

Blessed Are the Pure in Heart

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Introduction.

- A. In many ways, the world around us is of two minds on the subject of purity. We all know what purity is: A substance is pure when it is completely itself, without contamination or adulteration by any other substance. In some areas, this is something we prize quite highly. The other day, when Lauren and I were at Wal-Mart, she bought a bottle of something called "Fiji Water". After she was done with it, I got to studying the bottle, and discovered that it, in fact, claims to be water from the island of Fiji in the South Pacific, which is about as far away from here as it's possible to go and still be on planet Earth. That water was shipped thousands and thousands of miles, to central Illinois, to quench the thirst of consumers who want their water pure.
- B. Sadly, while millions and millions of Americans are extraordinarily interested in pure water, they're not nearly as concerned about pure lives. Just like water is pure when it is free from contamination, our lives are pure when they are free from sin. Often, we associate this kind of purity with freedom from sexual sin, but in Scriptural terms, any sin makes us impure. Nonetheless, for most, purity of heart is not a concern.
- C. Jesus tells us that we need to think about purity differently in Matthew 5:8. People who struggle to keep their hearts and lives pure aren't self-deluded masochists; instead, they are pursuing the only course of action that can lead them to a relationship with God. Conversely, if we do not have purity of heart, we can be certain that we will never see the inside of heaven. Purity of heart, then, is something that every one of us needs, and the Bible tells us how and why to get it. Let's consider these things as we study, "Blessed are the pure in heart."

I. God's Take on Purity

- A. Because purity itself is a fairly simple concept, we can start this evening by diving straight into the whys and wherefores and considering God's take on purity. Simply put, the reason why the pure are blessed is because God likes it. Consider the words of Proverbs 15:26. Logically speaking, this makes a great deal of sense. God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all. God cannot sin, nor can He be tempted. Put together, those things define God as a completely pure being. He is all good and no evil. As such, He naturally favors those who are pure like He is. Of course, there's a downside to this too. Just as God's nature draws Him to the pure, so too the impurity of the wicked repulses Him. If we are impure, we will surely repel Him too.
- B. This difference between the pure and the impure also determines the way that God will judge each. We see this explained in Psalm 18:26. One of the notable things about this passage is that to which purity is opposed. David doesn't contrast purity directly with impurity. Instead, the opposite of purity as presented here is deviousness. This tells us that if we are pure, it will make us simple, straightforward people because we don't have anything to hide. Life is simpler that way. I can remember back when I was in about sixth grade or so, and I was hanging out with kids I shouldn't have been hanging out with and doing randomly destructive things that I shouldn't have been doing. When I was up to that kind of no good, I couldn't just come trotting home and report to my parents all the no good I was doing. Instead, when they asked me how I'd spent my day, I had to hold back some of the truth, and make other stuff up, and keep my lies consistent with all my other lies, and so on. It's impurity that makes us devious, but if we are pure, life stays simple.
- C. That's the kind of life that God appreciates in us. If we live simple, straightforward lives, then God will be simple and straightforward with us. If we show up on the day of judgment, trusting in the grace of Jesus, having done the best job we can at being pure, God is equally simply going to fulfill His promise. However, if we come before the throne having tried to be devious, we're going to find out that God is a lot smarter than we are. Sure, my web of deception may have confused my parents back in the day, at least until that memorable occasion when I came home in the back of a police car, but there's nobody who can spin a web that can stop God. If we have been impure, He's going to sort through it all and punish us accordingly.
- D. That means, then, that as we decide between purity and impurity, only purity offers any hope of lasting good. That's what leads James to his exhortation in James 4:8. In many ways, this is a tremendously encouraging verse. If we haven't lived pure lives, we don't just have to wait trembling for the hammer to fall. Instead, if we choose to draw near to God, then He will draw near to us. Just like David wrote, with the pure, He will show Himself pure. Nor is this search for purity just a theoretical possibility. Instead, it is entirely within our power to purify ourselves, to take the wretched person that we used to be, and with God's help, remake ourselves into that which pleases Him. We do this by taking our double-minded old self, a self that used to want to serve God, but wanted to serve the devil just as badly, and training ourselves to be single-minded instead. This is not a quick transformation nor an easy one. Instead, all Christians spend their lives in an attempt to be wholly dedicated to God. However, if we work on it, we will be successful in drawing near.

