, “I’m going to bring a new covenant, and it’s not going to be like the old one (that covenant that they didn’t keep). It’s not going to be a ‘Law’ that you have to **learn** and try to obey...”

Jeremiah 31: (ESV)

³³ For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares YHWH: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. ³⁴ And no longer shall each one teach his neighbour and each his brother, saying, ‘Know YHWH,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares YHWH. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”

And this is the New Covenant (that was bought in Jesus' blood) – This is the Gospel that we preach...

Through faith, we repent of our sin, we confess all of our wrongdoing, and we're forgiven... But once we're forgiven, what then?

- Do we continue on as we once were? No, of course not. Jesus didn't die (to save us from sin), so that we can then go on sinning...
- Did He save us, so that we can now study and learn the Old Covenant Law, and therefore do what's right??? No, that's the whole purpose of the Letter to the Galatians – Paul's saying "That's not what we have to do – we've been set free – don't be enslaved to 'The Law'".

V16 is the key: ¹⁶ But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.

So, let me paint the picture... Before we're saved, we're driven by the flesh, and the desires of the flesh, are against the desires of the Spirit... Alright, so 'the flesh', is that worldly propensity we have, to sin – it's that part of us, that wants to put ourselves as No.1... And God and everybody else, you're No. 10, 12 & 20 000...

But when we respond to the Gospel, this all changes. Holy Spirit, comes inside our heart, and He writes His Law on our hearts... And that's why it's so critical that we respond to the **true Gospel**, and not a man-made gospel...

You see, the Gospel's getting watered down these days, so that it's not so offensive. And by watering the Gospel down, it misses the beauty being the Gospel...

To be truly saved, begins when I come to the realisation that 'there is no good in me'... A theological term that sometimes gets used, is "Total Depravity" – before I'm saved, I'm rotten to the core. And we have to put to death, the old self, and then in Christ, we become a new creation. In V²⁴ **And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.**

Do you know what that means??? It means that to become a Christian, doesn't mean I just add 'a bit of belief in Jesus' to who I am... It means I am so appalled with my rottenness, that I fall on my knees before the Lord, "I don't want to be that person anymore"... And as we surrender our lives (totally to Christ), this is crucifying the flesh (with its passions and desires) ... Are you with me??? And if I do not take this step – If I do not renounce my old, fleshly life (with its passions and desires), do I really belong to Christ???, because **those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires...**

You see, it boils down to "Who's my master?" Do I want to continue being Lord? Do I let the **flesh** continue to guide me? Or do I crucify the flesh, and let Jesus be Lord???

those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. – That’s the starting point, and if we don’t get the starting point right, we’re going to have a lot of trouble ‘walking by the Spirit’...

So, before we were saved, we were controlled by the flesh, and totally rotten to the core.... But in Christ, that all changes:

- We’re forgiven of our sin;
- We’re taken from darkness, into light;
- transferred from Kingdom of this world, to the Kingdom of God; and
- The Holy Spirit lives in our heart...

He changes our heart. All of a sudden, we have (within us) what we call “The desire of the Spirit”... It’s not a moral code that we have to try and achieve – The Spirit inside of us, changes us from the inside, so we **want** to do what’s right.

And you understand this, don’t you? You want to please God....

Now, some people would say, “That’s the end of the story – “Once I’m saved, I’m led by the Spirit, and so, ‘if I feel OK about it, well, it must be ‘the Spirit leading me’”...

Sometimes you might hear someone say “I’ve got a passion for such-&-such”, as if ‘them having a passion’ means it’s automatically from God...

And I wish this was true... But sadly, it's not... You see, at this point, Paul is writing to **Christians**... and the picture he paints for us, is that the fleshly nature, hasn't disappeared...

And there's an inner battle, that goes on inside of us...

Now, if you're anything like me, sometimes you get might get the feeling that: all those other Christians are so perfect, and you feel that there's something wrong with you (as a Christian) – You feel so terribly inadequate, because all those other Christians talk about overcoming sin, but for you, there's a daily battle – it's a war between the flesh and the Spirit that's going on inside of you... Guess what – You're normal...

This is a battle I fight, every day. And it's a battle you fight, every day... But I want you to be encouraged, because we're not fighting this battle alone...

V17 ¹⁷ For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.

