



Ministry of the Word

*Wednesday 29<sup>th</sup> July 2020*

by Vincent Gannon

**Scripture:** Matthew 5:8 - *“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God”*

**Subject:** Part 20 – Purity in the Kingdom

What are we to make of this one verse alone? It’s pointing to a subject that is so immense and its theme so infinitely vast that it reaches back to Genesis and goes right through every truth of the Scriptures. The subject of purity of heart is related to holiness, and it's impossible to exhaust this subject and impossible to reduce its significance to the believer.

Most believers think that this has to do with our future in glory, but if that is it, then it begs the question, *“Why did the King mention it at the commencement of His public ministry?”* The answer to this question is simple - purity of heart and purity in the kingdom is foundational to Christianity.

### **The Scriptural/Historical Context**

These words challenged the disciples then just as they challenge us today. Historically the church has struggled at keeping their focus right. As discussed already in some detail, when Jesus began His earthly ministry, Israel was in desperate condition; politically, economically, and spiritually they were weak and often faithless. Jewish leaders thought their religion was in fine shape, and believed the Messiah would solve their political and economic problems. But when He came, Jesus only concern was for the spiritual problem, the problem of their hearts. This has been the source of all of this world's problems since the Fall, even today, yet

the majority of people will not recognise it. The people needed someone who would show them how to be forgiven for the laws they had already broken. When John the Baptist began his ministry, there were people waiting for the promised Messiah, hungry to know the real way of salvation, the real way to please God, the true way of peace. Many knew that the Scriptures taught of One who would come not simply to demand but to redeem, not to add to their burdens but to help carry them, not to increase their guilt but to remove it. This Messiah would be the One to purify their hearts, so that they would see God one day.

Ezekiel prophesied that someday God would replace their hearts of stone with hearts of flesh (Ezekiel 36:25-26). Many of the Torah observing Jews knew the testimony of David who cried out, *“How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered! How blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit!”* (Psalm 32:1-2).

Many knew those truths, and longed to experience the reality of them. Nicodemus was one such person. He went to Jesus and asked: *“Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him”* (John 3:2).

Though he did not state the question that was on his mind, although implied from his testimony, the Lord knew Nicodemus’s mind, and He said to him, *“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God”* (v. 3). Nicodemus wanted to know how to please God, how to be forgiven. Had he not had a deep, compelling desire to know God’s will, he would not have risked coming to Jesus even at night. Nicodemus was a Pharisee, a member of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish high court, a teacher of the law; but he knew in his heart that all of that did not make him right with God.

Nicodemus was not on his own. After Jesus fed the great multitude near the Sea of Galilee, some of the people who had seen the miracle asked Jesus, *“What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?”* (John 6:28). Or in other words *“How can a person get right with God? What must we do to truly please Him?”* Like Nicodemus, they had been through all the ceremonies and rituals, they too tried to keep the law and traditions, but had the same question, aware that something crucial was missing.

Luke tells of a lawyer who tried to test Jesus asking, *“Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?”* (Luke 10:25), and after Jesus gave an answer the man tried *“to justify himself”*

(v. 29). Despite his insincerity, he had asked the right question. Similarly, a rich ruler asked Jesus: *“Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?”* (Luke 18:18). This man apparently asked sincerely, but he was unwilling to pay the cost. He wanted to keep his lifestyle more than the wealth of eternal life. He needed more than outward obedience to the law, which he kept diligently since childhood (v. 21). With all his devotion and effort to please God in his own way, he had no assurance of possessing eternal life. He was seeking the eternal kingdom, but he was unwilling to seek it first (Matthew 6:33).

From these well-known accounts of Scripture, we see historically the same question being asked, *“What must I do to belong to the Kingdom of God”* *“What is the standard for eternal life”*. But how about today? Well many people sincerely seek the answer for eternal life, but unfortunately they do not all want to accept the answer Jesus gives, just like the lawyer and the rich young man.

