

MARK 7:20-23

SINS WHICH MUST BE JUDGED

“Jesus said, ‘What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.’”¹

It is jarring to hear a professed Christian using profane or crude language. Such language does not honour the Saviour; nor does it reflect well on our divine parentage. Likewise, it is disturbing to witness professed believers slander one another. Some behaviour is incongruous with the confession of new life in Christ that we profess. It is not that the people of God are incapable of sinning, but rather that we expect better of those who follow Christ; and we are always shocked when God’s people fail to live as children of the Living God.

Overt sin obviously cannot be justified in the lives of Christians; sexual immorality, theft, murder and adultery are clearly proscribed in the Word of God. However, we tend to excuse what I call polite sins—those character traits that are less obvious, or at least more difficult to pin down in the lives of people we know. When we are guilty of evil thoughts, no one knows of this, except for us. Envy, pride and foolishness are tolerated. If someone should accuse us of such, we bristle and question how they could dare judge us.

We are taught in the Word of God that we are responsible to live lives which are distinguished from the world. We are not to live as the world does, nor even to be friends with the world. James excoriates those who imagine that they can live as the world does while claiming allegiance to God when he writes, “Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore, whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God” [JAMES 4:4].

The Word of God teaches that we are corporately responsible to judge ourselves as members of one body; but even more vital is that we each assume responsibility to individually judge our own lives. Join me in looking to the Word of the Master as we examine a strong teaching which He provided His disciples on one occasion after exposing the hypocrisy of the Pharisees.

THE BACKGROUND OF THE MESSAGE — The Pharisees, together with some scribes from Jerusalem, witnessed the disciples eating without washing their hands. This washing of the hands was a ritual washing required of all observant Jews. This was not a hygienic requirement, but a religious requirement, as is obvious from Mark’s comment that this was done “holding to the tradition of the elders” [MARK 7:3]. The disciples’ failure to observe protocol was offensive to the mobile truth squad that followed Jesus and His disciples. They were usually looking for an indiscretion, an offensive statement—anything with which they could accuse Him of religious deviation.

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Things were no different on this occasion. The religious arbiters saw that the disciples failed to wash their hands before they ate. You can almost see their raised eyebrows as they nodded knowingly to one another before they turned to the Master; I can only imagine that their tone indicated their incredulity as they accused the Master, “Why do your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands” [MARK 7:5]?

It was always a mistake to attack the Master, but these experts in religious minutiae were ever hopeful that they might prevail. As was His wont, Jesus responded to their accusation with Scripture. How they must have winced when the Master replied, “Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written,

“‘This people honours me with their lips,
but their heart is far from me;
in vain do they worship me,
teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’

“You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men.”

“You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to establish your tradition! For Moses said, ‘Honour your father and your mother’; and, ‘Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.’ But you say, ‘If a man tells his father or his mother, “Whatever you would have gained from me is Corban”’ (that is, given to God)—“then you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or mother, thus making void the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And many such things you do” [MARK 7:6-13].

The religious leaders were exposed as frauds—and that before all the people who seemed always to swarm about the Master. Then, driving the point home in the minds of the crowd, Jesus addressed the broader group that surrounded Him, saying, “Hear Me, all of you, and understand: 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” [MARK 7:14]. The text seems to indicate that His words caused bewilderment, perhaps even consternation. I imagine that were we able to have a photograph of those about Him at that moment, allowing us to see the faces of the people, we would see confusion writ large on their faces.

As soon as the Master went into “the house,” perhaps the house of a disciple living in the region of Gennesaret or His own house in Capernaum, the disciples questioned Him. You observe a formula in the Gospels, whenever Jesus gives a parable, if it is readily understood by the disciples or by members of the earliest churches, there is no explanation provided—it is self-explanatory. There is no need to ponder what the Master may have meant, for it is obvious. However, if there is a question, you will note that the disciples asked; and in asking, they ensured that we are thoroughly instructed.

As an aside of some considerable significance, the fact that the disciples enjoyed such an intimacy with the Master that they could question what He meant should be an encouragement for each of us. God does not call us to “blind faith,” a “leap in the dark” when He provides instruction. God expects us to think, to dare question and seek the truth. God is too great to be dethroned by our questions; and in asking for clarification, we will grow stronger in our faith. The Faith of Jesus Christ is a reasonable faith; it will withstand questions.

