

Blessed are the Pure in Heart

Matthew 5:8

By [Rev. Kevin Chiarot](#)

This morning we are looking at the sixth beatitude, in Matthew chapter 5, v.8: Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Only they shall see God. This purity of heart is thus not optional. It is the non-negotiable root of the Christian life and vision. As Calvin put it: Purity of heart is the mother of all virtues. We will make two main points: Purity in heart and seeing God.

I. Purity in Heart

First, then, purity in heart. At the outset we must ask: what is meant by heart? Because the heart is the root issue here. Blessed are the pure in HEART. And by "heart," scripture means the center of the person, the deepest seat of personality, the inner man, the wellspring of our lives. *The heart is the person in their deep interiority, the inner mystery of their being. It includes the intellect, the emotions and the will.*

For the Hebrew mind, THINKING is done in the heart – as a man THINKS in his heart, so he is. Willing and emoting flow from the heart. Thus, Proverbs warns us to guard our hearts with all diligence, for out of the heart flow the issues of life. So the heart embraces the total person, in the depth and breadth of their existence. And this presents a daunting challenge for us. For the heart, Jeremiah tells us, is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick. As our Lord will put it – it is not what goes into a man that defiles him, but rather, out of the heart proceed all wicked thoughts, words, and deeds (Adultery, murder, theft).

The heart, then, is the seat of all our troubles. It is the enemy within the gates. The ones called to guard the heart are the ones with a corrupt heart. And its condition is not to be taken lightly or under-estimated. It is a labyrinth of self-justification and deceit. And it is especially dangerous for those who fancy themselves as pretty good people.

The 19th c. Russian novelist, Ivan Turgenev said: I do not know what the heart of a bad man is like. But I do know what the heart of a good man is like. And it is terrible. It is after all, the decent religious people, keepers of the Torah, lovers of the law, the conservatives and traditionalists, to whom Jesus says:

“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup, but inside are full of greed and self-indulgence.

²⁷ “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside, but on the inside are full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean.

So much for the good people.

Now, when we speak of the PURITY of this heart, there are two related dimensions, or two different angles on, what is in view here.

Internal Purity

First, it refers to internal purity. To being cleansed of our moral defilement. Jesus, we just heard, takes the Pharisees to task, for their obsession with outward, or ritual, purity. And the human heart is, by nature, a Pharisee-like heart. As such, we deceive ourselves, we get things precisely backwards, and we find ourselves more concerned with outward appearance than inward substance.

We, too, are far from immune from wanting to APPEAR pure to men. We are often more concerned with convincing others we are pious, then with actually engaging in the hard, but glorious work of becoming pure in heart.

This internal purity of heart is an indispensable prerequisite to Christian life and worship. This is seen in Psalm 24 – and Jesus is almost surely alluding to that Psalm here – where we are told that the one who can ascend the hill of the Lord, who can stand in the holy place, is the one with clean hands and a pure heart. Such a person has an inner integrity and a passion (a vertical drive) to seek the face of God. And its source (its root) lies deep in the mystery of the state of the heart. Thus, to attain to this purity, we must learn to cry out, as David does in Psalm 51, for the Lord to create in us a clean heart, to give us wisdom in the secret, inner place. What is needed is nothing less than an act of divine creation. CREATE IN ME!

This is why the New Covenant is depicted as God putting, writing, his law deep into our hearts, sprinkling our hearts clean, taking out our hearts of stone and replacing them with hearts of flesh. For what is needed is deep interior renewal and cleansing.

Singleness of Devotion

The second, and closely related, aspect of this purity is the idea of being single-minded. Or, if you will, having a single, undivided heart. (Moral purity & singleness of devotion) Purity of heart, the 19th c. Danish philosopher, Soren Kierkegaard said, is to will one thing. That sums this text up well. Purity of heart is to will one thing. The pure in heart have one, and only one, overriding, driving,

will. They see God, and God alone, God only as their hope, their refuge, their rock and fortress, their salvation. They will his pleasure and glory. They will ONE thing. They seek to love the Lord with ALL- not part, but ALL their heart, soul, mind and strength. Thus, they are free from the tyranny of a divided self. Their inner life is not fragmented into hundreds of unrelated, or loosely related, pieces.

We live in an age of perpetual distraction, of enormous mental and emotional clutter. Of novelty, of rivers of triviality, of endless provocations to outrage and anger. Of flitting back and forth from one thing to another. Of short attention spans. Of intellectual instability. Of emotional turmoil. Of double-mindedness, of being tossed to and fro. Of lives lived on the surface of things, usually in some sort of reactionary mode. Cultural ADD.

But the purity in view here is an indictment of all of this. The word (purity) is used of pure water, of pure metals, even pure feelings, of pure grain. Thus Jesus here pronounces as blessed, flourishing, a people whose heart is single, unalloyed, unmixed, unadulterated, undivided.

A people who have heeded the rebuke of James: cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Thus, a pure, single heart here, is very much like what Jesus will call a single-eye, a pure, light-filled, non-covetous, generous eye, in chapter 6 of the Sermon on the Mount. This singleness of heart can be spoken of, as sincerity of heart. The sincere heart is one of simplicity and purity of devotion. It is free from guile or deceit.

It relates, as the man of Psalm 24 does, to both God and men, without sham, without ulterior motives, without falsehood, or hypocrisy. The hypocrite, like the Pharisee, is an actor. The very word (hypocrite) means to wear masks, to play roles, to act. The sincere heart despises fronts, false appearances, play acting. It is earnest and open.

