

The Sermon on the Mount: A Reformed Exposition

Chapter 7: The Pure in Heart

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Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God (Mt. 5:8).

The sixth beatitude is very searching and broad in that it deals with the heart of man. This emphasis on man's heart is one of the things which makes Christianity unique and separates it from other religions and philosophies. The kingdom of God begins on the inside, with the heart of man. Christ rules, not by the external coercion of arms, but by His Spirit regenerating and sanctifying His people. The focus of the Savior's rule is purity, holiness and separation from evil. That is why our Lord confers a special blessing on the pure in heart. Purity of heart is absolutely indispensable if one is to be a disciple of Christ and have fellowship with God.

What is Purity of Heart?

In order to understand this beatitude we must first understand the terms that Jesus uses. We must define the word heart and we must examine the term pure or purity. The word heart is used in Scripture in a much different manner than it is used today. In modern culture, the term heart is used primarily to describe the emotional aspect of man. For example Webster's dictionary says, "the seat of the emotions: said of the moral side of human nature in contradistinction to the intellectual; as, he was all head and no heart."¹ In the Bible, the term heart describes every aspect of the inner man or person. It describes the whole self, the essence of personality. Thus, the word heart refers to the whole mind of man including the intellect, the emotions and the will. As the central essence of what a man is, the heart is the source of a man's beliefs (Lk. 24:25; Rom. 10:10), imaginations (Ezek. 13:2), understanding (1 Kg. 3:9; Job 38:36), behaviors, expressions, words (Mt. 12:34, 35; 15:18, 19), inclinations (Eccl. 10:2); intents (Heb. 4:12); reflections (1 Cor. 2:9; Rev. 18:7) and will (Eph. 6:6). "For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he" (Pr. 23:7). "Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life" (Pr. 4:23). There is no more comprehensive word use in Scripture to describe every aspect of the function of man's mind, consciousness or self. The heart is the very center and source of all that we are and all that we do. Therefore, the state of man's heart is central to one's relationship to God. If the heart is evil, then everything in that person's life is corrupt and defiled.

Our Lord emphasized this point when he told His disciples the central problem with mankind: "For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies" (Mt. 15:19). All of these dreadful evils flow from one polluted fountain—the heart of fallen man. Jesus focuses on the necessity of heart purity precisely because the natural man's heart is totally depraved. Everything about fallen man's nature is in

¹ *Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary: Unabridged*, 836.

rebellion against God. “Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Gen. 6:5). “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?” (Jer. 17:9). The gospel of Jesus Christ must be concerned with the heart because every one of us enters the world with a heart that is not pure, that is polluted and enslaved to sin. “Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me” (Ps. 51:5).

It is important that we define the word heart according to Scripture and understand what the Bible says about the heart of every unsaved person because the Scriptural doctrine on these matters is diametrically opposed to what the modern world is saying. Today, people are taught that everyone is basically good and the problem with mankind is his environment. Evil is caused by poverty, or oppression or a poor educational system. We are told that mankind’s problems will be solved by eliminating poverty, by universal healthcare, by “free” government education, by liberating the environment and so forth. All such thinking is fallacious and dangerous, for it ignores the central issue. Aside from “natural” disasters and disease (which are caused by Adam’s fall), all of the problems of this world such as war, hatred, poverty, racism, crime, perversion, originated from a person’s sinful heart. Because man’s problems are not environmental or merely intellectual, but are rooted in his own perverted, corrupted, defiled nature, the gospel of God is the only real answer for this world’s problems. The heart of man is the center of his being and the center of his problem, both God-ward and man-ward. If purity of heart is given to man by Christ, then there is hope because man needs to be changed from the inside out.

Having defined the term heart we now need to understand the term “pure.” As we examine this word, we will interact with some common false notions of the word. There are a number of things to consider.

