

The Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost Mark 7:14-23

Christians do not really believe in the Bible; they only pretend to, in order to have an excuse to hate homosexuals.

Did you know this? I did not, and still do not, although I have heard it often, or rather, read it, written as it often is by supposedly educated people.

And as much as it might surprise you to learn that this is the way your mind works, and that you are a Christian only because you want to have an excuse to hate homosexuals, there is definite proof of it, and I have read that, also: there is something somewhere in the Bible about not eating pork, and Christians eat pork. So there you have it; see how much more smarter I am than you, and much more intellectual, and educated, and sophisticated? Nanny-nanny boo-boo!

What we hear today, out of the Bible is also in the Bible, though: that our Lord Jesus *declared all foods clean*. But those who triumphantly point to the pork thing as definite proof that Christians only *pretend* to believe in the Bible because they want an excuse to hate homosexuals, well, most of them have no idea that what we hear today is in the Bible, for they have never bothered to read it, or to otherwise look into what they talk or write about. And why would they? They have heard or read that somebody said something about it on the internet, and these days, that is all you need to know to know the whole truth about everything, is it not: that somebody said something about something on the internet.

Well, some of those who triumphantly point to the pork thing as definite proof that Christians only *pretend* to believe in the Bible because they want an excuse to hate homosexuals, well, some of them are very well aware that what we hear today is in the Bible, only, they *pretend* not to know, and that it is not there. And why would they not? It is an integral element of the progressive post-modern mindset that *truth* should never get in the way of maligning those who disagree with you, nor should it be a reason not to.

Obviously it is utter nonsense that Christians only *pretend* to believe what we believe in order to have an excuse to hate homosexuals. Not many Christians actually do; hate homosexuals, that is; although, sadly, some who claim to be Christian speak and act as if they do. More importantly, though, anybody who actually *knows* Christians will know that hating homosexuals has very little to do with what we believe, and why.

It is true that it says somewhere in the Bible that at some point in history some people were not to eat pork. In days of old, Israel was indeed prohibited from eating pork, as well as a lot of other things most people do not know about; nowhere, though, does the Bible say that Christians cannot eat pork; in fact, as we hear it today, Holy Scripture clearly and directly teaches the exact opposite: *He declared all foods clean.*

But how can that be, then? How can something that what was once prohibited by God now be permitted?

Well, in general terms, the Law God gave to His people in days of old can be divided into three different kinds of law. There is the *moral law*, chiefly found in the Ten Commandments, that which is good and right in the sight of God, His will for how we as His creatures should live before Him, in His love, and live out His love in our life with each other.

Then there are the laws for how Israel should order her affairs as an earthly society. These laws have no bearing on Christians today, except for enlightenment and understanding of that which was to come; the Kingdom of Christ is *not* an earthly kingdom, not a country or a state. These laws are part of that parable which is the history of ancient Israel, which chiefly served to show that no earthly nation can really be the Kingdom of God.

And then there are the laws about purity and holiness; they declare such things to be unclean as dead bodies and blood and other bodily secretions, and certain animals, such as pigs and shellfish, and clothes made from different kinds of fabric, and more. These laws are all symbolic of how the people of God were to be *His people wholly and completely*, not a mixture of that and something else; hence the prohibition against clothes made from different fabrics. The animals not to be eaten have this in common, that they are all sort of *inbetween* animals; the Law points out that shellfish have scales, but not fins, and as such they are not *really* fish, and pigs have cloven hooves, but do not chew cud, and so are not quite in the same class as goats and sheep and cows. Dead bodies and blood and bodily secretions all represent loss of life and strength, and, as such, *death*; and God is a God of life, and anything that is of death is foreign to Him. This is what the Law of holiness and purity point to; that, and how it is impossible to live completely clear of impurity in this world.

The laws about purity and holiness were never meant to be *the real thing*, though.

