

The Blessing of Purity in Heart Matthew 5:8 with Matthew 5:27-37

By Phillip G. Kayser at DCC on 4-25-2010

Introduction

This beatitude presents a tension; and I think it is a tension that most Christians experience. The goal – “for they shall see God” is the longing of our hearts. We want an authentic relationship with God. But we also wish that we had a more consistent experience of the condition – purity of heart. But if we are honest, I think every one of us will admit that our hearts are not always pure and that we are not totally satisfied with our experience of seeing God. And I wanted to mention this upfront because it is easy to get discouraged when we see our lives out of line with God’s promises. We are going to be talking about progress in this beatitude, not perfection. No one is perfectly pure in heart, or perfectly sees God until heaven.

In fact, in heaven, there may be a sense in which we see God with the eye. But on earth, Hebrews 11:27 describes what is more and more happening to us as we press into that upward calling. That verse describes Moses, and speaks of him leaving Egypt, “**as if seeing the one who is invisible**” (Heb. 11:27, NAB). It’s not a literal seeing. It is “as if seeing the one who is invisible.” So we are seeing an invisible God. It’s a metaphor for closeness. And that’s the way the church has taken it all down through history. They spoke of the beatific vision – the blissful experience of communion with God.

And even in terms of closeness there is constant progress. I cannot think of a person who had seen more of God’s presence and power in his life than Moses had, yet Moses still longed for more and said, “**Please, show me Your glory**” (Exodus 33:18). What had he been seeing *before* this? He had seen God as a friend in the glory cloud. But he wants to see more, so he says, “Please, show me Your glory.” Even the greatest saints in the Bible still longed for more and more of God. And this beatitude tells us the pathway of this beatific vision.

Commentaries point out that the Old Testament passage that is most likely in the background of this beatitude is Psalm 24, which says, “**Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? Or who may stand in His holy place?** [That’s the longing for closeness of communion with God. That’s pressing upward. That’s fellowshiping with God in the very Holy of Holies. But he’s asking, “Who can do that?” Here’s the condition:] **He who**

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has clean hands and a pure heart, [and then he defines what it means to have a pure heart] who has not lifted up his soul to an idol, nor sworn deceitfully. He shall receive blessing from the LORD.” And then later he says, **“This is Jacob, the generation of those who seek Him, who seek Your face.”**

So that is what this sermon is about: How do we seek His face and experience the reality of His presence more and more. Or (as that same Psalm words it), how do we open the gates of our lives so that the King of Glory may come in that we may see Him?

I. No True Happiness Without Heart Purity (“pure in heart”)

A. The meaning of “pure.”

Let’s start with the word, “pure” – the pure in heart. And commentators are divided on the meaning of this term. Some emphasize moral purity within, and others emphasize moral integrity or single-mindedness. And I believe that D.A. Carson is correct when he says, “The dichotomy between these two options is a false one; it is impossible to have one without the other.”¹

Well, thankfully we have seen that Jesus gives His own exposition of these beatitudes. And if you look at verses 27-37 you will see his teaching on the pure in heart. In verses 27-30 he deals with adultery in the heart. In verses 31-32 he talks about breaking covenant, which is a lack of integrity. In verses 33-37 he deals with trustworthiness versus pulling the wool over people’s eyes. So both integrity and more purity are being covered.

B. Counterfeit Purity

But if you back up to verse 27 we are going to first of all look at counterfeit purity that will let you down. You can work as hard as you want to on this outward purity and it is not going to open the gates so that the King of Glory can come in. In fact, you are going to feel dry and dusty and even with a sense of bondage and duty. Though sons do have duties, if you are feeling like a slave, you are missing the boat. In your outline I have listed four counterfeits that the Pharisees were masters at. And if these are the kinds of purity that you have been working hard at, you are opening the wrong door, and you’ve got an orphan spirit.

¹ D.A. Carson, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary with the New International Version: Matthew, chapters 1-12* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), p. 135.

