

## PURITY OF HEART

"Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God." Matthew 5:8.

One of the most common errors of men is that of mistaking ritual for religion. Men have committed that mistake in every age. It is a mistake that multitudes are committing today. God asks Christians for the love of their hearts and the obedience of their lives, but many of them simply seek to put Him off with the observance of a number of religious forms. Far too many substitute religion for Christianity.

Mistaking ritual for religion on the part of the Jews resulted in their religion degenerating into formalism. They were losing sight of the spiritual nature of religion, and identifying it with a scrupulous observance of sacrifices, fasts and prayers, as prescribed by the law. In the emphasis which they were laying upon outward forms, the inner reality was constantly being sacrificed and lost.

This state of things prevailed at the time of Christ's earthly ministry. Never had there been such careful observance of religious forms. Never had there been such an absence of the true religious spirit, which the Lord desired to see. There was all of the outward parade of religion, but there was little or none of its inward reality. Men said their prayers, offered their sacrifices, paid their tithes, fasted twice a week, and punctiliously observed every religious requirement, but they knew nothing about real spirituality. They were clean without, but inwardly they were very unclean. The Jews were exceedingly particular about outward cleanness, but inwardly they were very impure. They magnified the importance of clean hands, but they forgot that the one thing essential was a pure heart.

Speaking to those who were accustomed to think so much of mere external cleanliness, who prided themselves on the number of their ablutions and washings, and who believed that by virtue of their ceremonial purity they would be admitted into heaven, Christ taught them that the purity which makes man blessed, for which man is to strive, and which admits him into the presence of God is purity of soul.

These Beatitudes of our Lord challenge us at every point of human conduct, and they give us explicit direction for daily living. As we read them through, we can only cry: "Who is sufficient for these things?" The eternal answer to this question comes to us from the Book: "Our sufficiency is of God."

It is well to remember that our Lord said, "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God." It is not surprising that this Beatitude would arrest our attention and stimulate our interest. However, it can be misunderstood very easily. This is due in part to the fact that it draws attention to something which is inward and secret. The purity which is praised by Christ is in the heart. To the Jew the heart was the entire inner life--the reason, the desires, the affections and the will. It is in that inward realm that purity is to reign supreme. "Heart" as used here may be understood to mean the interior life of the personality.

It is important for us to discover what it means to be pure in heart, and what it means to see God, before we can learn the real secret of this Beatitude, for both of these expressions are misunderstood by the masses.

Wickedness, which is so obvious in the lives of men, proceeds from the depravity of their hearts, so, before the life can be pure, the heart must be cleansed. In its unregenerated state, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." Jeremiah 17:9. Sin disturbs the harmony of the inner life. Before the heart can be pure, the conscience must be purged from dead works. There must be a resolute putting away of evil things before it is possible for us to receive that purity of heart which our Lord gives. The pure in heart are those who have been cleansed by the precious blood of Christ, and whose consciences are quiet and calm because they have been purged from dead works.

What is it to be pure in heart? On the surface it sounds forbidding. It suggests the impossible. But to be pure in heart does not mean to be sinless. Christ did not say, "Blessed are the perfect: for they shall see God." The word which is translated "pure" occurs in twenty-four places in the New Testament. In nine of these instances it is translated "clean" in the King James Version. In Revelation 21:18 the word is used twice; the first time with the word "gold," where it is translated "pure," and the next time with the word "glass," where it is translated "clear." "And the city was pure gold, like unto clear glass." The word means "pure"--free from mixture, "clean"--free from filth, "clear"--free from cloudiness, or open to view. Purity means freedom from foreign substance. Drugs are pure if they are what they are supposed to be, with no other substances contained.

The word "pure" is applied to the heart in three other verses in the New Testament. "Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart." I Timothy 1:5. "With them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart." II Timothy 2:22. "Love one another with a pure heart fervently." I Peter 1:22. It is with a pure heart, then, that we fully keep the commandment of God, truly call on the Lord, and truly love one another.

Purity of heart involves singleness of mind and purpose. The heart is the center of all thinking, feeling and willing. The pure in heart are endued with and inspired by one definite purpose. It may be expressed in the words, "On thing have I desired of the Lord." Purity here means freedom from any admixture of base matter, as we speak of pure food, pure water, etc. A pure heart is one that is absolutely sincere in its desire to love and serve God. There is no purity apart from the absolute authority of God in the affections. The pure in heart are those who have been saved, whose thoughts have been cleansed, whose intentions are sincere, whose desires are unmixed, whose affections are dedicated to God, and whose wills are yielded to His perfect will. Purity of heart implies that "old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." II Corinthians 5:17. Pride is destroyed, and the soul is clothed with humility. The understanding is enlightened; the will is made conformable to the will of God; the affections are placed on the proper objects. An undue love of the world having been uprooted, and a supreme love for God having been implanted in the mind, murmuring and complaining are at an end, and a blessed contentment is joyfully experienced. The constant spirit of "the pure in heart" is expressed beautifully in the words, "not My will, but Thine, be done."

