

**Mark 7:14-23** – “You Turn Things Upside Down - Part 2”

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Our Gospel reading for today is a continuation of last week’s Gospel where we heard about the religious leaders turning God’s Law upside-down. They thought God had given us the Law as our Savior—as a set of rules we can do to save ourselves. Unfortunately we all have a tendency to do the same thing with God’s Laws or other things in our lives which we think can bring us lasting peace and happiness. That’s one of the reasons we need to continually hear God’s Word so that the Holy Spirit (working through God’s Word) can give us a right understanding about our sinful, upside-down condition, and faith in Jesus Christ as our only Savior who can turning us right-side up again, from ME trying to save myself, to WE (referring to God saving us and making us a part of His family the Church).

*“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.”* Jesus said this because the truth is, ever since Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden, we (as their descendants) are born defiled. We’re sinners not because of the sinful things we do. We do sinful things because we’re sinners. King David, through the inspiration of God, certainly understood this when he wrote Psalm 51. *“Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me”* [NIV]. But he couldn’t use that as an excuse for the sinful things he did, since God had rescued David from his sinful condition and restored him to life by giving him faith in the promised Savior. Yet, even after God had given David so much, David went and did the same thing Adam and Eve did. He chose to disobey God’s Laws—He sinned. And what did God tell Adam and Eve would happen if they disobeyed Him? *“You shall surely die”* (Genesis 2:1).

That’s what sin does to all of us, it separates us from God because when we disobey God we are saying that we don’t want to do things God’s way—we don’t believe or trust that His way is best. And when we separate ourselves from the One who gives us life, what happens? We die!

To die doesn’t mean that we cease to exist. But it does mean that we exist apart from God who, as I said, is the Giver of life and all that is good. This eventually results in eternal death and suffering, and unfortunately there’s nothing we can do to change that. That’s why Jesus said, *“Apart from Me you can do nothing”* (John 15:5). And a person who can do nothing certainly cannot save himself by doing good works—by keeping God’s commandments.

So, why did God gives us commandments in the first place? To answer that question it helps to go back to Adam and Eve again, and one of the first commands He gave them. *“And the LORD commanded the man, saying, ‘You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die’”* (Genesis 2:17).

If Adam and Eve obeyed that commandment, would they be saved? No, they were already saved! God gave them that commandment before their fall into sin. But if they obeyed that commandment they would demonstrate their love and trust in God. Therefore, by giving them commandments, *“be fruitful and multiply...work and keep (the garden)...don’t eat of that one tree...,”* God was giving them opportunities to return His love—to worship Him.

The same is true with all God's commandments, including the Ten Commandments. They too were given to His saved people—people who already knew and believed in His love and promise of salvation. And they had seen many clear examples of God's power to deliver them from evil when He delivered them from slavery to the Egyptians, which served to strengthen their faith in God. Therefore, when God gave them His commandments, they were not a means of salvation to an already saved people; they were a gift—an opportunity for them to demonstrate their love, faith, and trust in God by doing their best to keep them. Keeping God's commandments was also a way of sharing God's love with others, not as a good work to save themselves (ME doing something to save ME) since they were already saved, but a WE thing—God working through us (His Church) to save others.

That's why God, in the OT reading from Deuteronomy, told His saved people to "*listen [and keep listening] to the statutes and the just decrees that I am teaching you, and do them... [for then you will be saved? NO!] for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes [not only God's decrees or commands but first and foremost the good news of God's creation and love in the beginning, and His promise and power to save Adam and Eve when they sinned, along with all their sinful descendants, they] will say, 'Surely this great nation [referring to Israel—God's Church] is a wise and understanding people.'*"

But what happens when, despite all that God has done for me, I still do a ME thing? For example, when I think my understanding and memory of God's Word is strong enough that I don't need to keep being reminded or strengthened by God? That's a sure sign of just the opposite—of the weakness of my understanding and faith in God's Word. Therefore, hopefully God uses someone like Nathan or like you to remind me of God's Word of Law and Gospel, through which God continues to work to turn ME right-side-up again—to turn me away from my sins and to our Savior, Jesus Christ, for forgiveness and salvation—to enable me to cry out to God with King David, "*cleanse me from my sin...Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit*".

Nowhere is there mention of ME doing anything to save ME. It's all about what God does through His Word/Jesus Christ, to turn ME around and consequently others through ME—to save us, the WE of the Church. How can that be done if, as God said, "*the wages of sin is death*" (Romans 6:23)? Only through God's Son, Jesus Christ, who paid for all our sins through His death on the cross, and rose from the dead in victory over our sins and to give us all the benefits of what He has done through His Word and Sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion.

Another thing I like about this from ME to WE illustration is how the arms of the ME, when we turn away from God, are not open to receiving God's blessings but losing them. But when God turns ME around through His Words of Law and Gospel, enabling me to see my sins and my Savior, Jesus Christ, He turns my arms up, WE, to receive all His gifts of eternal life which overflow to others.

Thanks be to God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.