

**The Pharisees and some of the teachers of the law who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus and <sup>2</sup> saw some of his disciples eating food with hands that were “unclean,” that is, unwashed. <sup>3</sup> (The Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they give their hands a ceremonial washing, holding to the tradition of the elders. <sup>4</sup> When they come from the marketplace they do not eat unless they wash. And they observe many other traditions, such as the washing of cups, pitchers and kettles.)**

**<sup>5</sup> So the Pharisees and teachers of the law asked Jesus, “Why don’t your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders instead of eating their food with ‘unclean’ hands?”**

**<sup>6</sup> He replied, “Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written: ““These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. <sup>7</sup> They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.” <sup>8</sup> You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men.”**

**<sup>14</sup> Again Jesus called the crowd to him and said, “Listen to me, everyone, and understand this. <sup>15</sup> Nothing outside a man can make him ‘unclean’ by going into him. Rather, it is what comes out of a man that makes him ‘unclean.’”**

**<sup>21</sup> For from within, out of men’s hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, <sup>22</sup> greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. <sup>23</sup> All these evils come from inside and make a man ‘unclean.’” (NIV84)**

Theme: Worship Comes from the Heart.

1. The heart is cleansed by the gospel.
2. A clean heart shows itself in true worship.

Is God glad that you are here today? Is he happy with you simply because you are in the pew joining us in worship—singing songs, praying, and so on? Is all you have to do is show up, join in the service and you are good to go? Not exactly. You could be doing all the right things, but be far away from true worship because your heart is not in it. You can say whatever you want but if it’s not from your heart, than it doesn’t really matter. If you don’t mean it, then God is not pleased with you. True worship comes from the heart. But we are

nothing but sinners. So God has cleansed our hearts through the gospel. And this clean heart shows itself in true worship.

At the time of our text, Jesus was becoming quite popular and word about him had spread. So some Pharisees and Scribes—that is those who wrote down the Old Testament and other Jewish books, traveled from Jerusalem to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. They hoped to catch Jesus in a sin. And it didn’t take them long to pounce. They watched as Jesus and his disciples started to eat. But the disciples didn’t wash their hands first. And that was a sin in the mind of the Pharisees. Mark explains, **The Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they give their hands a ceremonial washing.** This wasn’t washing your hands with soap and water like we do before we eat, no this was a ceremonial washing. No germs were removed in this kind of washing.

The thought behind this was that they might come across something or someone ceremonially—or spiritually, unclean when they were out and about during the day. Such as at the market they might meet Gentiles. And they were unclean. So they said you must wash your hands—ceremonially before you eat. Otherwise what you touch and eat will itself be unclean. There is one major problem with this: It’s not a command from God. It’s a man-made law. The Pharisees admitted this themselves. When they complain about what the disciples were doing they asked Jesus, **Why don’t your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders instead of eating their food with ‘unclean’ hands?**

That is what the Pharisees were all about. They didn’t believe in Jesus as their Savior. They didn’t know what he came down to this earth for. They didn’t see Jesus as the long-promised Messiah, but as a nuisance who threatened their way of life. Since they rejected the grace God gives us through Christ, they had to come up with something else. And if it isn’t by grace, then it has to be by works. So they tried to earn God’s favor. And in order to do that, they made up their own laws. They followed some oral traditions passed down through the centuries. And they placed these ahead of God’s law. They figured by making their own laws on top of God’s laws they were better than others. God would see how hard they tried and be

impressed. They figured their extra laws made them more pious. And that by simply following their own traditions they would be saved. And they loved their traditions so much, that God's Word was pushed to the side. They focused so much on outward works, that they forgot all about what God promised to do through the Messiah.

But it doesn't mater what someone does, you can't please God enough to save ourselves. It doesn't matter if you try to please God by following his commands, or your own rules. You are still a sinner. And you have nothing to offer to God. Just listen to Jesus talk about what comes out of a man's heart, **For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly.** Nothing but sin comes out of our heart. Every sin starts in the heart, moves from within us, comes out, and leads us to do many horrible things. And some sins never come out—they stay inside of us, and are sins of our thoughts. When we are honest with ourselves we must admit that we commit these sins daily. Not a day goes by when we can say that we have keep God's commands perfectly. And these make us unclean. Our sins lead us to eternal damnation. And there is nothing we can do about it. There is nothing we can offer God. We can keep all the laws we want--both God's laws and man-made laws. But we are still sinners. Out of our natural hearts comes nothing but sin. So we can't offer God anything.