1. Social Purity (“you have heard that it was said” Matt. 5:27,31,33)

The first counterfeit was social purity. And I call it a social purity because everything is measured by what people say and think. Look at Matthew 5:27, He says, “**You have heard that it was said to those of old.**” And he repeats that in verse 31 and again in verse 33, 38, 43, and in the next chapters. What does He mean by that phrase? Well, He is referring to the traditions of the fathers. There were oral traditions of the Pharisees that were a mixture of Scripture, man-made laws, and superstition, and bad, bad, interpretations of Scripture. Whenever Jesus spoke of Scripture He would say, “It is written” or a similar phrase, and whenever He referred to the oral traditions He would say, “You have heard it said.” And that is such an important distinction to keep in your mind, because otherwise, you might think that Jesus was overturning the Old Testament. He was not. Verse 17-20 make that so clear.

Now this one may be confusing to you because you *can* find this quote, “You shall not commit adultery,” in the Old Testament. Yes you can. But you can also find it in the Talmud, which is the later compilation of these traditions of the fathers. So what’s going on here? What Jesus was opposing was the Pharisee’s truncation of the law to a mere outward act and completely ignoring what the Old Testament said about the heart. You see, Christ had many problems with the teachings of the Pharisees. Sometimes they misapplied the Old Testament. And we saw that was the case with the Lex Talionis. Sometimes they took it out of context. Sometimes they only applied one part of the law, and refused to apply another part. Sometimes they added to the law. But always, it was the Pharisees *opinions* that became the standard for Israel, not what *God* thought. That’s what upset Christ. They didn’t want you to be Bereans and check out what they said by studying the Scripture. They wanted you to submit to their opinions so that righteousness was no longer a Biblical standard; it had become a social standard. And Jesus was on a warpath against the Pharisees because of the way they had substituted their authority for the Bible’s. It was a problem whether they took away from the law, added to it, or misinterpreted it.

So in verse 27 they have something right. Jesus is not going to say that it is OK to commit adultery. “**You have heard that it was said to those of old, “You shall not commit adultery.”**” The Pharisees bragged about their keeping that law. They said that the Bible had 613 commandments. And Christ tells His disciples, “They are wrong.” They failed to count Proverbs 6:25, which says, “Do not lust after her beauty *in your heart.*” They left that out. They also failed to take into account the passages

describing Potiphar's wife, or David with Bathsheba, or passages like Psalm 51. Those accounts highlight how adultery started in the heart. And so they had narrowed the focus of God's law. Later in the chapter He will blast them for adding to the law, but now He is blasting them for leaving out aspects of God's law. We will be dealing with that more in a bit. But here I am just trying to prove that they were content with a social standard of righteousness. What mattered to a lot of people was not what the Bible said but "What are the Pharisees going to think of me."

So here is my first question this morning: What kind of morality do you hold to? Does your heart long to be right with God's standards of purity or is your primary concern what others will think of you? It's really a test of where your eyes are fixed – on man, or on seeing God? And I can assure you that the church of Jesus Christ is rife with Pharisaism on this very point of subtracting from God's law just as much as they are on adding to God's laws. We are satisfied with a social righteousness and we will not expend the effort necessary to pursue a deeper righteousness unless it is expected by society or at least by the church that we are in.

Today drunkenness is frowned upon, but gluttony is tolerated. You who would never get drunk (and maybe criticize those do), are you willing to be gluttons. You who would never think of committing adultery, do you take the time to flip through the lingerie catalogs that come unsolicited in your mailbox? You who would never think of becoming a Peeping Tom (looking into the bedroom windows of others), have you become socially acceptable Peeping Toms with the movies that you watch? It should disgust you just as much to be a Peeping Tom at a movie as it would be to be a Peeping Tom at a house. Today addiction to cigarettes is frowned upon as it should be, but addiction to the caffeine in Mountain Dew, Dr. Pepper, Pepsi Cola, Coffee or Tea is socially acceptable. We call it the evangelical drug of choice. Notice that I didn't say it was wrong to drink these things. There is nothing wrong with caffeine if we use it responsibly, but the Scripture says that we must not be controlled by anything.

Of course a Pharisaical spirit will latch onto what I have just said and forbid caffeine. There is growing evidence that there might actually be some health benefits to caffeine consumed in moderation. But people will think that just in case we get addicted, we better not drink any. But that would be legalism – adding to the Scripture. I don't smoke for personal reasons, but if you think smoking is a sin, you have added to the Scripture. Most medical studies might argue that abuse of it is bad for your health, but there are some medical studies indicating that moderate use of nicotine has a number of health benefits. But science is not infallible. I think a clear case can be made

to say that addiction would be the sin. And there may be other good reasons not to smoke. But I bring these examples up to illustrate that we need to be careful about even allowing science to be a dictator of conscience. That would simply be another manifestation of social righteousness. Medical science is constantly changing its opinion on such matters. While it can inform our opinions, it should not dictate conscience. Only the Scriptures can.