The thought that we dare not challenge what is taught is foreign to both the Word of God and to the idea that God is sovereign. God is sufficiently great that He is not dethroned by our honest search for truth. Jesus encourages honest pursuit of the truth. “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened” [MATTHEW 7:7, 8].

Surely that is the encouragement that we receive when the Master instructs us, “When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth, for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak, and He will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify Me, for he will take what is Mine and declare it to you” [JOHN 16:13, 14].

It is the will of the Master that we will know the truth and pursue knowledge of the truth, for the Lord Himself has said, “I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life” [JOHN 14:6]. Indeed, we are promised, “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him” [JAMES 1:5]. There is wisdom, there is understanding, there is knowledge—all that is lacking is the willingness of His people to ask Him.

I am not advocating doubting God, nor am I suggesting that we operate in the negative mode. I am not suggesting that we must be obstreperous or combative with those who provide leadership. I am saying that the honest search for the will of God will be rewarded. The reason many don’t find the will of God is because they come before God prepared to tell Him what He must do for them rather than approaching Him with the desire to know what is pleasing to Him.

THE CAUSE OF EVIL — In a sense, the Pharisee movement, and the Jesus movement, were each holiness movements. Either sought a way to be set apart for God’s service. However, they each adopted different approaches to holy lives. The Pharisees sought to achieve holiness by external effort. They thought that how they dressed, how they acted, how they spoke, would make them acceptable to God. Jesus focused on the heart. In effect, Jesus taught us that if our heart is right, our actions will follow suit. The flaw in the Pharisaic effort is that people can perform every religious act imaginable, and do so flawlessly, but if the heart is corrupt, the actions fail to honour God.

To understand the cause of evil, you and I need to determine how we will define evil, and then ask what the source of that evil is. Evil is violation of the perfection of Holy God. Evil is any deviation from what is correct and good. The standard for good is God—not what we determine is good. You and I tend to define good by what is personally beneficial, and we define evil by what makes us feel badly about ourselves. Our definition for either good or evil revolves around the impact of an action on our own being. In other words, we are at the centre of our definition. However, the biblical definition of good and evil is determined by measuring an action against the will of the Living God.

Accordingly, Jesus gives a list of actions that are obviously evil. After all, in His words, Jesus is focused on what defiles an individual. So, He lists “evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder [and] adultery” [MARK 7:21]. So far, few of us would dissent from this list. We see these character flaws and we agree, in part because we see each of these acts as potentially harmful to us.

It was at this point that Jesus quit preaching and began meddling. He listed “coveting [and] wickedness” as evil; and though these actions are clearly wrong, they are often justified in our minds. Throughout the past two or three decades we were told that greed was good—we were urged to make all we could, to acquire all that we could acquire. We could always get more because credit was unlimited and we were growing the economy. Someone forgot to inform us that we need to pay for all that we were acquiring. We Christians confused our wants and our needs. Likewise, we often want to quibble about what is wicked. One man’s wickedness, we say, is another man’s pleasure.

However, let’s assume that we are willing to concede that coveting and wickedness are indeed evil, if the actions of far too many professed Christians is any indication, “deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride [and] foolishness” [MARK 7:22] must not be evil. We are prepared to act deceitfully—fudging on income tax or taking longer coffee breaks than our contract permits. Evidently, few Christians are generous toward God as we don’t even approach a tenth of our wealth in charitable giving in Canada. The word speaks of treachery, the resort to falsehood and guile to achieve what we want. It speaks of refusal to live openly, rather wearing a mask as we speak kindly to others, even as we plot their downfall. This is the descriptive word that spoke of the plots of the Sanhedrin to seize Jesus and arrange for His death [e.g. MATTHEW 26:4; MARK 14:1]. Surely, we realise that such intrigue and falsity does not come from God.

If the entertainment that we tolerate entering our homes by way of television, via compact discs or through the Internet, then sensuality is an apt description of a significant portion of our lives. When surveys show that one-half of American clergy view pornography in any given month,² can we deny that sensuality is a significant part of our lives? The figures for professed Christians as a whole may be even higher. Increasingly, our world is characterised by its lack of restraint; Christians must not permit themselves to adopt this standard of living, because God says this is evil. Sensuality is not a new problem among Christians. Paul confronted this tendency to return to the past among the Corinthian Christians [see 2 CORINTHIANS 12:21].