And this works both ways... If you want to do good – If you **want** to do God's will, the flesh inside of you, will urge you, "Oh no, don't get too carried away"...

e.g. God might be calling you to serve Him in a particular ministry,, but the flesh inside of you, that worldly carnal desire, might prompt you by saying, "*Yes, that would be nice, but you've got other commitments, that are much more*

important. You can't possibly serve God in that way – Leave it for somebody else...” Alright, so you **want** to do good, but the flesh is telling you, “You’ve got other priorities”...

But it works the other way too e.g. I might decide, “*I’m going to give that person a piece of my mind, and put them in their place*” And the flesh is fully encouraging me to do that – **enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions ...** But what does the Spirit do??? The Spirit is opposed to the flesh, and is urging me to love; Peace; Joy... And we want to do evil, but the Spirit keeps us from doing what we want to do...

Alright, so we’re not in this alone... The flesh, is coaxing me to evil... And the Spirit is opposed to the flesh... But, what is the Spirit? “The Spirit”, isn’t some kind of airy-fairy concept... The Spirit is a person... Paul’s already told us, it’s the Spirit of the Son of God...

4:6 (ESV) ⁶ And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!”

Isn’t that beautiful... The Spirit of Jesus (Himself), is with/in us. We’re not alone in this...

But how does this all work??? We’ve got the flesh battling the Spirit; The Spirit battling the flesh... And I don’t know about you, but sometimes I do what the Spirit’s telling me to do, but other times, I end up doing what the flesh is telling me to do...

What Paul said (Rom 7:24) “What a wretched man I am”, and I thank God that in times like this, His grace is sufficient. I can repent of that sin, confess that sin to God, and I’m forgiven... You understand don’t you, repentance isn’t a one-off thing... Quite often through the Scriptures, the instruction is given to Christians (and sometimes whole churches), “Repent, and turn away from your sin again.”ⁱ

But I want to know, “*How can we get the batting average up.*” Do you know what I mean??? How we live, matters, and we should always be striving to be the best disciples of Jesus that we can be...

2 Peter 1:5-7 (ESV)

⁵ For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, ⁶ and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, ⁷ and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love.

Alright, we have to make every effort... How do we strive to be the best disciples of Jesus that we can be... How do we get the Spirit average up, and the fleshly average down???

V16 walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.

V25 ²⁵ If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.

You see, the Christian life is a journey. And it's a journey we're going to walk, until the day we die. And how close we walk with Christ, will have an enormous bearing on whether the **Spirit** reigns, or whether the flesh reigns...

e.g.

If I have a problem with 'lust', choosing to watch a movie with scantily clad actresses, probably isn't keeping in step with the Spirit.

Whereas if I begin my day by reading the word of God, and dwelling on what He's said through the Scriptures, that's a pretty good way to keep in step with the Spirit...

And so, if temptation comes along, immediately stop, and get back in step with the Spirit. Just take some time-out to pray.

Which is why V18 says: ¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

What The Law does, is it helps us to identify the works of the flesh, but Paul says "**They're evident**". And if we're led by the Spirit, they **are** evident. And he gives us a few examples of 'works of the flesh' . (BTW, this is **not** a definitive list).
(and things like these)

He starts out with ‘sexual sin’: **sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality**

sexual immorality πορνεία (porneia) is ‘any sexual activity outside of marriage (as God designed marriage to be)’. Sexual intimacy should **only** be between a man and a woman, who are married to each other... Any other sexual activity, is ‘a work of the flesh’ – not a work of the Spirit... And to those who are in step with the Spirit, this is evident.

And so:

- if you’re dating your boyfriend or your girlfriend, and things are getting passionate, it’s probably time to stop, because if you continue, that’s not being in step with the Spirit.; and
- If you feel an attraction to someone of the same sex, be aware that **this** is a craving of the flesh, and not of the Spirit.

impurity: in this sense, it’s talking about sexual impurity... Boys, men, women, it’s evident that looking at pornography is an impurity that’s out of step with the Spirit ...

sensuality: That could be: flirting; dressing provocatively; even a gentle touch...

The flesh might tell you, *“It doesn’t matter how I dress. If the way I dress, causes someone else to think impure thoughts, that’s their problem.”*... But the Spirit realises that

sensuality, such as flirting; dressing provocatively, is out of step with the Spirit, and a work of the flesh.

idolatry: It seems ‘peculiar’ to me, that even some committed bible teachers, seem to have changed the definition of “idolatry” ... And I think it’s a western culture thing (trying to make it more relevant to us)... It’s becoming common, to describe “idolatry” as “anything that we give our attention to instead of God”... Well, yes, that may well be a sin, but it’s not what Paul meant when he said “Idolatry”.