First, purity of heart does not refer to sinless perfection in this life. There are a number of heretical groups (Pelagians, Roman Catholics, some semi-Pelagians or Arminians, Quakers, Wesleyans and Charles Finney along with his followers) who believe that it is possible to totally comply with all of God’s requirements in thought, word or deed in the present life. This doctrine, which probably was spread the most among “evangelical” Christians by Charles Wesley, is called perfectionism. Occasionally someone will meet a professing believer who says that he is completely pure in spirit; that his carnal nature has been completely eradicated; that he no longer even has sinful thoughts. Such a view however, completely contradicts Scripture. Solomon says, “Who can say, ‘I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin?’” (Pr. 20:9). John writing to Christians says, “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1 Jn. 1:8; see 1 Kg. 8:46; Eccl. 7:20; Rom. 3:10; Jas. 3:2; etc.). “According to Scripture there is a constant warfare between the flesh and the Spirit in the lives of God’s children, and even the best of them are still striving for perfection. Paul gives a very striking description of this struggle in Rom. 7:7-26, a passage which certainly refers to him in his regenerate state. In Gal. 5:16-24 he speaks of that very same as a struggle that characterizes all the children of God. And in Phil. 3:10-14 he speaks of himself, practically at the end of his career, as one who has not yet reached perfection, but is pressing on toward the goal.”² Moreover, Jesus and John, speaking by the Spirit, tell us that we need to repeatedly confess our sins to God and ask for forgiveness (Mt. 6:12, 13; 1 Jn. 1:9). Further, an examination of the lives of God’s saints in the Bible reveals men who, although dedicated to God, are far from perfect ethically. There is Noah who got drunk, Abraham who lied, and Moses who disobeyed a direct order from God. Job cursed the day he

² Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 540.

was born, Elijah doubted and fled in fear from Jezebel; the apostle Peter denied Christ and John fell in worship before an angel. All the great Reformers and Puritans had their struggles and defects. Therefore, heart purity in this life must never be equated with sinless perfection. “[T]he truth is, one of the most conclusive evidences that we do possess a pure heart is to be conscious of and burdened with the impurity which still indwells us.”³

Second, purity of heart is not something purely intellectual. It is not simply an assent to certain propositions about God, Christ and ethics. When we speak of the heart, we speak of the whole man. The idea common in our day that people simply need to give an intellectual assent to Jesus and ask Him into the heart without repentance, without a radical change of heart, has more in common with certain forms of gnosticism than biblical Christianity. The disciples of Jesus are “pure in heart.” The Holy Spirit has radically changed them at the very core of their being by the implantation of new spiritual life. Believers are not only justified, but set apart and spiritually purified. Doctrine, of course, is very important. No one can be saved without a correct understanding or biblical comprehension of God, Christ and His atoning work. But if true doctrines have not had any impact upon the heart and life, then there is no evidence of regeneration or true saving faith. There are many modernist theologians who know orthodox protestant dogma inside and out, but who are spiritually dead and do not know Christ. Jesus must not only be known in the head, but also embraced in the heart.

Third, our Lord’s statement about heart purity is focused on the internal spiritual character of believers in contradistinction to the crass externalism of the Pharisees and Jewish people at that time. The Jewish people were set apart by God to be a holy, spiritually purified people before Jehovah. They had been given various laws and ceremonies to teach them about purity, both ritually and morally. The Jews, however, misunderstood these laws and in their quest for ethical autonomy externalized biblical religion. They focused on various rituals and the outward appearance of holiness, yet neglected the inward heart aspect of true religion. Therefore, Jesus referred to them as whitewashed tombs (Mt. 23:27). They appeared very beautiful and upright on the outside, but on the inside they were dead and unclean. They appeared righteous to men, but inside were full of hypocrisy and lawlessness (Mt. 23:28). They would use a ritual to clean the outside of a cup, but inside were full of extortion and self-indulgence (Mt. 23:25). “Looked at externally, they were without spot. But their inward parts were full of ravening and wickedness. They were most concerned about the external injunctions of religion; but they forgot the weightier matters of the law, namely love to God and the love of one’s neighbor.”⁴ They forgot that true religion, in its application to the sinner, always begins in the heart and spreads out into life.

Fourth, we can better understand pureness of heart by looking at how the word is used to describe purity in other contexts. Barclay writes, “The Greek word for *pure* is *katharos* and it has a variety of usages, all of which have something to add to the meaning of this beatitude for the Christian life. (i) Originally it simply meant clean, and could, for instance, be used of soiled clothes which have been washed clean. (ii) It was regularly used for corn which has been winnowed or sifted of all chaff. In the same way it is used of an army which has been purged of all discontented, cowardly, unwilling and inefficient soldiers, and which is a force composed solely of first-class fighting men. (iii) It very commonly appears in company with another Greek adjective—*akeratos*. *Akeratos* can be used of milk or wine which is unadulterated with water, or

³ Arthur W. Pink, *An Exposition of the Sermon on the Mount*, 32-33.