Envy and slander are integral to every church conflict. Tragically, professed Christians seldom act differently from the world out which they have come. We seek to injure those with whom we are angry, and we harbour animosity in our hearts and seize every possible opportunity to strike out to inflict the most pain possible. We are warned in the Word, “Do not speak evil against one another, brothers. The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks evil against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. There is only one lawgiver and judge, He who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbour” [JAMES 4:11, 12].

Of course we are proud, and see it as something good. We take pride in our associations and our affiliations even within the world of religion, using that pride to serve as a stand from which we are able to look down on others that don’t share those associations. We take pride in our interpretations of God’s Word, never pausing to think that God gave the Word and His Spirit directs us as we humble ourselves before Him. “Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will exalt you” [JAMES 4:10], is teaching that we need to hear again.

² Matt Friedman, “Half of Clergy Members View Pornography Every Month?,” <http://action.afa.net/Blogs/BlogPost.aspx?id=2147491058>, accessed 20 February 2010

To act without moral or intellectual understanding is what is implied by the word “foolishness.” It is the absence of spiritual wisdom and sobriety; it is failure to make proper use of one’s mind. This is not an issue of intellectual ability, but an issue of failure to use what God has provided. In that respect, it is the inability to see matters correctly because the heart is impure.

How shall we define evil? Evil defines every act that deviates from the will of God. Evil is supplanting the will of God, enshrining our own will so that we act to satiate our own desires and to secure our own pleasure rather than acting for God’s glory. Evil is acting without regard for God’s will or without thinking correctly of what is pleasing before the Master.

Throughout the Word of God are found lists of actions and attitudes that displease the Lord. For instance, the Apostle has written to the Churches throughout Galatia that “the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God” [**GALATIANS 5:19-21**].

Undoubtedly, there are people who will defend some of these actions as “necessary,” as just part of life. “Jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions [schisms]” and “divisions [heresies]” are not so bad in our estimate. However, God says they are the works of the flesh and not the works of the Spirit. Thus, they are dishonourable and evil in the sight of the Lord. We do not have the luxury of categorising the sins of the flesh, designating some as especially wicked and others as merely problematic. God says they are the work of the flesh, and thus evil.

There is a similar dark catalogue of sinful actions provided in the First Letter to Corinthian Christians. There, the Apostle warns God’s people, “Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God” [**1 CORINTHIANS 6:9, 10**].

Again, we attempt to categorise the acts that are listed. Some we agree are deserving of God’s condemnation. Others, we tacitly qualify as necessary. When Paul speaks of “revilers,” he uses a word that means “to slander.” It is derived from a word that means to speak in an insulting manner. We will insult, and justify what we say because those whom we speak against “had it coming.” However, when we act thusly we are ignoring the Word of God which warns us, “Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing” [**1 PETER 3:9**].

Actions such as described in these passages are identified as unrighteous—that is, they are not honourable before the Master. Those who practise such things are defined as evil. In fact, Paul identifies these actions as part of the flesh—its passions and desires. And therein lies the source of the evils listed—indeed, the source of all the evil that plagues each of us—the heart. Jesus said that evil comes “from within, out of the heart.” Have you ever noticed that this is a constant theme throughout the Word of God? Listen to the divine commentary on mankind’s condition following the fall of our first parents. “The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” [**GENESIS 6:5**].

After He had judged the earth, we read that, “When the LORD smelled the pleasing aroma, the LORD said in his heart, ‘I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the intention of man’s heart is evil from his youth’” [GENESIS 8:21]. Did you notice that dark evaluation that “the intention of man’s heart is evil from his youth?” God is gracious, and despite man’s wickedness, God does not destroy him.

Our knowledge of mankind’s fallen condition leads us to the conclusion that Jeremiah was absolutely correct when he wrote:

“The heart is deceitful above all things,
and desperately sick;
who can understand it?”

[JEREMIAH 17:9]

The wise man pondered life and its meaning. He wrote a dismal assessment of humanity. Here is the heart of his appraisal. “This is an evil in all that is done under the sun, that the same event happens to all. Also, the hearts of the children of man are full of evil, and madness is in their hearts while they live, and after that they go to the dead” [ECCLESIASTES 9:3].

