

Pure in Heart

Jonathan K. Dodson | Matthew 5:8 | May 31, 2015

Rock bottom and soaring heights Christianity share the same elevator. The way to reach the pinnacle of human joy and the foundation of faith converge in one place—seeing God. To see God is to look into the face of pure beauty, unmatched power, unending love. Here, then, is the question: are you seeing God? Are you taking in his pure glory? Stunned by his grace? Humbled by his power? What holds us back? Jesus says, its purity of heart. How do you get a pure heart? And when you do, what's it like to see God? Let's look and see: The Problem of purity, Heart of purity, a Vision of purity.

Problem of Purity

There's a back story to this beatitude. It comes out of the Psalms and goes something like this. There's an ancient mountain, luxuriant and green, where people have built entire cities into the mountain. The rivers run with wine, everyone has their own vines and fig trees, they lack for nothing. Children dance and play free from harm. The hearts of men and women are glad. At the top there is pure beauty that puts Athena in her shadow. And the only way to get on the mountain, to live in the city, is to climb to the top and stand before pure beauty, and to pass her test. She has to look you in the eye, down into the soul and see total purity. If she does, you receive her blessing and get to live on the mountain forever. The psalm puts it like this: "[He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false and does not swear deceitfully. He will receive blessing from the LORD](#)" (25:4-5). So how do we pass the test? Purity. What is purity? One answer is **pure living**. Steady moral character regardless of how you feel. Read your Bible, go to church, give financially, show mercy to the poor, forgive others, abstain from immoralities, don't love money. Essentially be true to a set of outer rules. Pure living can quickly turn into cold religion. Or an intellectual purity, a set of doctrines. Beauty will inspect your hands. God also requires a clean heart. True beauty looks at this person and sees an impure heart. Pure living fails Beauty's test. The other tendency is to see **pure intention**, personal authenticity. This version of purity isn't external but internal. It privileges one rule, to thine own self be true. My decisions about how I date, spend my money, what I do with my time, with my family, career, sexuality are governed by me and no one else. As long as *I'm true to myself*, to my inner longings and desires, that's pure, that's what matters. What matters isn't outward morality but inner consistency, being true to self. Pure beauty looks at this person and sees impure hands. Both fail the test, and both have a fragment of truth. *Pure living*, outward actions matter. You can be full of lustful thoughts, but restrain yourself from porn and adultery. 91% of Americans say its wrong and 79% of men don't do it. 21% do. Pure living is good for society and self. It resists exploitation of men and women. It preserves families. But it's not enough, because unless the heart is dealt with that lust will eventually break out. The limb will snap. *Pure intention* is also good. Not just jumping through ritualistic hoops or doing things because the church says to do them, but instead forging personal convictions, being personally engaged and true. The problem is true to what? True to self, true to your own inner light. That makes for social chaos. [Ross Ulbricht.] His reason for starting Silk Road was that we should have the freedom to buy and sell whatever we want to. His personal, inner commitment to freedom had no boundaries

except the ones he set. The Judge passed a life sentence and said, “what you did was terribly destructive to our social fabric.” Ulbricht: *“I’m not a self-centered sociopathic person that was trying to express some inner badness. I do love freedom. I wanted to empower people to be able to make choices in their lives.”* This is his problem. He loved freedom, to do whatever his inner self deemed right, to empower individual choice over universal right and wrong, but he was true to self. Inner light, personal freedom is not enough. It is not a pure source of guidance. We have to get that from the outside. Any person who relies on inner purity will stand before true Beauty and be banished from the mountain forever. Pure living, pure intention are not enough.

