

Purity: Our Goal, God's Work Matthew 5:8

A teacher, testing her students on the book of Proverbs asked: Cleanliness is next to what? With great feeling a small boy replied: Impossible.

Someone once said, "It is not enough for a gardener to love flowers; he must also hate weeds."

With that we come to the topic of our passage today in **Matthew 5:8** "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God."

Jesus is interested in the heart. If we grasped the full meaning of what He is saying we would approach this verse with great awe on the one hand and with great inadequacy on the other hand because the goal of purity seems impossible. Yet we are called to hate evil.

Consider for a moment the condition of the heart. **Genesis 6:5** "The Lord saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time."

Though written thousands of years ago, that verse sums up what we're seeing today.

Jeremiah 17:9-10 "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure (desperately wicked – KJV; desperately sick – NASB, ESV). Who can understand it. I the Lord search the heart and examine the mind, to reward a man according to his conduct, according to what his deeds deserve."

"Beyond cure" refers to something that is terminal and incurable, which doesn't give us any hope.

Mark 7:20-23 "What comes out of a man is what makes him 'unclean.' 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. All these evils come from inside and make a man 'unclean.'"

Read some of what Paul writes and you get a

picture of man's complete depravity, given over to his lust.

Romans 1:21, 29-32

Romans 3:9-18

You may sometimes hear the term 'total depravity.' That doesn't mean that every person will commit all the sins listed. It doesn't mean that we are as bad as we can possibly be. Neither does it mean that man's conscience is incapable of discerning what is right or wrong. Total depravity means we are consumed by sin with no hope of getting things turned around on our own. **Romans 8:8** reminds us that in the flesh we can't please God. Total depravity accurately describes what the Bible teaches about the fallen nature of man in all aspects of his life – mind, will, emotions, and flesh. The flesh refers to our natural person. In this condition Paul describes us as being "dead in sins." (**Eph. 2:1; Col. 2:13**)

With my heart condition as it is, there is no hope of ever becoming pure in character through my own efforts. Just like the little boy, cleanliness or purity is impossible. That creates a problem. So before we look at what Jesus is saying in our verse, let's consider first our problem without purity.

I. OUR PROBLEM WITHOUT PURITY

If we are going to talk about our problem, the first place to look at is where sin came from.

A. Our Sinful Character

It's true that we all have a sin nature.

Romans 3:23 bears that out. "For ALL have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God."

Comparing us to the wandering nature of sheep, **Isaiah 53:6** says that we have all gone astray, that every man has turned to his own way or does his own thing. As **Judges 21:25** says "every man did what was right in his own eyes." Morality is relative meaning I can make up my own rules. Without an absolute moral guide, our human nature is bent on doing what is wrong. Paul sums it up better than anyone else when he describes the sin nature at work in him.

Romans 7:14-24

Where did our sin nature come from? First of all, Scripture shows us that our sin nature is inherited.

1. Our sin nature is inherited

Essentially, that means you didn't have a choice in the matter. **Romans 5:12-14** tells us that sin entered the world through one man. That man was Adam. Besides the command to be fruitful and multiply and tend the garden God had placed him in, God gave one central command – he could eat from every tree in the garden except one. If he ate from that tree, God told him he would die. A physical and spiritual change would take place. Created to live forever, disobedience would result in a change in that physical status. Man would begin to age. His body would be racked with aches and pains and sickness that would attack his body and eventually he would die. We all feel it every day. Things like torn ligaments and carpal tunnel and cancer and colds and arthritis plague us. Heart disease and hearing loss and vision problems require devices to help us hear or see better. Those things and many more are the result of the inherited sin that came through Adam. Paul says we groan.

But there was another problem inherited with Adam's sin and that has to do with our spiritual nature. When Adam sinned in disobedience, he became spiritually separated from God. Like the physical abnormalities that plague us, that separation was passed on to every person as well.

You might think that doesn't seem very fair. After all we didn't get a say in the matter. It doesn't seem fair that I got my baldness from my mother's father or that I am predisposed to high blood pressure from my parents or that I got my shortness from my mom's family, but that is the genetic makeup of what was passed on through the gene pool that is now me. My sin nature, your sin nature was passed on from your parents and their parents all the way back to Adam and Eve. When we were born, we don't even have a chance to live a sinless life, because we are already sinners by nature.

David sums up our inherited sin nature by saying **“Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time**

my mother conceived me.” (Psalm 51:5)

I am not a sinner because I sin, I sin because I am a sinner by nature.

Our sin nature was no accident, it was inherited. Second, our sin nature is also imputed.