⁴ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, 1:108.

of metal which has in it no tinge of alloy. So, then, the basic meaning of *katharos* is *unmixed, unadulterated, unalloyed*.”⁵

When we apply this word to the heart of man we see that purity of heart involves a number of related things. It refers to the heart of a person who has been regenerated by the Holy Spirit. The starting point of a pure heart is the new birth which is a sovereign work of the Holy Spirit upon those for whom Christ died. This change in man’s heart has two aspects—purification and renewal. “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit” (Tit. 3:5). Ezekiel presented regeneration as a spiritual cleansing. “Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols” (Ezek. 36:25). Similarly, Jesus told Nicodemus, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God” (Jn. 3:5). Paul represented purification as a circumcision of the heart: “In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ” (Col. 2:11; cf. Ezek. 36:26).

The new birth is absolutely necessary for purity of heart because we are all born with depraved, defiled hearts that are enslaved to sin. That which is impure and corrupt desires, serves and seeks the impure, sinful things of this world. But, in regeneration, the Holy Spirit cleanses the heart and imparts a new spiritual life which makes a man fit for membership in Christ’s kingdom. The Holy Spirit, as a consequence of the Savior’s death and resurrection for His people, cleanses the heart from sin and recreates it in righteousness. Thus, we see that even in the application of salvation to the elect sinner God is sovereign. A pure heart is not something that is earned, or self-generated but is imparted as a gift of grace. “The Holy Spirit, in the act of effectual calling, causes the soul to become regenerate by implanting a new governing principle or habit of spiritual affection and action. The soul itself, in conversion, immediately acts under the guidance of this new principle in turning from sin unto God through Christ.”⁶ Because the Holy Spirit has changed the sinner’s heart, that person at his very core is different. The heart is no longer defiled and no longer looks to the world and its idols, but now has spiritual affections and desires. When the heart was evil the beliefs and actions were evil. But, when the heart is made spiritual and holy by the power of the Spirit, the beliefs, desires and actions of that person follow. That person has become a spiritual person (Jn. 3:6) and is now pure in heart.

The moment the Holy Spirit regenerates a man’s heart, he immediately embraces Jesus Christ by faith and is justified before God. The gift of faith always accompanies regeneration. Thus, regeneration always leads to conversion and repentance. The regenerated heart is purified and thus turns from its sin toward the Savior. Because of the implantation of new spiritual life and the cleansing power of the Holy Spirit upon man’s heart, the regenerated person cannot lead a life characterized by sin. “Whoever has been born of God does not [habitually practice] sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God” (1 Jn. 3:9). John is not saying that Christians never sin, for that would explicitly contradict 1 John 1:8. He is saying that if you are born again your life is not characterized by sin. As Jesus said, “A good tree cannot bear bad fruit” (Mt. 7:18). A person who, before regeneration and heart purification, lived to party, smoke pot, get drunk and fornicate; after regeneration would forsake such activities and instead practice righteousness, because “everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him” (1 Jn. 2:29).

⁵ William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1:105-106.

⁶ A. A. Hodge, *The Confession of Faith* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, [1869] 1958), 171.

The Holy Spirit's gift of regeneration, which makes the heart pure and breaks the power of sin and darkness over the sinner, does not bring perfection in this life. The heart is purified, yet still must struggle with sin. "The believer's understanding is *in part* purified from darkness, his judgment from error, his will from rebellion, his affections from enmity, avarice, pride, sensuality."⁷ Thus, regeneration begins the life-long process of sanctification where the Holy Spirit, in conjunction with the Word of God, more and more enables us to mortify the sinful flesh and live righteously before God. Therefore, purity of heart is first something the Holy Spirit works in us immediately and sovereignly apart from any cooperation on our part. And, purity of heart is a life-long duty; it is something we must nurture by the means of grace. What is begun in regeneration will not be perfected until we are glorified at the second coming of Christ.