We are prone to blame the devil for the evil that is in our hearts. Though he is the tempter, and though he is the accuser of our brothers, we cannot, like Flip Wilson did in years past in the persona of Geraldine, say, “The devil made me do it.” We are the ones who choose to sin. We are the ones who refuse to obey God. We are responsible for our own actions. We can blame no one but ourselves.

The festering abscess that blights each life was exposed when James wrote, “What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you” [JAMES 4:1]? Our own desires are at war; it is the heart that yearns to possess, to rule, to promote our own interests. Because the heart is sinful, the actions are likewise sinful. This holds true for each of us—none are exempted. Our lives are corrupted and cursed by our own sinful desires that rule over us.

THE CONTAMINATION OF EVIL — Well might we ask how serious this contamination is. Upon examination we discover that every facet of our lives is polluted by sin. The beauty of God’s creation, which He pronounced “Good,” has been utterly desecrated. When I speak of “God creation,” I am not focused on the entirety of the universe, but rather I have in view mankind. God created our first parents and pronounced His creation good. There is a truth that must be stated because we understand it so poorly, if at all. We are ruined by the fall of our first parents, and thus there is no goodness in us.

People sometimes imagine that they can do something that will please the Lord. However, we can do nothing to please God because our lives are contaminated. Here is the biblical appraisal of our condition in the sight of God. “It is written:

‘None is righteous, no, not one;
no one understands;
no one seeks for God.
All have turned aside; together they have become worthless;
no one does good,
not even one.’

‘Their throat is an open grave;
they use their tongues to deceive.’
‘The venom of asps is under their lips.’
‘Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.’
‘Their feet are swift to shed blood;
in their paths are ruin and misery,
and the way of peace they have not known.’
‘There is no fear of God before their eyes.’”

[ROMANS 3:10-18]

The divine estimate leaves no room for us to imagine that we can be good enough to satisfy His expectation of perfection. When God says “No one does good,” we may demur and argue that we are good. Perhaps we think that we know someone who is good, and that God’s evaluation is therefore overly harsh, picky or even flawed.

R. C. Sproul addresses this issue concerning man’s goodness when he writes, “In biblical categories a good deed is measured in two parts. The first is in its outward conformity to the law of God. This means that, if God prohibits stealing, then it is good not to steal. It is good to tell the truth. It is good to pay our bills on time. It is good to assist people in need. Outwardly these virtues are performed every day. When we see them we quickly conclude that men do in fact do good things.

“It is the second part of the measuring that gets us in trouble. Before God pronounces a deed ‘good’ he considers not only the outward or external conformity to his law, but also the motivation. We look only at outward appearances; God reads the heart. For a work to be considered good it must not only conform outwardly to the law of God, but it must be motivated inwardly by a sincere love for God.

“We remember the Great Commandment to love the Lord our God with all our hearts, all our strength, and all our minds... and love our neighbours as much as we love ourselves. Every deed that we do should proceed from a heart that loves God totally.

”From this perspective it is easy to see that no one does good. Our best works are tainted by our less than pure motives. No one among us has ever loved God with all of his heart or with all of his mind. There is a pound of flesh mixed in with all of our deeds, rendering them less than perfect.”³

In our text, Jesus stated that the dark acts which He identified as evil “come from within” **[MARK 7:23]**. In fact, it is “from within, out of the heart of man” **[MARK 7:21]** that these actions arise. Moreover, these actions, that have their origin in our own hearts, defile us. Let me give you a little insight into the language that Jesus used. The word that is translated “defile” in verses 20 and 23, is the same root as the word that is translated “fellowship.” It speaks of sharing. The point is that rather than being set apart as holy, these acts render the person common, or unholy. The thrust of Jesus’ words is that through performing these acts we expose ourselves as unholy, as impure, as defiled.

Long years ago, when answering his tormentors, Job asked concerning mankind:

“Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?
There is not one.”

[JOB 14:4]

³ R. C. Sproul, **Chosen by God** (Tyndale House Publishers, Wheaton, IL 1986) Logos Electronic Edition

The obvious answer is that no one can bring what is clean out of that which is unclean. The Master has identified the heart of mankind as unclean, full of every sort of evil, and thus incapable of pleasing God.