When your life is governed by what *others* think, you will end up with bondage and occasional bouts of misery because now your sense of purity comes from being a people pleaser. In fact, ironically, you will end up with areas of your life that are lawless and others areas of your life that are legalistic. You need to realize that lawlessness and legalism always go hand in hand. In some of the circles I knew in Canada people were fond of saying, “We’re not under law, but under grace.” So they ignored the Old Testament. By throwing out Old Testament law they became antinomian. But you know, the human heart can’t go without law, so what do these kinds of people do? They generate all kinds of man-made laws. When I was growing up these people who were supposedly not under law said that men were compromised if they grew beards. They frowned on girls who wore makeup and earrings. They frowned on everyone who played cards, drank wine, or listened to syncopated music. So at the very time that they are taking away God’s laws they are adding man’s laws. Another way of saying it is that at the very time that they are antinomian they become legalistic. The two always go hand in hand. In contrast, the pure in heart want to see God. They don’t care what man thinks; they care what God thinks.

Let’s give a few more examples so that we can understand what a social righteousness is. We have Christians who have thrown out God’s Old Testament blueprints for economics (so they are antinomian), but they have imposed a legalistic standard of socialism, and insist that you aren’t godly if you don’t vote for candidates who are trying to rule by Romans 12 love rather than by Romans 13 justice. They treat you as a sinner if you don’t support socialized medicine, Social Security, Welfare, Food Stamps, etc. I call it a social purity because you are being judged by modern views of justice, not Biblical views of justice.

Let me give a subtler example that could easily affect us if we are not careful. There are people who latch onto one part of the Bible for courtship as the only standard, when other parts of the Bible explicitly give liberty of entering marriage in four or five ways, depending on the situation. So you can fall into this problem even by following a Biblical mandate. If you only looked at Genesis 2, you might argue that both the man and the woman

should be passive and let their parents arrange a marriage with no courtship and no betrothal. If you looked at the story of Isaac as the paradigm you might say that the woman has veto power. If you look at Jacob, you might say that the man should be active in seeking a wife without parental involvement and he should have a long courtship. If you look at Hosea you might see evidences for a betrothal period in which Romance is developed. Other passages speak of both courtship and betrothal. And you will find people who park on one passage as if that is the only paradigm the Bible gives. And they set it up as a standard for everyone, and because they can cite chapter and verse they say that it is *the* Biblical standard. And people sometimes feel like they will be in sin if they follow a different Biblical paradigm. Where is their vision? Their vision is on what other people think. Now don't get me wrong, I like courtship, but I am in the process of writing a book that outlines the wide range of Biblical options and how to apply the Biblical principles to your unique situations with liberty. And I'm writing it because I have seen both antinomianism (where people don't want to think about how the Bible applies to the subject) as well as legalism (where they are more restrictive than the Bible is). But both antinomianism and legalism are evidences of a Pharisaical approach to life. It's a social righteousness, not a Biblical one. Are you getting a lit bit of a feel for why Jesus was upset with the "you-have-heard-it-said" form of purity?

Let me give you another example. In the ten years that this church has been in existence, I think I have had at least three TRs tell us that our order of worship is not Biblical. When I've asked them to show me in the Bible what they considered to be a Biblical of worship, they couldn't do it. They just said, "Well, that's not the way the Puritans did it." And I would try to show how every jot and tittle of what we do we try to back up from the Scripture. One of these TRs told me that it was not good to have drums, violin, and guitars in worship. He actually said that the piano is the only appropriate instrument. I asked him why that instrument was OK and why other instruments that are actually mentioned in the Bible in connection with worship are not OK. There was no Scripture. There was just a social righteousness of "this is the way we have always done it." You see, we Reformed people can fall into this just as much as others can.