A pure heart is one which has a great object before it, being attracted by "the beauty of holiness." It is one in which the fear of the Lord has been implanted, and the love of God has been shed abroad; therefore, it hates what He hates, and loves what He loves. The purity of heart upon which our Saviour and Lord pronounced His blessing is that internal cleansing which accompanies and follows the new birth. That purity of heart does not mean sinlessness of life is clear from the inspired record of the history of all of God's saints. However, the purer the heart, the more conscious of vile imaginations, filthy thoughts and evil desires it becomes, and the more it grieves over them. Purity of thought, purpose, desire, motive, affection, speech and deportment should characterize every child of God. Since Christian purity includes sincerity and genuineness, it is the very opposite of subtlety, guile, hypocrisy and duplicity. One likes to think of purity of heart as a constant and passionate aspiration towards the holiness of God.

What is the blessedness which results from purity of heart? "They shall see God." There are many sights which bring great joy to us; for example, some rare work of art, the skyline of a modern city, a lofty mountain range, or a beautiful sunset. Not all of us are able to travel and to see the treasures of art or the wonders of nature. But there is one object of vision more satisfying than any other, the contemplation of which brings the deepest and highest joy man can know, and that is the vision of God. How could one fail to be happy, if he could see God? What would we not give for this blessing? The vision of God is promised to the pure in heart. The condition for a vision of God is that the heart shall be clean and pure.

A clear and satisfying vision of God is the big need of every one of us. Such a vision offers to us the satisfaction of our most intense hungers and of our deepest needs. What is it to see God? Of course, to see God is not to look upon Him with our natural eyes. The truth of the matter is that the person who sees only what meets the natural eyes sees but very little. It is interesting to recall that the ancient Hebrews had a belief that no man could see the face of God and live. Yet, Christ here speaks of seeing God as if it were the natural climax of the Christian experience.

What are some of the blessings that come as a result of this vision of God? To see God is to obtain a clear revelation of self. Job was a character of unusual beauty and worth. Then, he was afflicted tragically in his body. One fancies that, at times, he was even more afflicted through his friends. While his body was racked with pain, they came to tell him that his condition was the result of his sin. With hot indignation Job denied it, and we cannot help but side with him. We applaud him for the manner in which he maintained his integrity. But, by and by, a vision of God burst upon him. Automatically his self-sufficiency left him, his knees got weak, and in deep humility he cried: "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." Job 42:5-6.

Here is another man, certainly one of the cleanest and most upright of his day, whose name was Isaiah. He tells us of the personal experience that made him the man that he became. Said he, "In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple." Isaiah 6:1. What was the outcome of his vision? In the brightness of that light he also saw himself. What he saw caused him to cry out, "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts." Isaiah 6:5.

When we have a vision of God we are always convicted of sin. Whenever there is a consciousness of God's presence there is always a sense of sin. A lack of the consciousness of sin is due to the failure to recognize the presence of God. Certain Africans never realized that they were black until they looked into the white face of David Livingstone, and then they could not avoid being aware of it. So it is that, whenever we see ourselves in the light of the divine countenance, we never fail to come to a realization of our guilt. But a vision of God will do more for us than simply show us our own sinfulness. It will also bring cleansing from sin. Was it not so in the case of Isaiah? No sooner had he confessed his sin than he became conscious of cleansing by the power of God. Then, to see God in a spiritual vision is to be gripped with a holy passion to share your vision with others.

"For" is the word in our text which ties sight of God to purity of heart. Notice that sight of God is not tied to the profession of the lips, or the activities of the life, but to purity of heart. If the lens of our hearts are muddy with hypocrisy, impure with sinful thoughts, purposes and feelings, or filthy with sin, we shall not see God. Insincerity and impurity always obscure the vision of God. While none of us can be absolutely pure, we can want to be, we can pray to be, and we can try to be. Has it ever occurred to you that perhaps the reason why you are not happier than you are is because there is some lurking insincerity, or some secret impurity, which destroys your fellowship with God? Sin in the heart obscures the spiritual vision. Like the clouds which hide us from the cheerful light of the sun, so sin shuts us out from the vision of God. In order to attain purity of heart in the Christian life, one must feel the need of it, and use the means by which it may be obtained, which are Bible study, prayer and faith.

Christ said, "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God." It is to this glorious experience that He invites us. Christ came to reveal God to us, to open our eyes to the reality of God at work for us and with us. The "pure in heart" shall be favored with pleasing discoveries of God. In this life, they see Him in all His wonderful works of creation, in all His varied providences, and in the gracious dispensations of His grace. Before they were saved, they neither had eyes to see, nor hearts to understand, but now His wisdom, love and power meet their eyes in every direction. Seeing these manifestations, they adore, love and praise Him.

This promise, "They shall see God," has both a present and a future fulfillment. In the present life, the pure in heart possess spiritual discernment and with the eyes of their understanding they obtain clear views of God's character and perceive the excellency of His attributes. They also enjoy intimate and delightful communion with God. This promise, however, will not be fulfilled completely in this life. Here God's children see Him by faith, and all too often only darkly because the lens of their hearts are not clean and clear enough. In the next world they shall see Him face to face, and with clear sight. What a sight that will be! How satisfying it will be! The sight of God will be an everlasting source of blessedness. As the Psalmist said, "I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness." Psalm 17:15. Then, but not until then, will the full meaning of these words be understood. "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God."