Purity of heart also refers to a man who, as a consequence of regeneration, has truly repented of his sin and is not leading a hypocritical life. We see this meaning quite clearly in Psalm 24:4-5: "He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not lifted up his soul to an idol, nor sworn deceitfully. He shall receive blessing from the LORD, and righteousness from the God of his salvation." The true disciple of Christ doesn't put on an act only in certain situations, but strives to be holy in his mind, conversation and actions at all times. Thus, this beatitude was a great rebuke to the externalism and hypocrisy of the Pharisees and the majority of Jews at that time. The Pharisees were like Nebuchadnezzar's image, partly of silver and partly of clay (Dan. 2:35). The dross, chaff and filth of sin had not been removed. The outside appeared clean, but the inside was filthy. True repentance and consecration toward God must begin in the heart. By acting the part, we may wash the outside of the cup as long as we want; but, if the heart is filthy, we are still filthy in the sight of God. Thus, later in this sermon Jesus said "that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven" (Mt. 5:20). "There must be a work of grace in the core of the heart as well as in the palm of the hand, or our religion is a delusion. May God grant that our inward powers be cleansed by the sanctifying Spirit, so that we may love holiness and abhor all sin. The pure in heart shall see God, all others are but blind bats; stone-blindness in the eyes arises from stone in the heart. Dirt in the heart throws dust in the eyes."⁸

The words for repent in the New Testament mean a change of mind (*metanoeo*, e.g., Mt. 3:2; Mk. 1:15) or heart (*metamelomai*, e.g., Mt. 21:29; Heb. 7:21), which is sincere and leads to a change in one's life (*metanoia*, e.g., Mt. 3:8; 9:13; Ac. 20:21). Repentance is related to heart purity because it is an inward, sincere state of the heart or mind that sees the exceeding sinfulness of sin; approves of God's moral law; hates one's own sins and forsakes them in order to serve Christ. True repentance is known by its permanency and its completeness. "True penitents forsake sin, with a firm resolution to have no more to do with idols. They are converted from the love as well as from the practice of sin. They particularly guard against those sins to which they were formerly most addicted, and before whose influence they are most ready to fall (Psalm 18:23). They assiduously watch against all occasions of sin, and earnestly long for complete deliverance from it. They return to God as their rightful Lord and Master, resolving, in dependence upon his grace, to 'serve him in holiness and righteousness all the days of their lives.' They form a steady and unshaken purpose in their hearts, and sedulously [i.e., diligently,

⁷ Thomas Scott as quoted in Arthur W. Pink, *An Exposition of the Sermon on the Mount*, 33.

⁸ Charles H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*, 1:424.

constantly, unremittingly] endeavour, by watchfulness and diligence, in the constant use of all [biblical] means, to avoid all sin, and to practice universal holiness.”⁹

The man who has a clean heart is far from perfect. He must struggle with his sinful desires every day; he must take up his cross daily (Lk. 9:23). However, he never makes peace with sin. Because he has a clean heart, he desires to live a holy life. Christ is his supreme Lord and, therefore, his whole priority in life is serving Jesus and not his own desires. There is a consistency in his life between the inner spring of his conduct and the conduct itself.

Another way to put it is that he is not double-minded. Thus James exhorts us, “Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded” (4:8). If we are to cure the outward motions of sin, then we must strike first at the root of it in our hearts. “That which God looketh after and loveth is ‘truth in the inward parts,’ Ps. li.6. God will easily find us out under our disguise, as the prophet did Jeroboam’s wife. Be not careful merely of honour before the people, but of your hearts before God; and let conscience be dearer than credit [from men].”¹⁰ Our Lord says something similar later in the Sermon on the Mount: “The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness” (Mt. 6:22-23). “This pureness of heart, therefore, corresponds to ‘singleness.’ It means, if you like, ‘without folds’; it is open, nothing hidden. You can describe it as sincerity; it means single-minded, or single-eyed devotion.”¹¹ Man cannot serve two masters. He cannot live with two opposite goals. He cannot glorify God by living a life of daily repentance and mortification; and, at the same time, satisfy the lusts of the flesh. “[T]he sincere Christian serves God with the ‘whole heart’ (Psalm 119:2). Hypocrites have a double heart (Psalm 12:2). A heart [that thinks it is] for God and a heart for sin. ‘Their heart is divided’ (Hosea 10:2). God loves a broken heart, but not a divided heart. An upright heart is a whole heart. The full stream and torrent of the affections runs out after God. A sincere heart ‘follows God fully’ (Numbers 14:24).”¹²