Have you ever wondered why this beatitude was placed 6th on the list. It may seem to be in a strange place, but like everything in God’s word, it is set in the correct place. It is in fact the climax of the Beatitudes, because it is the central truth which the first five lead to and from which the following two flow. This beatitude is most certainly for us as believers today. So many claim to have God somewhere in their lives but realistically, He is not central in them. No wonder there are problems within Christianity, as you are aware. We need to take heed and make sure we have oil in our lamps and that God is at the centre of our hearts.

So what does this verse really mean? *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.*

This verse gets to the root core of the matter, God is dealing with the very most inner being of the man. You may look one way to others, but it doesn’t matter the hours or money you spend, because God is interested in your attitude, in your heart. This is a matter of internal transformation.

**Heart** translates “kardia”, from which we get cardiac and similar terms. Throughout Scripture, as well as in many languages and cultures throughout the world, the heart is used metaphorically to represent the inner person, the seat of motives and attitudes, the centre of personality. In Scripture it represents more than emotion, and feelings, as it also includes the thinking process and particularly the will. In Proverbs we are told, *“As [a man] thinketh*

*in his heart, so is he*” (Proverbs 23:7, KJV). Jesus asked a group of scribes, *“Why are you thinking evil in your hearts?”* (Matthew 9:4; Mark 2:8; 7:21).

The heart is the control centre of mind and will as well as emotion. Jesus said that it is in the inner man, in the core of his very being, that God requires purity. This is not a new truth, but an old one long forgotten, amidst ceremony and tradition. The writer of Proverbs counselled in Proverbs 4:23 *“Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flows the springs of life”*

The problem that caused God to destroy the earth in the Flood was a heart problem as we see in Genesis 6:5. *“Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually”.*

David acknowledged before the Lord in Psalm 51:6:10, *“Behold, Thou dost desire truth in the innermost being, and in the hidden part Thou wilt make me know wisdom”; and then he prayed “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me”*

Asaph wrote in Psalm 73:1, *“Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart!”* Jeremiah declared in Jeremiah 17:9 and 10, *“The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it? I, the Lord, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give to each man according to his ways, according to the results of his deeds”*

Evil ways and deeds begin in the heart and mind, which are here used synonymously. Jesus said in Matthew 15:19, *“For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders. These are the things which defile the man”*

Above all else, God has always been concerned with the condition of man’s heart. When the Lord called Saul to be Israel’s first king, *“God changed his heart”* (1 Samuel 10:9), but the new king soon began to revert to his old heart patterns. He chose to disobey God and to trust in himself. For example, he presumed to take for himself the priestly role of offering sacrifice (13:9) and refused to destroy all of the Amalekites and their possessions as God had commanded (15:3-19). Saul’s actions were wrong because his heart rebelled, and it is by our hearts that the Lord judges us (16:7). God took the kingdom from Saul because he refused to live by the new heart God had given him. Consequently, the Lord gave it to David (15:23, 28) because David was *“a man after [God’s] own heart”* (1 Samuel 13:14). David pleased God’s

heart because God pleased David's heart. *"I will give thanks to the Lord with all my heart,"* he sang (Psalm 9:1). His deepest desire was, *"Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord, my rock and my Redeemer"* (Psalm 19:14). He prayed, *"Examine me, O Lord, and try me; test my mind and my heart"* (Psalm 26:2). When God told David, *"Seek My face,"* David's heart replied, *"Thy face, O Lord, I shall seek"* (Psalm 27:8). It was said of David's leadership over Israel, *"He shepherded them according to the integrity of his heart, and guided them with his skilful hands"* (Psalm 78:72). David often failed, but his heart was fixed on God. The evidence of his true-hearted commitment to God in the first 175 verses of Psalm 119. The fact that his flesh sometimes overruled his heart is the final admission of verse 176: *"I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek Thy servant."*

The word 'Pure' found in our reading, translates *"katharos"*, a form of the word from which we get catharsis. The basic meaning is to make pure by cleansing from dirt, filth, and contamination. Catharsis is a term used in psychology and counselling for a cleansing of the mind or emotions. The Greek word is related to the Latin castus, from which we get chaste. The related word chasten refers to discipline given in order to cleanse from wrong behaviour.