We admit that in our sinful nature, what Isaiah says is true, **How then can we be saved? All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags.** It's a good thing God sent his Son. For Jesus had no evil in his heart. Not once did he have an evil thought. Not once did his heart lead his to do anything evil. He never sinned—never went against God's Word. He was completely innocent. Yet he willingly let himself be murdered on the cross. He did this so he could take away our sins. And at the same time he gave us his perfection. He pure heart is now ours. Our sins have been removed and we have been given Christ's holiness. Now we are pure and holy in God's sight. When he looks at us he no longer sees someone whose heart is filled with wickedness. Rather he sees the pure heart of Christ. Thanks be to God. For through Christ we have been given a pure heart.

And that pure heart enables us to give true worship to God.

The Pharisees thought that by making up and following their own laws they were obeying God. They also thought they were worshiping him. But they weren't worshipping God because they didn't believe in Jesus as God. So they were tried to earn their way to heaven. They were worshipping themselves. And their own rules. They put themselves in the place of God. They didn't think God did enough. So they improved on his Word. They believed their rules were better than his. So they emphasized their own rules and downplayed God's Word. And they missed his grace.

They thought they were worshipping God, but they were far from it. Jesus pointed this out by telling them that Isaiah was prophesying about them when he said, **These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.** What the Pharisees were doing wasn't worshipping at all. They acted as if they cared about God. They acted as if they were following his Word. But their hearts were only after their own rules. Their hearts were not toward God. Their lips may have been saying the right things at times. But their hearts were evil. And without a pure heart, there is no true worship.

We could be guilty of the same sin. Most of us love tradition. We often do things simply because that is the way we have always done them. And when asked why we do them, sometimes we have to admit that we don't know. And that's fine, in and of itself. But it becomes a problem when we emphasize an unknown tradition over and against God's Word. Or perhaps it's a rule that you have made, or one that you follow. It's a man-made rule and you know and understand that. But at times we may emphasize our man-made rules at the expense of God and his Word. And then we are no better than the Pharisees. But perhaps when you read Jesus' quote from Isaiah and thought about something else. Perhaps you thought about our worship service. You can say much of it by heart. The confession and absolution, the Lord's Prayer, and the Creeds, plus all some favorite psalms or hymns, just to name a few—you know them all. And you can sing or say them without even thinking about them. Our lips move. But our heart is far from worship.

Or we maybe your are here because it's expected of you. You don't really want to, but your parents, or your spouse, or your kids expect you to join them in worship. So you do. You say the right words. But you don't really care about what you are saying. Or you sing a hymn but are thinking about something else. You read the lesson but you aren't concentrating on the words. Your lips move, but your heart is far from the Lord. And yet, you think that by simply being here and participating you can please God and build up some credit for later. But when your heart isn't in it, than it's not true worship. It needs to come from the heart. It stems from the gospel.

And how could it not? How could we not worship God with our whole heart when we remember all that he has done for us! Christ gave up everything for us so we could have it all. He gave us a pure heart before God. And this moves us to worship him. We sing his praise loud and clear not because we are forced to or because that is what we've always done. But we proudly sing his praises because of his grace. We are more than happy to study his Word, listen to a sermon, pray, share our faith, or worship him in any other way because of what he has taken away and given us. When worship comes from the heart because God has made your heart pure—that is true worship. That is worship that pleases God.

Christ said about us, **out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks**. What we say and do comes from the heart. And from a pure heart come praise and thanks to God instead of impure thoughts and words. We spend our time not in empty worship, but in true worship of our one who only Savior who suffered, died, rose, and brought us to faith. With a pure heart we focus not on man-made traditions but on Christ and his gospel. For it is through that gospel that we are forgiven.

Is God pleased with you for being here? At times we may say and do the right things, but not be pleasing to God because our hearts are not in it.

If we want to truly worship God and obey him, we must first turn to the gospel. For though it Christ has made our heart pure. He has removed our sins of selfish worship and so called obedience through his death and resurrection. So we willingly and joyfully sing his praises with a pure heart. Amen.