2. Our sin nature is imputed

Imputed is both a legal and a financial term and simply means credited to an account. The sin of Adam has been credited to every human being following him because he was the first human. That is the inherited aspect of his sin to us. It's also known as original sin. In addition to inheriting a fallen nature, we have also been credited with the guilt of his sin. **Romans 5:18** says that the consequence of his sin was passed on to everyone, so that everyone is guilty. The guy who drives the getaway car is just as guilty as the guy who robbed the bank.

Verse 19 continues by saying that by Adam's sin we were all made sinners. Going back to **verses 12-13**, before the law was given man was guilty of sin by virtue of Adam's sin since we all inherit what he passed on. We are guilty by association.

Our sin nature is inherited.
Our sin nature is imputed.
Our sin nature is individual.

3. Our sin nature is individual

These are the sins I commit every day. I can't claim as Flip Wilson did on his comedy show that **“the devil made me do it.”** I don't need help from anyone else when it comes to sin. It's in my spiritual DNA. Every day we commit personal sins. Every day we break one or more of God's commands. As I said, we aren't sinners because we sin, we sin because we are sinners. Your sins may be the same or different from mine or from others. The point is, we don't need any help sinning. We do a bang-up job on our own. (**Ps. 51:4**) David also says in that psalm that we really have sinned against God.

If we want even just a glimpse of things that are included on such a list of sins, we can read **Ephesians 4** and **Colossians 3**, which, by the way, are not exhaustive lists because sin in our character. All sin is abhorrent to God and it bears consequences.

B. Our Sinful Consequences

God spelled it out quite explicitly in **Genesis 2:17** that if Adam disobeyed by eating the fruit from the forbidden tree, he would die. Let me emphasize that God meant what He said. He wasn't just going to turn away and ignore it since it was just the first offense. Disobedience always has consequences. It may be immediate, or it may not. Both are spelled out in **Hebrews 9:27** where we are told every person has a destiny with physical death, which is the consequence of sin, but even after that there is the judgment, which is the destiny of anyone who dies without Christ as Savior. One is physical and the other is spiritual. When the serpent enticed Eve to eat the forbidden fruit, she said they couldn't eat it or even touch it or they would die. But the serpent mocked God's command by telling her she wouldn't die. As I have said before, I imagine that as he said that, he reached up and plucked a nice juicy piece of fruit from the tree showing her that even touching it didn't cause him to die, so she had nothing to worry about. That's all the convincing she needed and just like that mankind not only bears the nature of sin but its consequences as well.

We know well **Roman 6:23** which tells us the payment for sin is death. **Isaiah 59:2** says that our iniquities have separated us from God so that His face is hidden from us and our prayers are not heard by Him. We cannot hide our sin from Him.

Hebrews 4:13 says that everything is uncovered and laid bare before God. In **Galatians 6:7-8** we are told not to deceive ourselves thinking that sin has no consequences. Paul says that we will reap what we sow and if we sow what pleases our sinful nature, if we do things that gratify the sinful nature, **“from that nature we will reap destruction.”** **Habakkuk 1:13** tells us why. It's because God's eyes are too pure to look on evil and cannot tolerate

wrong. Our sin nature, that nature that is unregenerate and shameless in its actions and motives and thoughts all stemming from a wicked heart, will receive the consequences for our sinful condition.

1. Sin makes us its slave

John 8:34 “Jesus said, ‘I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin.’”

2. Sin makes us an offense to God

Isaiah 59:2 “Your iniquities have separated you from God; your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear.”

3. Sin results in death

Ezekiel 18:4 “The soul who sins is the one who will die.”

4. Sin results in condemnation

Galatians 5:19-21 “The acts of the sinful nature are obvious (lists a number of sins)...I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.”

We have a problem without purity – it's our sin nature and that sin nature makes us subject to God's judgment. We all have it, but we are called to change. We are called to be pure in heart.

Where does this sin nature that is in us come from?

Jesus says it starts in the heart. It's part of our spiritual DNA. That's why Jesus calls us to a pure heart. Let's look next at our pattern for purity.

II. OUR PATTERN FOR PURITY

Since purity is not in us, the only possible way for us to have a pure heart is to be changed supernaturally. God tells us how that is possible in **Jeremiah 33:31** “I will put My law in their minds and write it on their hearts.” In other words, it's only possible by divine intervention and implementation. So we look first at God's pattern of holiness.

A. God's Pattern Of Holiness

When we speak of God's holiness, we refer to absolute moral purity. In **Isaiah 6:3**, when the

prophet wrote down what the angels were declaring about God as being holy repeating it three times **“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty”** they didn’t have a stuttering problem. Their repetition was a way of emphasizing His infinite holiness. Holiness is His character. He is absolutely without any sin whatsoever in His being and in His actions. The repetition describes the completeness of His holiness. The same declaration about God is repeated by the angels in **Revelation 4:8**.