The biblical teaching on purity of heart raises some important questions. Are we living a divided or hypocritical life before God? Would we be willing to lay our whole life open before all to examine? Do we act one way in private and then another completely different manner in public? Do we cater our behavior ethically to suit those around us, acting one way with Christians and then another with unbelievers? The person who is truly pure in heart can have a transparency to their life that a hypocrite, backslider and weak believer cannot. The man who is pure in heart can be totally sincere at all times because the center of his personality and character is not defiled and devious. Because the inner spring of his heart is pure, he does not need to play out or pretend he is something that he truly is not. Some people are so adept at playing the hypocrite, at playing contrary roles on different occasions that they fool themselves. They are living in gross self-deception; they do not see their own hypocrisy. The Jewish religious leaders in our Lord’s day were such people.

⁹ Robert Shaw, *An Exposition of the Westminster Confession of Faith* (Geanies House, Fearn: Christian Focus, 1973), 202.

¹⁰ Thomas Manton, *A Commentary on James* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, [1693] 1963), 372.

¹¹ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, 1:111.

¹² Thomas Watson, *The Beatitudes*, 182.

Keeping the Heart Pure

We have noted that purity of heart is rooted in regeneration and exhibited by a sincere repentance. The man whose heart is pure is focused on Christ and does not lead a hypocritical or double-minded life. As we examine purity of heart as a continuous work, as an aspect of progressive sanctification, we need to center our attention on a number of things that nurture this purity.

First, purity of heart can only be maintained by a person who is humble in spirit. This beatitude builds on those which precede it. The man who is proud and does not acknowledge and mourn over his sins will not be pure in heart. Jesus told the Pharisees that because they believed they had no sin, their sin remained (Jn. 9:41). He rebuked the Laodiceans by saying, “Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked—I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire” (Rev. 3:17-18).

An aspect of biblical humility is not to trust our own hearts because of the sin that remains in us. Even as Christians we do not fully know our own hearts (1 Cor. 4:3-5). In our unsearchable heart dwells the law of sin (Rom. 7:23) and thus we cannot fully discern our motives and deceitfulness. Because of sin our hearts are quick to excuse transgressions, to make all sorts of rationalizations in order to justify our thoughts and actions. Sinful pride is very dangerous because it can lead us down the path of sin with complete self-deception. It can also cause us to treat sin with completely inadequate half-way measures that are unacceptable to God. Therefore, if we are to be pure in heart we must be humble, not trust in ourselves and look to Jesus and His Word. As Watson notes, “A proud man admires himself; therefore he cannot deny himself. A humble man lays his mouth in the dust. He has lower thoughts of himself than others can have of him. He goes out of himself. He renounces himself. He opens to God as the flower does the sun. He will do what God will have him do. He will be what God will have him be. He is like melting wax. God may set what stamp and impression He will upon him. The humble man is the self-denier.”¹³

Second, we can only maintain and increase heart purity through diligently examining our hearts and actions in the light of God’s holy Word. As we read, study and memorize Scripture, the Holy Spirit will apply what we read to our hearts so that we will more and more put off the old man and put on the new (Eph. 4:22). “For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Heb. 4:12). Are you exposing your thoughts, words and deeds to the perfect, penetrating light of Scripture? “Only God’s word can pierce through to this intangible realm, and it does so in a manner that is both dynamic and critical.... It is here, in this radical center of human self-hood, that the word of God does its work.”¹⁴ It is here in the heart that God’s Word cuts away sin and purifies the spring of all that we are and do. To ignore Scripture, to neglect it, to not read it diligently is to ignore the great antidote for sin in the heart and life.

Third, knowing that we cannot trust ourselves, we need to reach out to God in prayer and repeatedly ask Him to search and purify our hearts. “Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way” (Ps. 139:23-24). David had

¹³ Thomas Watson, *The Duty of Self-Denial and Ten Other Sermons* (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, [1675, 89] n.d.), 35-36.

