

Intro: You are what you eat, as the saying goes. Growing up, I was one giant plate of mashed potatoes, if that were the case. I certainly wasn't a growing boy made out of many vegetables. As funny as this is, sometimes this seems to be true—do you remember the rumour that if you ate too many carrots, your skin would turn orange? I've been told that it's false, but I'm still holding out hope, honestly. And if you eat too many sweets, even though you might not begin to taste sugary yourself—well, maybe your sticky hands would—but you might become shaped like a lollipop

It seems as if this idea was also prominent among the Jewish people as well—not in a cutesy, get your kids to eat vegetables and a little less sugar kind of way, but in a way that recognized that what you put into your body had serious effects. And religious effects. If you ate something that was unclean, it made you unclean. So if the food hadn't been properly killed, or if it had been sacrificed to another god, or if it was a forbidden food, you better not eat it, lest you become what you eat—unclean. And these rituals were not limited to food. They also couldn't touch a dead person or a menstruating woman or have a skin disease. What you came into contact with, via hands or mouth or any contact at all, dramatically affected your relationship with God. In order to prevent this, they had purity rituals. They had rites to properly prepare foods and they had rites to restore those who were unclean (and this was both for the sake of the unclean and for everyone around them, so they didn't become unclean, either).

Now, as Christians, we don't have these rituals. We know that Jesus' death and resurrection did away with them and our purity is in Him. And yet we still have these rituals. They are often unspoken, but there are certain things you can do in a Christian circle in order to make yourself "unclean." It might be that you view yourself as unclean among everyone else and feel like you shouldn't be around them; it might be that everyone else views you as unclean and they don't want to be near you. But whether it's you who seemingly excludes yourself from a right relationship with God or those around you, there seems to be a barrier that comes up because you broke a "purity ritual."

Now, historically these have been any of the unholy trinity of impurity—drinking, dancing, or smoking. Each community had one or two that were culturally forbidden because they led to “too much sin” among the people so they simply had to cease.

Today, one of these purity rituals might be who you vote for; only one candidate can be God’s providentially picked leader, after all. Or if you hang out with people who do not look like they belong here, it might be like touching a leper—so be careful if you have a friend who likes the same gender or who practices a different religion because you might become an outcast by association. In the church as a whole, pornography is an issue that plagues far too many people, and it can cause a person to feel unclean and unworthy so they cast themselves out. We often have to portray ourselves in a certain light around our brothers and sisters—we don’t listen to the wrong music or watch the wrong movies or curse, dang-nabbit.

Now, of these, these 21st century purity laws, some of them are working against real sin, real things that need to be dealt with, and others are simply cultural baggage, outgrowths of our own fear, that we need to work against. So we are much like the 1st century Jews. Some of their purity Laws were laws from God which He set forth to protect them from sin and from their community’s destruction. Others were simply human laws which a select few could push on everyone else and therefore feel self-righteous. But whether the Laws are good boundaries or man-made nonsense, they do not address the issue, really.

If a person were to publicly manage to self-correct any of the purity laws of today and those from history, he or she wouldn’t have dealt with the issue. Our issue is not with the external dealings with such taboos—if we could cease all physical contact with them, we wouldn’t become pure. The truth is, one does not become an adulterer by viewing pornography or even by visiting a “gentlemen’s club,” one does not become a coveter by seeing the nicest house on the block, and one does not become an idolater by seeing an idol.

These outward interactions, if they are going to lead to sin, are simply opportunities for our corrupted self to act out. The sin is there, whether dormant or active, and whether those around us can see it or not, it defiles us entirely. This is why Jesus is not concerned about what goes into a person. What you consume doesn't do anything against you, even if you aren't supposed to eat it. The evil desires which led to the bad consumption choice is really what Jesus is concerned about.

Now, Jesus here is inviting us to realize the desperate situation we are in. If we stop to think about His words, we realize that we are hooped. Even if you've managed to get your anger under control, even if you have reduced your gambling to a reasonable amount, and you've gotten a system to jump away from every jealous thought that arises, we are still full of evil thoughts, sexual immorality, thoughts of theft and murder and adultery, covetousness and wickedness and deception, sensuality and envy and slander and pride and foolishness. These traits are what defile us inwardly and they are what cause us to act out in impure ways.

So what are we to do? No matter how much we discipline our bodies, no matter how many times we snap the elastic band on our wrist when a snide or prideful thought pops up, the heart we have is still evil and dark and wants exactly what it shouldn't want.

Thanks be to God that Christ, the only one with a pure heart, has stolen yours away. On the cross Jesus didn't just die for the sins that the world can see and judge you on, He didn't just die for the sins that you think in your mind and are disgusted by, but make you terribly thankful that no one here is a mind-reader. He stole from you the root of your sins. He has taken from you your capital S Sin, that which defiles you and sends out of your being all sorts of evil vices.