In its definition, Got Questions puts it this way: **“The holiness of God refers to the unparalleled majesty of His incomparable being and His blameless, faultless, unblemished moral purity.”**

His holiness means that He has no trace of sin. **Numbers 23:19** tells us that God is not like man. He does not lie and therefore never needs to repent. **Leviticus 11:44** **“I am the Lord your God; consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am holy.”**

Psalms 99:9 **“Exalt the Lord our God and worship at His holy mountain, for the Lord our God is holy.”**

Isaiah 40:25 **“To whom will you compare Me? Or who is My equal?” says the Holy One.”**

I Peter 1:15-16 **“But just as He who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do. For it is written, ‘Be holy, because I am holy.’”**

We read in **I John 1:5** that there is no darkness in God at all. His holiness is a standard we cannot attain because our nature is one of sinfulness while His is one of absolute purity. God’s holiness is our pattern, a standard **Romans 3:23** says we fall short of.

No pattern of holiness would be complete without looking at Jesus’ pattern of holiness.

B. Jesus’ Pattern Of Holiness

The angel who spoke to Mary about her being chosen to be the Messiah’s mother called the child to be born to her as **“the holy one.”** (**Luke 1:35**)

II Corinthians 5:21 “He knew no sin.”

Hebrews 4:15 **“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weakness, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet was without sin.”**

In **I Peter 1:18-19** Jesus is described as a lamb without blemish or defect. In **I Peter 2:22** it says **“He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in His mouth.”** **I Peter 3:18** says He was righteous.

Jesus, being in the very nature God, was sinless both in His deity and in His humanity. Because He was sinless in every way, He also serves as a pattern of purity for us.

If we want to know what purity looks like, look no further than that standard.

A visitor to the studio of a great painter noticed some beautiful gems on the easel. The painter was asked why he kept them there to which the painter replied that they were there to tone up his eyes. When working in pigments, he said that the sense of color begins to weaken. The pure colors refreshed his eyes of the true color.

Hebrews 12:2 tells us to fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith. If we want to know the standard of holiness, we need look no further than to God the Father and Jesus Christ.

So where does that leave us? What does Jesus mean when He says that the pure and heart are blessed for they will see God? As I said at the start, this seems like an unattainable goal yet one that we are asked to strive for. Let’s consider our pursuit of purity.

III. OUR PURSUIT OF PURITY

I spent a fair bit of time talking about how sinful we are and how pure and holy God is because until we understand how diametrically opposed we are in nature to God’s holy nature, we won’t understand what it is to be pure in heart. We will think that in some way we can achieve it on our own. We won’t ever evolve into a better person. We can’t become a better person by chanting some mantra. It will never come to us through following a 12-step program.

It's not possible by being religious or by doing religious things like praying, fasting or reading gobs of Scripture. We can't reform our hearts on our own efforts. The only solution for us to have a pure heart is for God to make it new and that only happens when by faith we trust Christ at which time the Holy Spirit regenerates our heart. Just as sin was credited to us through Adam's sin, so righteousness is credited to us through Christ.

Let's keep in mind that the heart isn't just this thing that pumps life giving blood to every part of our body. What Jesus means by heart is our whole being – mind, will, emotion. **Proverbs 4:23** tells us to keep our heart because it is the well-spring of life.

Let's also keep in mind that according to **Hebrews 12:14**, no one will see God without holiness. In contrast, **Matthew 5:8** says that the pure in heart will see God.

Walvoord and Zuck explain that the **“The pure in heart are those who are inwardly clean from sin through faith in God's provision and continued acknowledging of their sinful condition.”**

The person who is poor in spirit recognizes his depravity, mourns over his sin, humbly approaches God and hungers and thirsts to be right with God. In repentance he comes to God through faith in Christ. Becoming pure in heart is not our doing, but God's. Only He can take a foul heart and make it clean.

What kind of purity is Jesus referring to here?

We have discussed them briefly, but Scripture speaks of categories of purity.

A. Categories Of Purity

By that I don't mean there are degrees of purity in the sense that when we sin less we are promoted to a higher position. I think you'll understand what I mean when I describe them for you.

1. There is **primal purity** that only exists in the character of God because He is pure holiness. We can never attain that.

2. There is **created purity** which speaks of

God's creation that was sinless before the fall.

3. There is **positional purity** that is given to us when we receive Christ as Savior. As we said earlier, His righteousness is credited to us.

II Corinthians 5:21 “God made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.”

4. There is **actual purity** when we are given a new nature.

II Corinthians 5:17 “Therefore, if any man is in Christ He is a new creation.”

5. There is **practical purity** which requires effort on our part. While purity comes from God it does demand our participation. It would be great if at salvation, God would just zap us with purity in our conduct and we'd never have to worry about it again, but that's not the case. We have a role to play as well. The Holy Spirit makes us holy in position or standing before God, but in practice or state we have to put in some elbow grease. We rely on the power of the Holy Spirit to help us grow in Christ likeness.