God never envisioned that His people would actually be able to fulfil the laws of purity and holiness, let alone actually be pure and holy by them. In fact, He never meant for His people in any way to make themselves pure and holy at all. He always knew that impurity comes from within; that *out of the heart of men evil thoughts proceed*, as we hear it today that our Lord Jesus said it, *and adultery, fornication, murder, theft, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, envy, blasphemy, pride, and foolishness, and that all these evils come from within, and they defile man.*

God also always knew that the experiment of having Israel live as a holy people would fail, or rather, that *the people would fail*, and fall into captivity and exile, and be delivered and restored again, as a parable of how God would deliver and restore all of fallen Mankind from where we have fallen and what we have become.

Even the Law itself made it clear that God never imagined that His people would live without sin: in the Law He prescribed sacrifices to be brought for the *forgiveness* of sins; by these sacrifices, God would count the sins of His people atoned for, out of His goodness and mercy, and forgive.

These ordinances made it clear that the people would need to be constantly cleansed from sin; and God even made it clear, also, that the sacrifices would not save from sin by virtue of being a good work on the part of sinners. Atonement would be *His* work, not theirs, and forgiveness *His* gift. *The life of the flesh is in the blood*, as He said it in the Law, *and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls.*

It was the misunderstanding of the Jews, as it is that of religious people everywhere, that we as humans are to make ourselves righteous and right with God, or *keep* ourselves righteous and right, by our own goodness and good works, and that we are capable of doing so, of overcoming evil and ungodliness and impurity in our hearts and minds ourselves, and in our lives; that we are *alike to God in knowing good and evil*, as the evil one promised our first parents that we would be, that is: in judging and mastering good and evil.

It is this misunderstanding our Lord Jesus corrects with what we hear today. Impurity is from within; because we are impure within; and so, no rules and regulations for how to live can make us to be *not* impure.

Not only were *the Jews* incapable of observing the Law He gave them, as history had already shown them to be, with its demand for wholeness and wholesomeness and holiness in all aspects of life, that the people of God be His people, and His alone, and that they not worship other gods.

We are *all* incapable of measuring up to His goodness and His good will. His Law demands not only right and decent outward living, but also purity *at heart*, and full and complete love for Him, and trust. And to this we cannot measure up, and we will not, and we cannot will it; we do not have it in us. *For the intent of the flesh*, as the holy Apostle Paul writes it, that is: of sinful nature, *is enmity toward God, and it does not submit to the Law of God, indeed, it cannot.*

Impurity is from within, because impurity is what we have within; purity and holiness is from *without*, and from beyond, that is: it is from God. The laws of purity and holiness all pointed to the perfect purity and holiness that would be given to sinners in Christ, once it was brought to completion, that which was always God's will, the salvation of sinners from our sin, and from His own judgement against it. *Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets, as our Lord Jesus said it; I came not to abolish, but to fulfill!*

And fulfilled He has. The Son of God came to us, who is Himself God from eternity, and had Himself born into our kind. He has lived for us, in our stead and our behalf, the life that we owe it to God to live, in full and complete love and trust for Him, and obedience, and submission to His will.

Moreover, He had Himself baptised with the Baptism of sinners to take upon Himself the sin of sinners, and suffer for it. And He suffered and died as the only sacrifice sufficient to actually atone for sin and make right the wrong that sin is, as He bore for us His own judgement against our sin and paid the price and penalty for all evil and ungodliness and impurity in our lives, and in our hearts and minds.

All that we owe to God God the Son has presented to God the Father for us, in our stead and on our behalf. He has made us right with God, and righteous before His judgement; and *He* declares us to be that, with His Word of what His love has done for us, who shall Himself judge the living and the dead. And in His festive meal of salvation He feeds us with His body and blood, for real, that food by which we are made pure and perfect in His sight.

Impurity is from within; purity and holiness comes to us from God, given to us freely and for nothing, out of His goodness and mercy, and for no other reason whatsoever. Only therefore shall we be with Him forever in the fullness of His goodness and His glory.

Now, to Him, whose power works in us and can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine, be glory, in the Church and in Christ Jesus, throughout all generations, for ever and ever. *Amen.*