The Greek term was often used of metals that had been refined until all impurities were removed, leaving only the pure metal. In that sense, purity means unmixed, unalloyed, unadulterated. What does it mean to be pure in heart? Singular on the inside. The word pure means without mixture or alloy. In that sense—uncomplicated—no mixed motives, it is the idea of pure motive, of single-mindedness, undivided devotion, spiritual integrity, and true righteousness. To the pure all things are pure. This purity is not simply sinlessness—for we cannot say we have no sin (1 John 1:8). This has more to do with the presence of truth in our hearts. The pure in heart have a single heart instead of a divided heart. The pure in heart are not divided between the truth and the lies of this world; or torn between God and the promises of this broken world.

Do you know the difference between clean and pure? A pure heart is one not distracted by this trinket, or that trip, this hobby or that idea. Think of it this way: "All soap is clean. Dove, Lux, Palmolive are all clean. There are very few soaps that are 99.99% pure soap, e.g.

Bladderwrack soap or even Ivory soap. They don't have deodorants, perfumes, additives or colorings. They are just soap, nothing but soap. Other soaps are clean but not pure. Pure hearts seek only one thing: the will of God. When we examine our hearts we sometimes find something impure. Someone has written that in ministry there are three temptations; (1) The temptation to Shine; (2) The temptation to Recline; (3) and the temptation to Whine.

Purity in heart doesn't have double-mindedness. Double-mindedness has always been one of the great plagues of the church. We want to serve the Lord but also follow the world at the same time. But Jesus says that is impossible. *"No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will hold to one and despise the other"* (Matthew 6:24). James puts the same truth in another way: *"Do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God"* (James 4:4). He then gives the solution to the problem in verse 8: *"Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded"*.

True Christians have the right heart motive concerning God; even though we often fail to be single-minded, it is our deep desire to be so. We confess with Paul, *"For that which I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate. ... I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wishes to do good. ... So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin"* (Romans 7:15, 21, 25).

Paul's deepest spiritual desires were pure, although the sin dwelling in his flesh sometimes overcame those desires. Those who truly belong to God will be motivated to purity. The deepest desire of the redeemed is for holiness, even when sin halts the fulfilment of that desire (Psalm 119, Romans 7:15-25).

Purity of heart is more than sincerity, although sincerity is important. A motive can be sincere, yet it can lead to worthless and sinful things because it is sincerely wrong. The pagan priests who opposed Elijah demonstrated great sincerity when they lacerated their bodies in order to induce Baal to send fire down to consume their sacrifices (1 Kings 18:28). But their sincerity did not produce the desired results, and it did not enable them to see the error of their belief system. Some sincere devotees walk on nails, some on hot coals to prove their

spiritual power. Others crawl on their knees or walk barefoot for hundreds of yards, bleeding and grimacing in pain, to show their devotion to a saint or a shrine. Yet, their sincere devotion is sincerely wrong and it is completely worthless before God.

The scribes and Pharisees believed they could please God by such superficial practices as tithing *“mint and dill and cumin”*; but they *“neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness”* (Matthew 23:23). They were meticulously careful about what they did outwardly but paid no attention to what they were inwardly.

*“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!”* Jesus told them, *“For you clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of robbery and self-indulgence. You blind Pharisee, first clean the inside of the cup and of the dish, so that the outside of it may become clean also”* (w. 25-26).

Even good deeds that do not come from a genuine good heart are of no spiritual value. Thomas Watson said, *“Morality can drown a man as fast as vice,”* and, *“A vessel may sink with gold or with dung.”* Though we may be extremely religious and constantly engaged in doing good things, we cannot please God unless our hearts are right with Him.

The ultimate standard for purity of heart is perfection of heart. In the same sermon in which He gave the Beatitudes Jesus said, *“Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect”* (Matthew 5:48). One hundred percent purity is God’s standard for the heart. Man’s tendency is to set the opposite standard. We are inclined to judge ourselves by the worst instead of the best. The Pharisee who prayed in the Temple, thanking God that he was not like other men, considered himself to be righteous simply because he was not a swindler, an adulterer, or a tax-gatherer (Luke 18:11). We are tempted to feel better about ourselves when we see someone doing a terrible thing that we have never done. The “good” person looks down on the one who seems to be less good than himself, and that person looks down on those worse than he is. Carried to its extreme, that spiral of judgment would go down and down until it reached the most rotten person on earth, and that last person, the worst on earth, would be the standard by which the rest of the world judged itself!