Thus, Paul can speak of the very goal of apostolic instruction as “love from a PURE heart and a SINCERE faith.” Purity and sincerity are handmaidens. And this state, of course, is not natural to us. It comes to only (continually) through the gospel of the One who is the only pure man, the only one with a wholly undivided heart, the one completely without guile, Jesus Christ. Thus, we are told, in 1 Peter 1, that it is in responding to the gospel, in obedience to its truth, that we have had our hearts purified for a sincere and fervent love of the brethren. Having been washed, having once been purified, we are easily defiled, thus, we must continually seek renewal. We must cry out, as the Psalmist does in Psalm 86: UNITE (integrate) my heart to fear your name. He knows all about a divided heart, and he prays for God to unite it, to make it sound, whole, single and sincere. Focused, absorbed with God, attentive, riveted, fixed on the divine glory.

And this purity of heart is the key to spiritual vision. When we forget our purification, Peter says, we become blind and shortsighted. We are only able to

see what the eyes of our heart allow us to see. And resemblance to God and his purity, is the key to seeing God. To see God, we must be LIKE God. Vision is enabled by purity.

II. Seeing God

And this brings us to our second point. Seeing God. And this breaks into two parts, the already and the not yet, or, seeing now and seeing later.

Now

First, seeing God now. We can see God now, not directly, but by the eye of faith, by having the eyes of our hearts enlightened, because he has appeared, manifested himself to us in Jesus Christ. As Jesus says: If you've seen me, you've seen the Father. We have seen, John says, Jesus' glory, which is the glory of the only-begotten Son of the Father.

What faith, and here we mean the faith of the single-heart, the pure heart, what faith does, is "see" God. Like Moses, we endure by seeing him who is invisible – yet, who nonetheless, has appeared to us in Christ. It takes purity of heart to see the risen Christ, and in turn, seeing enhances purity. This is the biblical feedback loop: the pure see and seeing increases their purity.

To expand and paraphrase our beatitude: Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God and increase in purity of heart, thus attaining greater vision. As Paul says in 2 Cor 3: We all with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the risen Lord, are being transformed into the same image, from one degree of glory to another.

All our moral effort, our spiritual energies are not aimed at becoming wonderful people. Or even other cultural and social goods. None of which are our end. The pure in heart yearn, they burn with desire to SEE God (beatific vision). That vision is why we die to sin, why we take up the cross, why we repent, why we attend to the Word (Face of God for now: Augustine) and the Sacraments (which won't be necessary in the age to come).

And the glory of this vision begins now. But, and this can never be forgotten, at every point now, in this age, we see, but we see through a glass darkly.

Later

Secondly, and as usual, this is where Jesus' emphasis lies, we shall see – and fully see -- later. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall, in the eschaton, see God as fully as creatures are capable. Then, seeing will not be by faith – or

through signs (Word & Sacrament) – but shall be direct, immediate apprehension – seeing by sight.

God is thrice holy. He dwells in unapproachable light. Only the splendor of light hideth thee. He is a burning fire of holy love. And thus, nothing but that which is utterly pure, wholly unmixed, absolutely single, can stand in his presence. Though the eye of sinful man, they glory may not see. Thus, purity of heart now, leads to fully human, glorified holiness later. For, the writer to the Hebrews tells us, without holiness no one shall see the Lord.

This is why this beatitude is so basic and indispensable. Without utter and absolutely holiness, in and through the grace of Christ of course, by his purifying blood of course, but really worked out and wrought IN US. Without total holiness (human transfiguration) NO ONE will see the Lord. (Holiness is for vision). Nothing unclean, Revelation tells us, enters the gates of the New Jerusalem. And to fail to obtain to that beatific vision is the great tragedy, for we were created for this eschatological vision and fellowship. It is our great end.

It is the hope of Job to see his redeemer (Job 19), it is the hope of the Psalmist to see the face of God (Psalm 11, 17 and elsewhere). In Augustine's words: to behold God is the end of all our loving activity.

Thus, John says in his first epistle: We know that when he appears – that is, when the One who is now in eschatological glory manifests his glory and his kingdom fully – when he appears we shall be like him. And why is this so? Why is it that when he appears we shall be like him? Because, John continues, we shall SEE him as he is.

Here we see the culmination of what we mentioned earlier about the link between resembling and seeing. To resemble in purity is to see, and the final, coming seeing will mean complete resemblance. And John concludes, by alluding to our very text, with: And the one who has THIS hope, the hope of this coming, purifies himself even as he is pure. Only purity sees Purity. The greatest blessing of the saints in the new heavens and the new earth, as the book of Revelation tells us, is simply that THEY SHALL SEE HIS FACE.

Let me close with Augustine again: Yes, we wish to see God. Who does not have this desire? We strive to see God. We are on fire with the desire of seeing God. But pay attention to the saying: Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God. He continues: Provide yourself with this means of seeing God. Why would you, while your eyes are bleary, desire to see a sunrise? Let your eyes be sound and that light will be full of joy.

If your eyes are blind, that light itself will be a torment. Unless your heart is pure, you will not be permitted to see what cannot be seen unless the heart be pure. Thus, Augustine.

Let us flee, then, to our pure and innocent high priest. He has purified us, and he shall purify us. He shall unify our divided hearts, that we might see him -in part, now – and fully, in unending joy, delight and rest later. Amen.

This article is provided as a ministry of [Third Millennium Ministries](#) (Thirdmill). If you have a question about this article, please [email](#) our *Theological Editor*.

Subscribe to *Biblical Perspectives Magazine*

BPM subscribers receive an email notification each time a new issue is published. Notifications include the title, author, and description of each article in the issue, as well as links directly to the articles. Like BPM itself, *subscriptions are free*. To subscribe to [BPM](#), please select this [link](#).