Though we need not hammer the point home, perhaps it will be helpful to recall that the suffering patriarch also pondered mankind's fallen condition when he asked,

“What is man, that he can be pure?
Or he who is born of a woman, that he can be righteous?
Behold, God puts no trust in his holy ones,
and the heavens are not pure in his sight;
how much less one who is abominable and corrupt,
a man who drinks injustice like water!”

[JOB 15:14-16]

Grappling with this condition, the Apostle Paul wrote, “We know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin. For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.

“I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death” [ROMANS 7:14-24]?

THE CURE FOR EVIL — Ultimately, the cure for sin is the sacrifice of Christ the Lord. God has promised that in Christ we stand holy and pure. I love the revelation that is provided in the opening words of the Ephesian Letter. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him” [EPHESIANS 1:3, 4].

We are not holy—our lives demonstrate that truth. We are not pure—our choices and our actions reveal the veracity of that truth. Yet, in Christ we stand before the Living God as pure and holy. We do not stand in our own goodness; we stand in the goodness of Christ Jesus. This is the same testimony that is given in the Letter to Colossian Christians. “And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard” [COLOSSIANS 1:21-23]. Thus, we know that through faith in the Lord Jesus we are made pure before the Father.

Earlier, I cited Paul's plaintive cry, "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death" [ROMANS 7:24]? When I cited that passage, I failed to read his answer, which was immediately given. It was not an oversight, but deliberate. At that time I was focused on our condition in this world. However, I want you to listen to the Apostle's answer to the dark question. "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin" [ROMANS 7:25].

The Apostle testified that his desire was to serve God because his mind had been renewed by the Spirit of God through faith in the Son of God. Nevertheless, he was still in the body with all the attendant sin that marks our physical existence. The struggle that he experienced is the same struggle you and I endure constantly as we are drawn downward by the flesh even though the heart is looking upward toward God. We have the desire to do what is good and right; but we nevertheless sin.

This dichotomy between the new self and that old nature sets up a struggle that we will be called to endure until Christ returns. However, we are not exempt from the struggle, nor dare we imagine that we need not seek to win the contest. We are taught, "Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. But that is not the way you learned Christ!—assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness" [EPHESIANS 4:17-24].

Though the final cure for sin is the death of Jesus the Saviour, in the more immediate context, each of us bears responsibility to judge ourselves. We must keep short accounts with God. We are responsible to recognise when we have sinned and turn from that sin to embrace what is right. This is the basis for the warning Jesus issued when He said, "Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad, for the tree is known by its fruit. You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil. I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned" [MATTHEW 12:33-37].

Recognising the sin that defiles our lives, we dare not permit sin to reign over us. We gain victory over sin when we repent, turning from pursuing our own desires to seeking and doing the will of the Living God. There is wonderful encouragement given God's people in John's first letter. John writes, "This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" [1 JOHN 1:5-9].

Though we now struggle, there is coming a glorious day when we will be free from the penalty of sin, free from the power of sin and free from the presence of sin. Christ Jesus our Lord is coming again, and when He does, He “will transform these humble bodies of ours into the likeness of His glorious body by means of that power by which He is able to subject all things to Himself” [PHILIPPIANS 3:21].⁴

Paul writes of that coming transformation in the First Corinthian Letter. Consider what he writes in 1 CORINTHIANS 15:50-58. “I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written:

‘Death is swallowed up in victory.’
‘O death, where is your victory?’
O death, where is your sting?’

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

“Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labour is not in vain.”

This is the promise that we have. Living in anticipation of what Christ is soon to do, we are transformed. Our desires are purified, and thus our actions reflect the presence of Him who love us and gave Himself for us. In 1 JOHN 2:28-3:3 we read these encouraging words which the Apostle of Love wrote. “Little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming. If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him.

“See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.”

I trust you will be present when Christ returns. I trust that you are looking for His coming. If you are, though you know the evil of your own heart, you are dealing with the sin that lies within. You are grieved over the wickedness that arises from time-to-time, but you are experiencing His grace that cleanses and purifies. If you are not now experiencing His cleansing power, it may be because you have yet to be born from above.

God has promised, “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.” Christ died because of sin—your sin; and He was raised from the dead to declare you right with God. Now, He calls on all who are willing to believe this message.

⁴ The NET Bible First Edition (Biblical Studies Press, 2006) Logos Electronic Edition

For this reason the Word of God declares, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” [**ROMANS 10:9, 10, 13**].

You, too, may be saved. I pray it will be today. Amen.