

“Kingdom Character: The Beatitudes” (part 7)

Matthew 5:8

It doesn't take much to look around at our society and come to the conclusion that we are in bad shape. Every generation has had its fair share of problems, but the problems that we are facing today are perhaps unparalleled in recent memory. A casual glance at the news headlines reveal that people are scratching their heads and wondering what in the world is going on. We are in a mess:

- politically
- relationally
- ethically
- morally

All of our problems can be reduced to one common denominator--the human heart. There is nothing on earth more corrupt and deceptive than the heart.

Jeremiah 17:9 - “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?”

Matthew 15:19 - “For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander.”

The most important part about you is your heart. The condition of your heart determines everything about you that really matters. For this reason, Scripture has so very much to say about the condition of our heart.

The “heart” is used in Scripture as the most comprehensive term for a person as a whole. It is the part of us where we desire, deliberate, and decide. It has been described as “the place of conscious and decisive spiritual activity,” our “feelings, desires, passions, thought, understanding and will,” and the center of who you are.

Jesus refers to the condition of the heart in this sixth Beatitude. And according to Jesus, the condition of our heart, not our circumstances, determines whether or not we are truly happy.

The condition that Jesus describes is purity of heart.

“Pure” - *not mixed with anything else; free from pollution; not containing anything which does not properly belong*

The purity that Jesus speaks of in this verse is synonymous with holiness. Essentially, Jesus is saying that those who are truly blessed are those who are holy in character.

Robert Murray McCheyne - *"In great measure, according to the purity and perfections of the instrument, will be the success. It is not great talents God blesses so much as great likeness to Jesus. A holy minister is an awful weapon in the hand of God."*

Hebrews 12:14 - **"Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord."**

Much in the same way, Jesus tells us here that if we truly desire to see God with 20/20 vision, purity of heart is the prescription. He says, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall SEE God."

Let me share with you several truths about purity of heart:

1. Purity of heart is an IMPORTANT truth

In Jesus' day, the religious leaders were more concerned about purity of hands than they were about purity of heart. For them, righteousness was external.

Psalm 24:3-4 - **"Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in His holy place? 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."**

The scribes and Pharisees emphasized clean hands, but they paid no attention to the part about a clean heart.

Matthew 15 records an interesting exchange between Jesus and the religious leaders. They were upset that Jesus' disciples had broke tradition by eating with unwashed hands. Quoting from Isaiah, Jesus said to them:

Matthew 15:8-9 - **"This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me; in vain do they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men."**

They were interested in hands; Jesus was interested in hearts.

The Old Testament prophets looked forward to a time when God would give His people new hearts:

Jeremiah 31:33 - “For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord. I will put My law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be My people.”

Ezekiel 36:26-27 - “And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put My Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes and be careful to obey My rules.”

God said that salvation would involve His work of giving people a new heart that would love and obey Him. The pure in heart are those in whom God has clearly done a transforming work. They are pure because He has made them pure by His grace.

Scripture speaks of sanctification and personal purity in three ways.

POSITIONALLY

2 Corinthians 5:17 - “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.”

I have been declared righteous because of my position in Christ.

PERMANENTLY

1 John 3:2-3 - “Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when He appears we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who thus hopes in Him purifies himself as He is pure.”

We will one day be like Him in perfect and permanent holiness, totally free from all imperfections and impurities.

PRACTICALLY

Purity demands that I am to live out practically who I am positionally in Christ.

This is where the real rub is in our lives. Believers are transformed men and women who live in a difficult environment. It is difficult to live a pure life in such an impure world.

2. Purity of heart demands INTENTIONAL effort

Jesus Christ has brought purity to my life by giving me a new heart. I have been declared righteous. God has saved and sanctified me, but there are responsibilities that I have been given. I am accountable for working out what has been worked in.

Philippians 2:12-13 - “Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work of His good pleasure.”

I am to WORK OUT what God has WORKED IN.

Randy Alcorn - *“How many of us Christians hope God will guard us from calamity and misery, while every day we make small, seemingly inconsequential immoral choices that inch us toward bigger immoralities?”*

Practical purity in my life demands that I be intentional.

Jerry Bridges - *“A farmer plows his field, sows the seed, and fertilizes and cultivates--all the while knowing that in the final analysis he is utterly dependent on forces outside of himself. He knows he cannot cause the seed to germinate, nor can he produce the rain and sunshine for growing and harvesting the crop. For a successful harvest, he is dependent on these things from God. Yet the farmer knows that unless he diligently pursues his responsibilities to plow, plant, fertilize, and cultivate, he cannot expect a harvest at the end of the season.”*

The farmer cannot do what only God can do, and God will not do what the farmer should do.

God has made me holy, yet God has commanded me to be holy.

1 Peter 1:15-16 - “But as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, You shall be holy, for I am holy.”

Scripture says that I am to pursue holiness, for without holiness no one shall see the Lord.

There are some things that I ought to devote myself to.

COVENANT with my eyes

Someone has well said that the eyes are the window into the soul. O, be careful, little eyes, what you see!