II. Paths to Purity.

- A. Thankfully, the Scripture is more specific than just this mere command to purify ourselves. It outlines several paths to purity that we need to follow. The first of these paths is through Bible study. Look at how the word is described in Psalm 19:8. Just like God is what He is and uses no deception or artifice, so too the Bible is what it is. There are all kinds of subtleties and depths that we can plumb as we study God's word, but even as those things draw our eye, we can't forget that the Bible is a basically simple book. Its core message is, "Here's what God wants: Do these things, but don't do these things." Likewise, the godly life is a simple life to put into practice. That's not to say it's easy to be a Christian. It isn't. However, it is simple. When the Bible says, "Don't lie," that's not a hard concept to understand. We know what it is to tell the truth, and what it is not to tell the truth. The hard part comes when we have to tell the truth even when it would be much less painful to lie. That's the way the Bible is. It's a simple, straightforward guide to a simple, straightforward life. If we learn those things and do them, we will be devoted to God and uncontaminated by sin. We will be pure.
- B. Likewise, we learn to have a pure heart by meditating on the things that are pure. This is the course that Paul advises us to take in Philippians 4:8-9. When we aren't thinking about anything else in particular, we should be thinking about the things that are pleasing to God. If our meditations are good, our actions will be too.
- C. This is a commandment that may be even more challenging for Christians today to follow than it was for our brethren of 2000 years ago. Today, we live in a world of information overload. We have movies and music and TV and the Internet and all kinds of other things, and most of the things that we hear from any of those sources are not godly in nature. Instead, they are very often the things that Satan wants us to be dwelling on. Whether we can't stop thinking about the steamy scene from "Gray's Anatomy" last night, or we can't stop thinking about that really gorgeous car we saw during the commercial break, we are allowing ourselves to meditate on impure things. Nor does our meditation have to be linked directly to lust or covetousness to be a problem. I know I'm just as guilty here as anybody else. Over the past fifteen years, I have devoted a simply ridiculous amount of time to thinking about University of Missouri football, or thinking about computer games, or what have you. I don't believe that those things are sinful per se, but when I allow them to crowd the thoughts of God and His word out of my mind, they're not doing His work. Let's be pure in our meditations.
- D. On a slightly higher level, though, we develop pure hearts by hoping in God's appearance on the last day. John lays this one out for us in 1 John 3:2-3. In my time as a Christian, I've heard several discussions about what we're going to be like after the resurrection from the dead. Are we going to simply be spirits? Will we have bodies too? Will we be recognizable? Here, John basically tells us not to worry about it, because we don't know, and we aren't going to know until it happens. However, he does tell us that whatever we will be like, we will be like God, and we will be made that way simply by seeing Him. Folks, that's a promise so good that it almost sounds blasphemous! On the day of resurrection, if I do my part, I get to be like God. That's a pretty hefty payout for a mere three score and ten of service, and if we dedicate ourselves to gaining that reward, our dedication will naturally lead us to think and do what pleases God. Our hope will purify us.

III. Fruit of Purity.

- A. That's the ultimate effect of purity, but even in our lives here, we can look for the beneficial fruit that purity will produce in our lives. Notice the things that James describes as the companions of purity in James 3:16-17. Just like the comparison between purity and deviousness back in Psalms helps us understand purity, this list does too. Here, the things that accompany purity are peaceable and merciful, but the things that are opposed to purity are envious and self-seeking. In other words, folks, the more we become pure, the easier we become to get along with too. This makes sense. If we are truly uncontaminated by sin, if our foremost hope in life is to see God and share in His likeness, we are going to care a whole lot less about the peripheral stuff. If someone insults us or cheats us or just says something that rubs us the wrong way, so what? It ain't gonna stick in heaven, and we're going to spend a whole lot more time there than here. On the other hand, though, if we're constantly fighting here to get the upper hand or make sure that nobody disrespects us, that's a sign that what should be peripheral has become a lot more important than that. If the world matters so much to us, we have been tainted by worldliness. Once we remove that taint, though, all the conflict dies down.
- B. Likewise, if we truly achieve purity of heart, it will change our perspective on nearly everything. This is what Paul is getting at in Titus 1:15. The best example that I've ever seen of this is my mother. She's a very intelligent, well educated woman, but I have never in my life seen anybody as clueless about an off-color comment or dirty joke. I can remember one time when we were going to a football game, and some frat guy walked by in a T-shirt with a crude innuendo on it. I glanced over at her to see how she was taking it, but she was just as smiling and oblivious as she could be. She just didn't have the mental vocabulary to process the double entendre. Sometimes, I worry about myself not being as clueless. I wonder what it says about me and my purity that I've seen and heard enough worldly things to get the coarse humor, even while I disapprove of it, or to see a double entendre where none is intended. As we purify ourselves, we ought to be purifying our perception too, so that we become wise to what is good, but innocent to what is evil.

Conclusion. If you haven't lived a pure life, you can still repent and return to God today.