

A few years ago, I got an email advertising a new service called “Pure Flix.” Pure Flix billed itself as a Christian alternative to “Netflix.” (For those who don’t know, Netflix is an online television service, a website where you can watch thousands of movies and shows over the Internet whenever you want for a monthly fee.) While Netflix’s library includes all kinds of films, Pure Flix distributed only “Christ centered movies” and described its mission as “influenc[ing] the global culture for Christ through media” and “chang[ing] our culture for Christ” through “faith and family media.”¹

So, on Saturday night, instead of watching *The Shawshank Redemption*, you might watch *Escape: You Can’t Run From God*. If *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* doesn’t suit your family’s Christian values, you could try *Naaman and the Seven Baths*! While *Batman* and *The Hunger Games* are nowhere to be found on Pure Flix, your desire for post-apocalyptic thrillers can be satisfied with *The Black Rider: Revelation Road*.

While I agree that Hollywood’s appetite for sex and violence can get too large, I still feel a little uncomfortable about Pure Flix, because the underlying assumption of these “Christian” services and films is that *good* Christians don’t watch mainstream media. Taken to its extreme, Pure Flix concludes that Netflix is bad for your faith, because most movies and TV shows contain immoral behavior, such as, to quote our Scripture reading for today, fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit,

¹ <http://pureflixstudio.com/about-us/> - accessed in 2015. It seems that since then, Pure Flix has broadened its mission and offerings to a “mix of family-friendly & wholesome entertainment” and taken out its references to Christ. The Christian movies once listed on its site also seem to have changed. (Yes, I looked *that* deeply when I got an email advertising Pure Flix.)

licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly. And Christians must *stay away and isolate ourselves* from these things.

Products like Pure Flix, created by human beings, moralize a non-essential component of life. And when this moralized product becomes the way to distinguish between people, to hold up one group up as better in their faith, other believers will feel lesser in their faith.

I wonder whether the disciples felt somehow lesser in their faith upon hearing the Pharisees and scribes ask Jesus, “Why aren’t your disciples washing their hands?” The religious leaders see them eating without completing a lengthy ritual washing and ask, “Why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?”

See, these religious leaders held to their own non-essential moralized standards. They did not eat unless they thoroughly washed their hands. They also washed cups, pots, bronze kettles, tables, and food from the market, among “many other traditions that they observe[d].” Keep in mind that the Torah—the record of God’s commandments—contains no rule about handwashing. These were standards and rules they followed thinking, “Well, any *good religious person* would do it this way.”

But the disciples, the religious people who had been following Jesus, observed none of it. They didn’t wash, so they ate with “defiled” hands. The moral judgement the Pharisees and scribes made was the same as that of Pure Flix:

these disciples couldn't be *good religious people* because they ate by a different standard.

Into this uncomfortable scene, Jesus issues some strong words of clarification: "Isaiah prophesied rightly about you [when he wrote] "This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far away from me." Jesus directly addresses the religious leaders, "You ignore God's commandment while holding on to rules created by humans" (Common English Bible).

Jesus is saying, "It's not about hand or pot washing. That's mixing up human tradition with the commandments of God. That's making a moral standard out of a custom humans invented. You've identified the wrong kinds of behaviors that harm people."

Then, to clarify what *does harm people*, to explain what—if not handwashing—does disservice to faith and defiles a relationship with God, Jesus turns to the crowd—the crowd who, in Mark, has been bringing the sick and ill to the marketplaces to be healed—and says, "There is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile." To this crowd of what must have been ailing, dirty, tired, worn-down folks, folks the religious leaders would have *definitely* wanted to see wash their hands, Jesus says, "It's not what's outside that defiles you or makes you unclean or unholy, but what's inside."

Defilement doesn't come from dirt on anyone's hands, or messages in our culture, or films we watch. Contact with the world, with sickness, pain,

tragedy, and terror, real and imagined, that's the stuff OUTSIDE. And Jesus is clear: the outside stuff does not defile us. What pollutes us are the evil intentions of our hearts, which come from INSIDE.

All the vices that Pure Flix is supposed to shield Christians from—fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly . . . that stuff doesn't come from movies. That stuff comes from INSIDE, from *the human heart*.

Jesus' statement about what's inside our hearts convicts us because it's true. Christ knows that sinful stuff lives inside us, all of us. It's why we attempt to "Pure Flix" away our sinful hearts or admire the people who put on a good moral facade. It's why it's easier to condemn people who live a sinful life than to love them like Jesus did. It's why we demand handwashing and tradition following. We have a lot of ways that attempt and fail to rid our hearts of the evil intentions on the list.

The Good News is that we also have Christ. In Jesus Christ, God chose to become incarnate in the world and to have contact with its evil intentions. In Jesus Christ, God chose to come live among fornication, theft, and adultery. Christ's betrayal, arrest, and trial means God knows licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, and folly. Christ's crucifixion on the cross brings God up close and personal with and defeats murder, avarice, wickedness, and deceit. Christ would have been able to write the salty plotlines of plenty of Netflix movies and TV shows because Christ experienced those plots, knew people who lived those storylines, even loved people who lived those profane ways.

Christ was able to love and embrace with these people, without condemning them or letting their behavior infect him, because of the pure state of Christ's own heart. Jesus was literally pure of heart, which makes him able to point out to us that we are not, while still loving and embracing and transforming us.

We have Christ's love, we have Christ's embrace and transformative power, because of our baptism. And baptism is what enables us to act with pure hearts like Jesus: to be in the world but not of the world, to love evil people but not become them, to embrace different people but not condemn them. Baptism enables all of us to respond to the world the way Jesus does: entirely without fear of the sin, evil, and brokenness within it. Baptism puts to death the bad intentions of our hearts and gives us the heart of Jesus.

Today, Grant is baptized into Christ's love and embrace, anointed for Christ's fearless way of being in the sinful world but not of it, and given the pure heart of Jesus. Because of the grace and love Christ has given Grant, he need not fear the sin and evil he will inevitably encounter in the world. Because of the new heart that Christ has given him today, he need not even fear the defiling things inside him, because those intentions have died and been replaced with the Spirit, which shall always rescue him from his sins.

And little Grant definitely won't need Pure Flix. Or ritual handwashing. Or any other human-made traditions. Because today, he has all he needs for living a pure and undefiled life, and we have it too: baptism into Jesus Christ. A heart created clean. A renewed and right Spirit within. The very heart of Jesus Christ beating forever inside. AMEN.