God’s standard for men, however, is Himself. They cannot be fully pleasing to God until they are pure as He is pure, until they are holy as He is holy and perfect as He is perfect.

Only those who are pure in heart may enter the kingdom. *“Who may ascend into the hill of the Lord?”* David asks, *“and who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart”* (Psalm 24:3-4).

It is impurity of heart that separates man from God as we read in Isaiah 59 verses 1 and 2:  
*“Behold, the Lord’s hand is not so short that it cannot save; neither is His ear so dull that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He does not hear”*

Just as impurity of heart separates men from God, only purity of heart through Jesus Christ will reconcile men to God.

Basically there are but two kinds of religion, the religion of human achievement and the religion of divine accomplishment. There are many variations of the first kind, which includes every religion but biblical Christianity. Within the religions of human accomplishment are two basic approaches: head religion, which trusts in creeds and religious knowledge, and hand religion, which trusts in good deeds.

The only true religion, however, is heart religion based on God’s implanted purity. By faith, in what God has done through His Son, Jesus Christ, *“we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace”* (Ephesians 1:7).

When God imputes His righteousness to us He imputes His purity to us.

As we look at Scripture we discover six kinds of purity:

One may be called fundamental or primary purity, the kind that exists only in God. That purity is as essential to God as light is to the sun or wetness is to water.

Another form of purity is created purity, that existed in God’s creation before it was corrupted by the Fall. God created the angels in purity and He created man in purity. Tragically, some of the angels and all of mankind fell from that purity.

A third kind of purity is positional purity, which we are given the moment we trust in Jesus Christ as Saviour. When we trust in Jesus, God imputes to us Christ’s own purity and

righteousness. *“To the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness”* (Romans 4:5; cross reference Galatians 2:16). From that day the Father sees us just as He sees the Son, perfectly righteous and without blemish (2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 9:14).

Fourth, imputed purity which is not a statement without substance. God grants actual purity in the new nature of the believer (Romans 6:4-5; 8:5-11; Colossians 3:9-10; 2 Peter 1:3). In other words, there is no justification without sanctification. Every believer is a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Fifth, there is practical purity. Of course, this is the hard part that *does* require our supreme effort. Practical purity, though it also comes from God, demands our participation in a way that the other kinds of purity do not. That is why Paul implores in 2 Corinthians 7v1, *“Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God”*

It is why Peter pleads in 1 Peter 1v14 to 16:, *“As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behaviour; because it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy’”*

We are not saved just for future heavenly purity but also for present earthly purity. At best it will be gold mixed with iron and clay, a white garment with some black threads.

Nonetheless, God wants us now to be as pure as we can be. If purity does not characterise our living, we either do not belong to Christ, or we are being disobedient to Him. We will have temptations, but God will always provide a way of escape (1 Corinthians 10:13). We will fall into sin, but *“if we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”* (1 John 1:9).

Finally, for believers, one day there will be ultimate purity, the perfected purity that God’s redeemed people will experience when they are glorified in His presence. All sins will be totally and permanently washed away, and *“we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is”* (1 John 3:2).

Throughout the history of the church people have suggested various ways to achieve spiritual purity and holiness. Some have suggested monasticism, getting away from the normal cares and distractions of the world, and devoting oneself entirely to meditation and prayer. Others claim that holiness is a second work of grace, by which God miraculously eradicates not only sins but the sin nature, allowing a sinless earthly life from that point onward. But neither Scripture nor experience supports either of those views. The problem of sin is not primarily the world around us but the worldliness within us, which we cannot escape by living in isolation from other people.

God always provides for what He demands, and He has provided ways for us to live purely.