On the other hand, I have had at least two Covenant Renewal visitors (who were not TR) who have said that our worship order was not Biblical because it didn't follow the pattern set in one Covenant Renewal book. I pointed out how I like the order in that book, and that is one of five Biblical orders of worship that we follow. But it isn't the only one that you will find in the Bible. We are using the one in 2Chronicles 30. But in one of the cases,

despite the fact that our order is more clearly found in Scripture on the tiny details than his order didn't faze him. He felt it was wrong to deviate from what he had been taught. So even though he was following Scripture, he was being more restrictive than Scripture. So social righteousness can come in many different flavors.

For some of you, the Pharisaism may not come from adding to the Word or from taking away from the Word. It might come simply by feeling badly about what others think or feeling satisfied with what others think because the Pharisees of our society are not breathing down your neck. But let me assure you that all social standards of purity will rob you of your kingdom blessings. Don't look to man. That leads to bondage. Look to the Scriptures alone for a standard of purity.

2. Outward Conformity (Matt. 5:27-28)

But there is a second counterfeit, and that is outward purity. You might be a person who could care less what others think. Social righteousness doesn't impact you at all. You pride yourself in doing the opposite of what other people do. But your sense of purity only goes skin deep. You are satisfied with your own outward conformity to (perhaps) your own standard. "I've made a standard and I'm living by that standard."

Christ goes on to say in verse 28, "**But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust after her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.**" Jesus told the Pharisees in chapter 23 that they cleaned the outside of the cup, but left the inside filthy. And in blasting them He was merely taking them back to the Old Testament. Psalm 51:10 is David's plea, "**Create in me a clean heart, O God. And renew a right spirit within me.**" In Psalm 73:1 Asaph says, "**Truly God is good to Israel, to such as are pure in heart.**" This is not new teaching like some anti-theonomists have said. This is a reinterpretation of what the Old Testament *really* means. For Asaph happiness was not outward conformity; it was purity of heart; it was a heart drawn to the fire of God's holiness. The Pharisees had missed the boat in their interpretation.

Dr. Krabbendam used to say, "The heart of the matter is the matter of your heart." What about you? Are you as diligent in guarding your thought-life, as you are your social life? You may not have sworn at your boss outwardly, but did you do it inwardly? You may not have felt that person's fanny, but did your mind do it? If you do not work at controlling the purity of your heart, eventually it will spill out into action. Christ said "**For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.**"

I remember in Ethiopia being flabbergasted when the first cuss word came out of my mouth. And I knew I was in trouble as soon as the word came out because a very strict teacher at our boarding school was driving the van. He slammed on the breaks, turned around, glared at me and said, “Get out of the van.” My mom’s never even heard this story. It was so embarrassing. And I remember thinking to myself, “I’ve never sworn before. How did that word come out?” It was so disconcerting. But I realized that I had been swearing in my heart, and had not been concerned with heart purity. Jesus says, **“For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.”** You can never enter into the happiness of these beatitudes without turning your heart over to the Lord.

Morality alone is not enough. The great Puritan, Thomas Boston said, “Morality can drown a man as fast as vice. A vessel may sink with gold or with dung.” His point was that you can have an outward morality like the Pharisees and drown because of a heart that has never been offered up to God. No amount of morality is going to impress God. You are on a sinking ship. And true Christianity is a Christianity that is intent on serving God from the heart, and with liberty, and with thanksgiving, and with power.

3. Technical Purity (Matt. 5:31-32)

So Christ countered a mere social conformity, and a mere outward conformity, and in verses 31-32 He counters a technical kind of purity. We all know horrible court cases where a person was clearly demonstrated to be guilty, but he got off on a technicality. And we think, “That’s just not right!” But that’s what is going on here. He says, **“Furthermore it has been said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’”** [And by the way, if you read Deut. 24 you will see that this is not exactly what God said. God was describing sinful behavior, and the Pharisees turned it into a command. So Christ corrects them saying,] **“But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery.”** We won’t have time to get into an exposition of this passage, but the rabbinical school of Hillel took the Hebrew phrase *erwath Debar* in Deuteronomy 24 as an excuse for an any-cause divorce. And it is true that that Hebrew word can mean many different things. The closest you can narrow the word down is something repulsive. And Hillel thought, “Hey, if you find your wife repulsive, get rid of her.” Almost any reason would do. But when Christ got into this in more detail in Matthew 19, He pointed out that even though their interpretation is

technically possible, it totally misses the spirit in which Deuteronomy 24 was given - to limit divorce, not to open it up. They were playing with the words of Scripture rather than seeking to submit to the spirit of Scripture. And it revealed a heart that lacked integrity. If you have a heart that is looking for a way out of a moral commandment, I guarantee you that you will eventually be able to find some technical way around it that can satisfy your heart.