Heart of Purity

So what is? How do we stand the test of utter Purity? Jesus says focus not inwardly or outwardly but on the whole: “Blessed is the pure in heart for they shall see God.” The Hebrew idea “heart” stands for the whole thinking, believing, feeling, acting, whole person. Greek philosophy came along and divided us, mind, body, will and we’ve been limping ever since. As Western people we have a divided notion of the Self, inner and outer, our thoughts different from our actions. And so we can privilege one over the other. But the Hebrews dealt with the whole person, what they called the heart. They knew man was created as an integrated being and that the love of God and love for God integrates. They understood that a person is undivided when they are united with God. Whole person theology. But modern thinking has divided us up. We have multiple selves. Conflicting desires and actions. **There is an grand fissure between the outer and inner life that only the love of God can heal.** We may love outer conformity or inner dependence and as a result we are impure, un-whole. And in order for that healing to occur, we have to admit our inner inconsistency, our lack of integrity, our love of self in place of the love of God. Essentially, “the only way to have a pure heart is to realize you have an impure heart” (MLJ). To admit that you lift your soul to what is false not true. That there’s inner deceit. We’ve thought our way, our self-made ethics; our personal philosophy is better than God’s. And insisted that he not disagree with us. We need a holistic cure, something that can treat the outside, the inside, and everything in between, renew and reintegrate mind, body, will. That something is total, in the words of the Psalmist, the king of Glory. That’s who’s at the top of the mountain, whose beauty we must mirror. As the story unfolds, we discover the king of Glory comes down the mountain, and he enters the divided world, lives a sinless life with men, teaches and serves them, but realizes teaching and serving are not enough. They need total change. So before he leaves their world, he says I will draw their impurity to myself, like a magnet, knowing it would crush him. And it did. He breathed his last breath and said it is finished. To all who surrendered themselves, their broken attempts at purity, he will absorb their impurity. But with the evil gone, they still needed healing, an infusion of purity, an undivided heart. Jesus wasn’t enough. So he sent his Spirit to purify the heart. St. Paul says it like this: “But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit” (Tit 3:4-5). The word regenerate means to remake or rebirth. The Spirit enters into us and fashions us into something more beautiful, something integrated and whole, like the true humanity we are meant to be. The prophets talk about it in surgical terms, God takes out the heart of stone and replaces it with a heart

of flesh and then actually imparts his Spirit, the electrical charge of pure beauty of heavenly glory, and revives us, waken us, enliven us to God. This is how you get true purity. Not by outer acts or inner light, but the holistic work of the Spirit and the Son. It's what every single human needs. Only then can we lift our heads, walk through the gates, stare Glory in the face, passing the test. Why? Because the Spirit takes the healing light of Christ and runs it right through you.

Vision of Purity

Now the purifying work of the Spirit is thrilling but also puzzling. Puzzling because, despite the fact that I've surrendered my impurities to Christ and experience a personal renewal by the Spirit, I still slip back into doing impure things. What are we to do? How do we keep from reverting to that Greek dualism, privileging outer or inner purity? **By seeing God and practicing purity.** Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God isn't just true on the mountain; it's also true in the valley. It's a promise for the future and for the present. How does it work? Seeing God and holiness have a reciprocal relationship. **Holiness helps you see God, and seeing God helps holiness.** We often think of holiness as an external thing, by its very nature is a whole person thing. It simply means to be close to God and therefore to be like God. To be close to God you have to see him. And things can get in our way: preoccupation with our children, our financial future, our perception in the company, our demands of the church. They can crowd out your vision of God. So being holy is minimizing those things, moving them out of the line of sight, and getting a great view of God. [Concert] And when you get a close to the stage of God's glory, you forget about the anxiety, temptation, and pain. They lose their grip on you. See the opposite is also true. **Holiness helps us see God, but seeing God helps us be holy.** Scripture says, "*Without holiness no one will see the Lord, yes, but the opposite is also true (Heb 12:14). Without seeing the Lord no one will have holiness.*" How do you see God? There's obviously more to this than a physical glance. When people are dating, we often say "John is seeing Sarah." What do we mean by that? An occasional stare? Oh no, we mean much more. We mean that two people have taken an interest in one another, so much that they cut out other things, and focused on one another. They see each other privately, on dates and so on, but it also means more. It means they are preoccupied with one another when they aren't together. When two people are seeing each other, they see one another even when they don't see one another. We take snapshots of the ones we love and take them with us. Seeing God works in a similar way. **It's not sitting in private prayer or Biblical meditation all day long, but it is seeing God enough privately that his image goes with you.** Christ hangs about you. You welcome his presence in your work and play. You even love seeing him so much that you steal moments with him throughout the day. Why?! **You are under the general influence of his love.** It shapes you, preoccupies you, makes you do some crazy things, but it doesn't eradicate who you are. You are you, but you're a better you because you're seeing God. Seeing God makes you whole, blessed, glad. If that's not happening, then you've got some things to clear out of the way. So you see, the way to be pure, to be who God has made you to be in the Spirit and the Son, has everything to do with your vision. **Holiness helps you see God, and seeing God helps you be holy.** So while it's true that initial look at Christ puts the divided self back together. It's the continual look at Christ that holds us together. Help one another with this, and let's keep seeing the King of Glory.