¹⁴ Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, 166.

already searched his own heart. But, knowing the deceitfulness and fallibility of our own searching, he offered his heart to be examined by God and entreated Him to purge it of every corrupt mixture. David was so concerned about maintaining his relationship with God, of meeting God's approval in daily life, that he set his heart before God and said, "Don't let me deceive myself; examine me thoroughly; show me my faults; lead me in the right direction." We can pray for heart purity with faith, for we know that God can change hearts. "Out of an impure heart he can produce grace. Pray that prayer of David, 'Create in me a clean heart, O God' (Psalm 51:10). Most men pray more for full purses than pure hearts. We should pray for heart-purity fervently."¹⁵ We must combine our prayers for God to search our hearts and purify them with placing ourselves under the searchlight of God's perfect Word. With these two means of grace we will avoid a proud, antinomian spirit on the one hand; and a morbid introspection that leads to discouragement and depression in the other.

Fourth, if we are to have a pure heart, we must not hold on to sin with our heart. "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me" (Ps. 66:18). If we are serious about personal holiness, we must not hang on to any known sins. We must not make peace with secret sins that hinder our fellowship with God and hurt our prayer life. We should not even entertain sinful practices in our mind. Wicked fantasies must be cast out and locked out of our hearts. Toying with impurities is a sin of the mind that very often leads to a sin of the eye, mouth or hand. Our thought life will permeate and control our whole character. As Solomon says, "For as he thinks in his heart, so is he" (Pr. 23:7a). Wicked thoughts lead to evil acts and evil acts lead to wicked habits. Therefore, we should heed Paul's command: "Whatever things are true...noble...just...pure...lovely...[and] of good report...meditate on these things" (Phil. 4:8).

The person who fills his mind with the filth and trash of this world is corrupting his heart and not purifying it. Keeping our hearts pure will require a total commitment at every moment. We must seek heart purity right now in the present, otherwise holiness will elude us. This is what true repentance is all about. Do you commit yourself every day to at least attempt not to sin at all? Or, are you harboring sin in your heart? If you are, then you must repent immediately. Don't wait until tomorrow or next week, or next year or ten years from now, but do so now—this very moment. "Whoso covereth his sins shall not prosper, but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall find mercy" (Pr. 28:13). Ask Christ to strengthen you with the enabling power of the Holy Spirit to bring "every thought captive to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5).

Fifth, we must by faith understand that, because of what Christ has done and our union with Him in His work of redemption, our hearts are no longer under the dominion of sin (Rom. 6:14). No matter how much we struggle with inner lusts and no matter how weak we may be, we must never give up or lose hope because the power of God is working in us. By faith we are to reckon ourselves to be dead to sin and alive to God. This is not some fantasy, but is a concrete, historical reality. The cross and the empty tomb are our victory over sin's guilt and power. We must look to Christ and His work every day if we are to nurture heart purity. This is a continuous process. "Observe carefully the tense of the verb in Acts xv.9: it is not 'purified their hearts by faith,' but 'purifying their hearts by faith'—a continuous experience."¹⁶ God has given us the Holy Spirit to live within us and help us in the long process of sanctification. He gives us spiritual life and nurtures that life. The Spirit makes us alive to God, unites us to Christ and controls us through His infallible Word.

¹⁵ Thomas Watson, *The Beatitudes*, 195.

¹⁶ Arthur W. Pink, *An Exposition of the Sermon on the Mount*, 33.

By faith we must form the habit of continually meditating on the fact that, in Christ, we are dead to sin and alive to God. Consequently, we must trust God's Word and reject sin's advances and emphatically rebuff the temptations of life. The fact that we are dead to sin and alive to God does not mean that we do nothing; that we "let go and let God," but that we look to and pray to Jesus for help and resist sin and temptation with all of our might. The work of sanctification and our continuing progress in heart purity requires diligent action based on faith. "If I believe Christ and all his merits are mine, how can I sin against him? We do not willingly injure those friends, who, we believe, love us. Nothing can have a greater force and efficacy upon the heart to make it pure than faith. Faith will move mountains, the mountains of pride, lust, envy."¹⁷

The Pure in Heart Shall See God

Those that are pure in heart are given a most amazing blessing, which is God Himself. They will see God. This seeing God has both a present and future fulfillment.