II Corinthians 7:1 “Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates the body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.”

I Peter 1:13-16

I Peter 2:11 “Dear friends, I urge you as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul.”

I John 3:2-3 “Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when He appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. Everyone who has this hope in Him purifies Himself, just as he is pure.”

II Timothy 2:22(-26) “Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.”

Paul admonishes us in **Ephesians 4** and **Colossians 3** to put on godly characteristics. Those verses tell us that we play in practical purity.

6. There is **ultimate purity** which is referred to in **I John 3:2** where it says we will be like Christ when we see Him.

Which of these categories of purity is Jesus referring to? Looking at the verse as a whole without a pure heart we cannot see God. Remember from **Hebrews 12:14** that no one can see God without holiness. So I think we can say that Jesus is telling us that we can only see God if we have a right relationship with Him through faith in Christ, that we have become a new creation through the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. Without His work in us to make us holy, we can't see God. That is our reward for purity. But along the way until we see Christ, it warrants our effort to become like Christ in character. In **I John 1** we see the importance of fellowship with God which is made possible if we walk in the light, which is a reference to living in His holiness and truth. Walking is a metaphor for our living or conduct. But I think that we would all agree that when it comes to our part in pursuing purity in this life, it's a challenge.

B. The Challenge To Purity

We are bombarded every day with challenges as we navigate a world that is steeped in sin, a world that is presently controlled by the prince of the power of the air who will do everything in his power to keep us from a desire to be godly in our character. We contend with the pull of the world, the desires of the fleshly nature and the enticements of the devil. The man who Satan wanted to sift like wheat, the man who gave into the pressure to deny Christ, the man who had come to grips with his own inability to please Christ gives us some advice.

I Peter 5:8 "Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings."

In other words, keep watchful for the enemy's attack. Stand firm in your faith. Paul gives us the same advice in **Ephesians 6:10-18** but takes it a step further in how we stand firm. We have been given divine weapons for our spiritual warfare that will enable us to stand against the enemy and in so doing to mature in godliness.

Let me give you four ways to face the challenge in pursuing purity.

1. We have God's power

We can't face the enemy alone.

I Samuel 17:45-46a "David said to the Philistine, 'You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the Lord will hand you over to me.'"

Romans 7:24-25 "What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God – through Jesus Christ our Lord."

II Peter 1:3-4 "His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and goodness. Through these He has given us His very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires."

We have God's power to help in our pursuit of purity. Recognize that we can't do it alone.

2. We have God's Word

Psalm 119:9, 11

John 15:3 "You are already clean because of the Word I have spoken to you."

We need to treasure God's Word and desire it more than our necessary food (**Job 23:12**) to keep us in pursuit of purity. **Colossians 3:16** tells us to let God's Word richly dwell in us. I can't emphasize enough the importance of daily being in God's Word. Let it be your vitamin that provides your soul

with the daily requirements for spiritual growth.

3. We have God's Spirit

Galatians 5:16 teaches us to walk or live by the Spirit so that we won't fulfill the desires of the flesh. As we allow Him to control us, He empowers us to live a godly life.

4. We have prayer

Psalm 51:10 "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me."

Psalm 139:23-24 "Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive what in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

Jesus tells His disciples a parable in **Luke 18:1** to teach them a lesson to always pray and not give up. Being pure in heart involves having a singleness of heart for God.

A pure heart desires to please God in everything.

A pure heart is unmixed with things that would otherwise taint it.

A pure heart allows the change that has taken place on the inside to be evident on the outside.

The only way to have a pure heart is to give our lives to Christ and ask Him to cleanse us from sin.

A pure heart is confident that He who began a good work in you will continue it until the end, that He will complete what He started (**Philippians 1:6**).

We can try to live a life of purity in our own effort but end up being just like the Pharisees who looked good on the outside, but their hearts were still filthy. Remember as God told Samuel, man looks on the outside, but God looks on the heart (**I Samuel 16:7**). He is searching for people who seek after Him with their whole heart.

There is one last point to make from our verse and it has to do with our covenant for purity.

C. The Covenant For Purity

"The pure in heart will see God."

That's a promise from God.

Psalm 24:3 "Who may ascend the hill of the Lord? Who may stand in His holy place?" In

other words, who can come into God's presence? Who can see God?

Verse 4 "He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol or swear by what is false." The person who has a singleness of purpose in following God, the person who has been given a clean heart through faith in Christ, that person will be joyful knowing he will see God. It's a promise of being in His presence forever.

John MacArthur writes "If purity does not characterize our living, we either don't belong to Christ, or we are disobedient to Him."

Would you like to see God? Here's the criteria: you need a pure heart that comes through faith in Christ. **Are you pursuing purity in this life?** God has given us what we need to become more like Christ in character.