So that which defiles you is no longer truly yours, and the pure heart, that which you can never attain to, has been gifted to you freely. So whenever the Father looks at you, He does not see the impurity that is properly yours but instead sees the perfection, the righteousness, the purity that Christ

has by grace given to you. And slowly but surely, in many ways that you will never know, and in times that you'd never expect, the fruit of the Holy Spirit flows from your life so that the world can see it too.

This all happened in your baptism, when you were clothed with the robes of Christ's righteousness, when your sinful heart stopped beating and was replaced by the perfect heart of Christ (unfortunately your sinful heart seems to know self-CPR and wants to take over time and time again). Which leads to a conflict within you, between Christ and the Work He is doing, and the old self that wants control.

This inward struggle, also mirrors that struggle outside of yourself as well. This is the struggle that Paul describes in our Epistle today. There is a struggle with those who would try and steal you back to the evil which once characterized your life. And this battle isn't with evil people. It's not with powerful people.

Our struggle is with the unseen powers with whom we worked alongside when we were not yet Christians, those forces who work tirelessly against Christ and His Church.

So how do we, who were once simply a tiny drop in the ocean of evil, though fully committed to its cause, and are now at best half-heartedly on the side of the Gospel and still a tiny force of power, how do we fight against the rulers, the authorities, the cosmic powers over this present darkness and the spiritual forces of evil? How can we be expected to do anything for the good of the war?

Well, the good news is that the war is over. On that fateful day when righteousness and life Himself was killed in our place, Satan and every devil of the world lost. The war is over, and yet today and every day you're alive, battles for individuals still rage on, but we are still not alone in these lesser battles.

We are given armour from God, but not just armour from God. We are given God's own armour. That which Christ wore in His battle against Satan, that which He wore to combat temptation and gave the endurance to see His battle through to the very end, this armour has been given to us. In our

baptism we were given His righteousness and faith, His salvation, His truth and His readiness of the Gospel. All that Christ wore is now ours. In fact, Christ Himself the very source of this armour is our protection from everything that might try and steal us away from the body of Christ.

And by putting it on daily, just as it was placed upon yourselves in your baptism, you are strengthened to stand. You don't need to chase evil down, but because out of your hearts comes the righteousness of Christ, Satan and his devils will be drawn to you like mosquitoes to your flesh. They will come and attack. And their attacks are not games to them—they aren't just trying to get you to jump from your seats so they can have a chuckle. They are trying to steal away from you your saving faith by any means necessary.

So it might mean supernatural phenomena by which they are trying to scare you and despair of all protection. But more than likely, you will be attacked in your righteousness. As that battle goes on within you, where you know that you have been made righteous but yet you don't look righteous because your heart is still spewing forth sinful vice after sinful vice. And in that moment, a devil might say "Christ's promises are just fairy tales. They haven't changed you, so this must all be nonsense. Do what you want because none of this matters to anyone except your grandmother." Or else a devil might say in your ear "Clearly you haven't been forgiven, but that's because you don't deserve it. Not yet. Work harder. Sin less. Love more. DO better. Then maybe God will be pleased with you. But not until you've put in the sweat and the tears. Not until you portray yourself as righteous—so stop looking like a sinner!"

This is what the average battle looks like. It's not possession or paranormal activity, but usually a struggle for your faith as it is attacked and rattled by the lies of Satan. "You aren't good enough. You aren't worth. You aren't trying hard enough."

But we can say in return: "Yes, that is true enough. By myself I am a weak sinner through and through. It is not my own heart that is pure but the one given to me. And I know I am not strong enough

to fight you, but I know who is.” Let us not deny our sin in an attempt to look pure enough, but instead confess with confidence our sin and our weakness that we may in turn despair of it and cling to the heart and hands of Christ, who is our purity inwards and our protection outwards. And this is our invitation to those around us, those for whom Christ loves and died for. No one who enters these doors—no one who refuses to even enter these doors—is too impure or too far gone. Christ doesn’t want them to get it together, but welcomes them just as He welcomes you. So let us be the hands and feet of Christ demonstrating His love to those whom society, to those whom all too often the church, have disregarded.

As we go together, we are also invited, all who believe and are baptized, those who know with their hearts and confess with their lips the magnificent gifts given here, to come to the table, where we may become what we eat. Let us come to the table where we partake of righteousness and strength and life incarnate and receive His Righteousness and His Strength and His life and we in fact become His Righteousness and His Strength and His Life to all those around us. Here He purifies you and your heart within, time and time again, and here He protects you, today and always, from the evil surrounding you. This gift of Himself He gives so that you may stand strong until the end.

Amen.