Those who are regenerated by the Holy Spirit and have their hearts purified are given the ability to see God through the Scriptures in this life. They do not literally behold God who is pure Spirit, or look upon Him physically, but spiritually. The natural man cannot behold God's glorious attributes or understand God's love and mercy because such things, "are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2:14). Jesus said, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see [comprehend, perceive] the kingdom of God" (Jn. 3:3). If the unregenerate cannot see God's kingdom, then obviously they cannot behold God with the eye of faith. Those who have not had their hearts purified are blinded by the god of this age and thus do not embrace Christ (see 2 Cor. 4:3-4). When God's Spirit purifies our hearts, we turn from darkness and Satan to light and God (see Ac. 26:17-18). When Christ walked the earth and light shined in the darkness, "the darkness did not comprehend it" (Jn. 1:4-5). Without purity of heart man is blind and dead. He cannot see God and shall never be admitted into God's presence. This is only for the pure in heart, for those regenerated and purified by the Holy Spirit.

Do you want to see God? Then you must behold Jesus Christ and His work with the eye of faith. We can only come to God through Christ and we can only get to know God through His holy Word, the Bible. Pray that God would purify your heart and open your eyes to the perfection of Christ and His redemption. Those who reject the Savior; who choose to live in sin and follow this present evil age; whose souls are stained black with sin and the filth of hell will never come into God's favorable presence. They will not have a beatific vision of God, but rather a sight of supreme terror. "They shall see the flaming sword and the burning lake, but not the mercy seat."¹⁸ But those who trust in Christ will enjoy a peace and fellowship with God that surpasses our understanding.

The future fulfillment of this promise is our beholding of God in heaven. Theologians refer to this as the beatific vision. There are a number of things to note regarding this sight.

First, it does not mean that the glorified saints will gaze into the divine essence. God is a Spirit (Jn.4:24) and does not have a body. As a Spirit, He is invisible to the human eye (1 Tim. 1:17). Paul says that God dwells "in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see" (1 Tim. 6:16). God is so awesome in infinite holiness that a sight of His true glory would completely overwhelm us, even with our sinless glorified bodies. Not even Moses, with whom

¹⁷ Thomas Watson, *The Beatitudes*, 193.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 201.

God spoke repeatedly, saw God's face (cf. Ex. 33:18-23). When Moses asked God to show him His glory, God shielded Moses with His hand and only allowed him to get a glimpse of His back (Ex. 33:23). "The vision of Yahweh's glory—His full Personality—was impossible for Moses: but he might catch a glimpse of the 'afterglow'—a partial suggestion of what the whole radiance must be."¹⁹ Our minds, even in glory, are so small and finite in comparison to whom God really is that God will only reveal Himself to us in a way that we can comprehend and endure. The promise that we shall see God is true. However, it does not mean and cannot mean a full or complete vision of all that God is. Only God has that.

Second, it does mean that with our glorified bodily eyes we will directly behold Jesus Christ. When Philip asked our Lord to show him the Father, Jesus said, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father" (Jn. 14:9). The apostle John ends the prologue of his gospel with this amazing statement, "No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him" (Jn. 1:18). Those whose hearts are purified by the Holy Spirit will look upon the glorified Christ blazing brighter than the noon day sun. When Peter, James and John saw the transfiguration where the Savior's face shone like the sun and His clothes became as white as the light (Mt. 17:2), they saw only a small sliver of the Redeemer's glory. "There will be glory beyond hyperbole. If the sun were ten thousand times brighter than it is, it could not so much as shadow out this glory. In the heavenly horizon we behold beauty in its first magnitude and highest elevation. There we shall 'see the king in his glory' (Isaiah 33:17). All lights are but eclipses compared with that glorious vision."²⁰ In Revelation, John describes the heavenly city that descends to earth: "But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light" (Rev. 21:22-23).

What a joy, comfort and blessing that day will be when we shall dwell in the loving presence of Christ. Are you ready to enter into God's glorious presence? Are you living a life that proves you really believe heaven is your final destination? Do you truly understand that all else, that everything in this present life will pale in comparison to that glorious day? This reality certainly ought to strengthen our faith and dedication to Jesus. With this hope before us we must promptly, sincerely and continuously mortify our flesh, deny ourselves and walk in faithful obedience.

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¹⁹ A. H. McNeile, *The Book of Exodus* (London: Methuen, 1908), 215-216.

²⁰ Thomas Watson, *The Beatitudes*, 198.