Job 31:1 - “I have made a covenant with my eyes.”

Purity of heart demands that we have a strategy. It means that I should constantly be on guard about what comes into my mind through the window of my eyes.

Studies show that the media has an influence on sexual behavior.

Bill Hull - *“Social analysts widely agree that media have a tremendous impact on our values, attitudes, behavior, and perceptions of the world. If I were the enemy, I would challenge God’s standards. I would use the most powerful forms of communication at my disposal: movies and television. I would want to impact you intellectually through your emotions, then drive my point home. I would use thousands of murders, rapes, and bedroom scenes to keep pounding away at you until you were desensitized to certain forms of evil. If I were the enemy, I would want you to echo my words to Eve in the Garden of Eden, ‘Has God really said? I want to confuse you; I want to fuzz the line between fantasy and reality. Television is discipling America. When a disciple is fully taught, he will be like his teacher (Luke 6:40). The media erode the moral base of our land, desensitizing you and me to evil and blurring the line between right and wrong.”*

The media has more of a discipling influence on the average church goer in our day than the Word of God does. Many are blind disciples of the culture rather than discerning disciples of Christ.

CONSECRATE my mind

Romans 12:1-2 - **“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”**

It is foolish to pray for God to keep you pure, yet not get intentional about purity in your thought life.

Scripture says that as a man thinks in his heart, so he is.

2 Corinthians 10:5 - **“We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ.”**

What if your thoughts were to be played back on the projection screen this morning for all to see? The truth is that my thoughts are just as important to God as my actions.

Psalm 139:1-4 - “O Lord, you have searched me and known me! You know when I sit down and when I rise up; You discern my thoughts from afar. You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O Lord, You know it altogether.”

Just how important are our thoughts? Someone has said:

- Sow a thought, reap an action
- Sow an action, reap a habit
- Sow a habit, reap a character
- Sow a character, reap a destiny

Purity of heart demands that I discipline my thought life. Disciples are to think like Jesus.

COMMIT myself to Scripture memory

It is not enough to simply discipline my eyes and mind; I must fill my mind with the truth of Scripture. Truth must be poured in!

Psalm 119:9 - “How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to Your word.”

Psalm 119:11 - “I have stored up Your word in my heart, that I might not sin against You.”

Disciples who desire to be pure must have a systematic way where they regularly and consistently take in vast amounts of God's Word.

COUNTERACT the enemy's strategy

The enemy of our soul is like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour. For this reason, I am to be sober-minded and diligent.

In what way does he seek to devour my life?

- He wants to keep me from the will of God
- He wants me to imitate the world, not Jesus
- He wants me to miss out on closeness with God

The enemy is perfectly content for you to appear religious on the outside, just so long as you are not pure in heart on the inside.

3. Purity of heart precedes INTIMATE knowledge of God

Jesus says, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall SEE God."

Can you think of anything more exciting than SEEING God?

There can be no intimate relationship with God in my life where there is impurity of heart. Impurity always gets in the way of true intimacy with God.

Darkness cannot coexist with light.

Since Jesus said that only the pure in heart will see God, then it should stand to reason that impurity of heart clouds one's vision of God.

Kent Hughes - *"In 1982 the Los Angeles Times carried the story of Anna Mae Pennica, a sixty-two year old woman who had been blind from birth. At age forty-seven she married a man she met in Braille class; and for the first fifteen years of their marriage he did the seeing for both of them until he completely lost his vision. Mrs. Pennica had never seen the green of spring or the blue of a winter sky. Yet because she had grown up in a loving, supportive family, she never felt resentful about her handicap and always had a cheerful spirit. In October of 1981 Dr. Thomas Pettit of the Jules Stein Eye Institute of the University of California performed surgery to remove the rare cataracts from the lens of her eyes, and Mrs. Pennica saw for the very first time. She found that everything was so much bigger and brighter than she ever imagined. From that day on, she could barely wait just to wake up in the morning, splash her eyes with water, and enjoy the changing morning light."*

What is ironic about her story is that, according to doctors, surgical techniques available as far back as the 1940's could have corrected her problem. Mrs. Pennica lived 40 of her 62 sightless years needlessly blind.

It reminds me of another man who was blind who was named Bartimaeus whom we read about in Mark 10:46-52.

Mark 10:51-52 - **"So Jesus answered and said to him, What do you want Me to do for you? The blind man said to Him, Rabboni, that I may receive my sight. Then Jesus said to him, Go your way; your faith has made you well. And immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus on the road."**

When his eyes were opened, the first person he saw was Jesus.

Impurity of heart is far worse than physical blindness; impurity of heart will keep you from truly seeing God.

D.A. Carson - *“It follows that the disciple of Jesus who looks forward to the kingdom as it will be finally perfected, is already determined to prepare for it. Knowing himself to be in the kingdom already, he is concerned with purity because he recognizes that the King is pure, and the kingdom in its perfected form will admit only purity.”*

Without purity, no one will ever see the Lord.

The gospel is good news--Jesus lived and died and rose again so that I could be made pure in heart. He gives a new heart to those who trust Him in faith.