And these technicalities start so young. I think I've told you of the time when I was still preschool, but I saw money on my parent's dresser drawers, and I really wanted the money bad. But I couldn't bring my conscience to swipe the money. So instead, I left, and a few minutes later I came into the room and said to myself. This shouldn't be out here. It might get stolen. I'm going to put it in a safe place. So I took the money, went under the house, and buried it in the dirt. And the next day I went under the house to play, and I found some money. And because I found it under the house, I felt satisfied somehow. Utter blindness! But as foolish as that technicality might appear to you, it is really no more foolish than the excuses some people come up with today.

There was a pastor who was in process of divorcing his wife and had talked a woman in his congregation into divorcing her husband so that they could get married. He was immediately put under discipline, but he didn't repent. And I remember talking with him for a couple of hours and showing him how his divorce and remarriage would be unbiblical. And he actually admitted that it was unbiblical. But he said, "God led me to divorce my wife and marry this woman, so even though it is not God's perfect will revealed in Scripture, it is his permissive will." He had found some technicality that had made him comfortable. And I told him that I could guarantee that God had not led him to do that because God does not contradict himself. But he was not persuaded.

Now here's the point I want to make. It would be very easy for me to shake my head at this rationalization and lack of purity in heart, but forget that I do exactly the same things. I have on more than one occasion told a fib, or embellished a story, or given an exaggeration, and when the Spirit convicted me of it I would argue in my mind using technicalities. And some of the arguments as to why I didn't need to tell people that I had borne false witness were pretty lame technicalities. Even as they were coming to my mind I could tell that they are lame excuses. And knowing full well the distance that failure to confess could put between me and God, I would submit to the Spirit, and tell them that this exaggeration was a lie, and I had repented of it.

And you would think I would learn my lesson and not throw out things I don't know, but Scripture says that in the multitude of words there is no lack of sin. Even this past Thursday as I was teaching at a conference, I publically threw out a statistic that was actually just a guess, and I slightly embellished an illustration. And as I was convicted, I was arguing with myself. I'm thinking that the general idea was right, and they aren't going to know the difference anyway. And I asked Kathy if she could remember the story the way I told it, and she couldn't. So first thing before teaching began Friday morning I had to humble myself and tell them that what I said was wrong, and I shouldn't have done so. You can't argue with the Holy Spirit. He always wins. It's just better to get it over with. But our hearts are so prone to do the things that these Pharisees did.

And this doesn't even have to be with other people. You can be reading the Scripture and feel your heart wrestling with the implications of that Scripture – do I really want the text to say that? And you have to rebuke your heart immediately and say, “O Lord, help me to love your law. Help me not to rationalize.” If you know in your heart's heart that the Scripture is pointing to A, even if you could successfully argue that it is pointing to B, you know you don't have heart purity.

4. Constant Affirmations Of Purity (Matt. 5:33-37)

The final kind of counterfeit purity that Christ blasts is seen in verses 33-37. He says,

Matthew 5:33 “Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord.’

Matthew 5:34 But I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God's throne;

Matthew 5:35 nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King.

Matthew 5:36 Nor shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black.

Matthew 5:37 But let your “Yes” be “Yes,” and your “No,” “No.” For whatever is more than these is from the evil one.

And Jesus says that if you have to say, “I swear that I'm telling the truth,” before people will believe you, you are revealing a heart that lacks integrity. In verse 37 Jesus said that our word must be as good as gold, and “**whatever is more than these is from the evil one.**” Constant affirmations of purity don't make for purity. Constant affirmations of integrity don't make you a person with integrity.

[The rest of what was planned in preaching was cut off at this point because of having run out of time. But pastor Kayser emphasized the

importance of not focusing on the negative, but moving on to the positive. There is a glory and a blessing in seeing God that makes the purity of heart a privilege rather than a burden. This pure heart too is given as a gift of God, and when we lack it, we go back to step 1 of the beatitudes, and as a beggar, we seek it from heaven.]

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By Phillip G. Kayser at DCC on 4-25-2010

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