We must realise that we are unable to live a single holy moment without the Lord's guidance and power as Proverbs 20 verse 9 asks. *"Who can say, 'I have cleansed my heart, I am pure from my sin?'"* The obvious answer to which is *"No-one."* The Ethiopian cannot change his skin nor the leopard its spots (Jeremiah 13:23). As John MacArthur said *"Cleansing begins with a recognition of weakness. Weakness then reaches out for the strength of God."*

We must also stay in God's Word. It is impossible to stay in God's will apart from His Word. Jesus said, *"You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you"* (John 15:3).

It is essential to be controlled by, and walk in the will and way of the Holy Spirit. Galatians 5:16 says it clearly: *"Walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh."*

We must also pray. We cannot stay in God's will or understand and obey His Word unless we stay near Him. *"With all prayer and petition"* we are to *"pray at all times in the Spirit"* (Ephesians 6:18; cross reference Luke 18:1; 1 Thessalonians 5:17). We can cry as David did in Psalm 51 verse 10, *"Create in me a clean heart, O God"*.

### ***The Result of Holiness***

The great blessing of those who are pure in heart is that they shall see God. The Greek is in the future tense and a more literal translation is, *"They shall be continuously seeing God for themselves."* It is only they (the emphatic autos), who are pure in heart, who shall see God.

Intimate knowledge of and fellowship with God is reserved for the pure. When our hearts are purified at salvation, we begin to live in the presence of God. We begin to see and to comprehend Him with our new spiritual eyes. Like Moses, who saw God's glory and asked to see more (Exodus 33:18), the one who is purified by Jesus Christ sees again and again the glory of God.

To see God was the greatest hope of Old Testament saints. Like Moses, David wanted to see more of God. *"As the deer pants for the water brooks,"* he said, *"so my soul pants for Thee, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God; when shall I come and appear before God?"* (Psalm 42:1). Job rejoiced when he was able to say, *"I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear; but now my eye sees Thee"* Job 42:5

Purity of heart cleanses the eyes of the soul so that God becomes visible. One sign of an impure heart is ignorance, because sin obscures the truth (John 3:19-20). Evil and ignorance come in a package. Other signs of an impure heart are self-centeredness (Revelation 3:17), pleasure in sin (2 Timothy 3:4), unbelief (Hebrews 3:12), and hatred of purity (Micah 3:2).

Those who belong to God exchange all of those things for integrity and purity.

We can see why we find it such a challenge. We have a lot of impurity that needs purifying. We do have a personal responsibility before God to do what He expects us to do, which should be our delight to do. I think that many pray for a revival in the wrong way, as a spiritual experiencing event, rather than a personal encounter with the true and living God. We need the help of the Holy Spirit, and at the same time, the Holy Spirit needs our cooperation. The question is, are we willing to cooperate?

Just to conclude, the pure in heart see God. Why? Because they can't see anything else. The impure in heart do not see God. You may be in a place in your life where you are not able to see God. Could it be that you are no longer pure in heart? You might be thinking, *"What are you saying Pastor? Are you accusing me of something? Are you saying there is something missing or wrong or not quite right?"* Well you would have tell me! *Has your vision of God been filtered, obscured, polluted, by a bunch of additives, chemicals, preservatives, perfumes—are you still clean—but no longer pure?* God really cares about what is going on in your heart. God reveals Himself on His terms; not yours or anyone else's. We develop

disciplines of devotion, purity, and worship. Remember 1 Thessalonians 4:3; *“It is God’s will that you should be holy”*.

Jesus rejected the hypocritical appearances of purity and holiness from the religious leaders when all the while they were filled with impurity and corruption.

The Lord promises; *“Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us that we should be called the children of God. And such we are. And does not yet appear what we shall be—but we know this that when He appears we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is”* (1 John 3:1-3). The pure in heart will see God. This purity is not found in personal effort, but absence of sin, and only Christ can cleanse us. Purity of heart is not something we work for but is something we desire and God grants it!

Our culture values purity in relation to clean air, clean water, clean food, but why do they despise a clean heart? Who wants to eat in a smoke filled restaurant? Why are we so open to a polluted heart? What would happen if you prayed a prayer like David;

*“Create in me a clean (pure) heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me”* (Psalm 51:10).

**Amen.**