Idolatry (in the true sense of the word), was a ‘live issue’ in their culture, and ‘idolatry’ is a ‘live issue’ in much of the world today... It’s the worship of another God, or more particularly, “The worship of a god of our own making”...

The most recognisable idolatry, is when somebody decides to put a Buddha in their garden/home... Or the practice of Yoga/Thai Chi...

But I reckon the most common idolatry today (in our culture), is when someone says “I like to think that God is like.....”, and then they describe a god that isn’t the God who reveals Himself in the Scriptures – it’s a god of their own making...

And it’s evident. Idolatry is a work of the flesh.

sorcery: Think, “Witchcraft”. Sorcery is calling on spiritual powers (other than God), to do the supernatural (or to reveal something hidden through supernatural means)... Have

nothing to do with these things. It's dangerous; it leads to spiritual oppression; and even spiritual **possession**.

And some people feel "It's all harmless"

- having a séance;
- playing with a Ouija board;
- Tarot cards;
- Fortune tellers;
- Crystals;

- Water divining... Sorcery/divination... The bible forbids it (State Library 'water dowsing', occult)

BTW, did you know that 'sorcery' is very closely linked with drug-use?

- φαρμακεία, (pharmakeia) (Pharmacy)

And sorcery (magic), often involved the use of drugs, to open one's mind up to evil spirits.. Can you understand why drug-use can be so destructive to a person???

Don't experiment with drugs. It's evident, that drug-use is a craving of the flesh (not of the Spirit).

I heard a preacher once tell of a time that a lady asked him, "As a Christian, do I have to give up smoking?" And he said, "Well, that depends... For you, is smoking a craving of the Spirit? or is it a craving of the flesh?" And she had her answer, and never smoked again...

Now, at this point, the list of examples of works of the flesh, shifts to how we relate to other people/Christians/within the church. **enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, ²¹ envy,**

As Disciples of Jesus, 'love' is supposed to be our core business. And it's obvious (isn't it?) **enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, ²¹ envy,** – it's obvious such things are works of the flesh...

enmity (hatred / holding someone as an enemy), is just as much a work of the flesh, as sorcery...

strife is conflict resulting from rivalry and discord.

You get the picture: The Spirit urges us to love, But the flesh tells us that this is an exception, and we're quite within our rights to feel anger and bitterness... But if I'm filled with hatred and anger and bitterness, it means "I'm out of step with the Spirit"...

drunkenness Is it ok for a Christian to drink alcohol? Some of the time, biblically, "yes it is". But **drunkenness** is a craving of the flesh... If I enjoy the *feeling* alcohol gives me, I'm out of step with the Spirit. The Spiritual man will never get drunk.

orgies, and things like these. It's obvious that things like these, are works of the flesh.

And Paul says, **I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.**

That's 'cutting', isn't it... What Paul's saying, is "Those who walk according to the flesh (rather than the Spirit), **will not inherit the kingdom of God.** And let's not think that he's talking about people outside of the church. He's writing to Christians. He's warned them before. He's warning them again...

Oh my, what a hopeless state...

Hopeless, except for the word "**But**"

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. ²⁴ And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

²⁵ If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.

We're going to leave it there now, and next week, we're going to talk about "Living by the Spirit, and the fruit of the Spirit."

Let's pray:
Heavenly Father,
We want to thank You,
for the wonderful gift of Grace we have in our Lord Jesus
Christ.

Lord, we confess to You,
that too often (because 'ever' is too often),
we haven't walked according to the Spirit.
We've had the battle between the flesh and the Spirit,
and we've let the flesh win...,
because we haven't kept in step with You.

God, forgive us.
And Lord, we thank you for the forgiveness we have,
through the blood of Jesus.
(the most powerful cleansing agent for the soul).

And Lord,
help us to walk in the Spirit;
To keep in step with the Spirit.

Lord, fill us with Your Holy Spirit,
and grow in us, the fruit of Your Spirit,

Amen.

ⁱ Revelation 2 & 3; James 5:16; 1John 1:5-10; Lord's Prayer;