2026-11-08 Points

Title: Clean on the Inside: The Struggle for True Holiness

Sermon Summary: Drawing from Mark 7, this sermon confronts the tendency of believers to prioritize outward religious performance over genuine inward transformation. The pastor challenges the congregation to examine the gap between what they profess with their lips and what resides in their hearts, using the confrontation between Jesus and the Pharisees as a mirror for self-reflection. The sermon calls believers to surrender their personal traditions and selfish habits to God, recognizing that true cleanliness before Christ is not ceremonial or external but flows from a heart that has been broken, confessed, and restored. The central tension throughout is the tug-of-war between living as a child of God and living according to one's own nature and desires.

Key Points:
- Outward religious ritual without inward devotion is hypocrisy, as Jesus made clear when he quoted Isaiah to the Pharisees, describing people who honor God with their lips while their hearts remain far from him
- Human traditions, habits, and personal preferences can quietly replace the commands of God without the believer even noticing the substitution
- True uncleanness does not come from what enters a person from the outside but from what comes out of the heart, including evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, greed, deceit, arrogance, and slander
- The Christian life is not meant to be lived independently but in surrender alongside Christ, combining human effort with divine strength
- Sanctification and growth in holiness require honest self-inventory before God, asking him to identify what occupies the locked rooms of the heart
- The American church has a tendency to conform Christianity to personal lifestyles rather than allowing the Christian life to reshape and conform the believer
- Parents bear a unique and irreplaceable responsibility for raising their children in godly truth that no church program or school system can substitute
- Operation Christmas Child is presented not as a charitable gimmick but as a

vehicle for gospel proclamation and discipleship among children who have very little

Scripture Reference:
- Mark 7:1-23, in which Jesus rebukes the Pharisees for prioritizing ceremonial hand-washing traditions over the commands of God, and teaches that what makes a person truly unclean is not what enters from the outside but what comes out of the heart
- 1 Thessalonians 5, where Paul instructs believers to rejoice always, pray continually, and give thanks in all circumstances, identifying this as God's will for them in Christ Jesus
- Psalm 51, David's confession psalm written after the prophet Nathan confronted him about his sin with Bathsheba
- Acts 10, in which Peter receives a vision of a sheet containing unclean animals and is told by God to eat, signaling that the old dietary distinctions have been fulfilled in Christ

Stories:
- The pastor recalls growing up on a farm where his mother tried unsuccessfully to keep his clothes clean, using this as a lighthearted entry point into the sermon's theme of cleanliness and what it truly means to be clean before God
- He describes helping his father bale hay as a boy, acknowledging he was more in the way than helpful but that his father welcomed his presence, using this as an illustration of how Christ invites believers to work alongside him even in weakness
- He shares experiences on the mission field where food was set before him that he found difficult to eat, but chose to receive it with prayer and thanksgiving out of respect for the sacrificial generosity of those hosting him
- The biblical account of Nathan confronting David is retold, in which Nathan tells David a parable about a wealthy man who steals a poor man's only lamb, prompting David's outrage before Nathan reveals that David himself is the man in the story, leading to the writing of Psalm 51
- The pastor references the congregation's involvement in Operation Christmas Child, describing the sacrificial effort of members who drove long distances to find deals, handmade items like jump ropes and bracelets, and

spent significant personal resources to fill shoeboxes with meaningful gifts for children around the world