

Happiness Comes Through Purity

Matthew 5:8

If you could collect the smartest intellectuals from around the world, bring them together, and ask them one question, “How many of you believe in God?” several hands would go up. On the other hand, many hands would go up if you asked, “How many of you do not believe in God?”

If you divide the smartest, most educated minds of the world into believers and unbelievers, there would be quite a few in each group. That is because faith in God is not a matter of intelligence. Faith is not a result of intellect, any more than it is a result of ignorance.

Faith is not a matter of intelligence, it is a matter of instinct. Even science has recently confirmed the power of innate, inbred instinct. A notable example is the recent experiment of Dr. Maurice, a scholar and a student of the weaver bird of South Africa. This interesting little bird makes its nest out of reeds, lines it with silky grass, and does what no other bird does – he makes a hole in the bottom of his nest through which he makes his entrance.

Dr. Maurice, trying to test the strength of instinctive drives, took two eggs from a nest in South Africa, transported them out of the country, and incubated them until they hatched. He successfully raised the birds in cages through four and even five generations. None of these birds ever had any exposure to nests with a hole in the bottom of it.

Dr. Maurice took the fifth generation of weaver birds, brought them back to South Africa, and released them in their natural habitat. The birds found reeds, immediately lined their nests with silky grass, and then made holes in the bottom. Incredible.

There are mysteries in anthropology and natural science – mysteries that can only be described as instinctive. These instincts are powerful; they can propel swarms of bees, herds of whales, schools of salmon, and flocks of geese thousands of miles. These instincts are also enduring; animals that are born with their peculiar instinctive modes of behavior have them as long as their species is in its native habitat.

What does any of that have to do with us today? The answer lies in Romans 12:3, "For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith." Genesis 1:26 tell us that we made in the "image" and "likeness" of God. **In that creative moment God placed in the heart of every man the need to worship Him.** That is why humankind throughout history has been drawn to a belief in a God. Even the aborigines of Australia and the headhunters in New Guinea believe in a god or gods. They feel the instinctive urge within their souls to know and worship something greater than themselves.

How else can you explain Bill Murray, son of the militant atheist, Madelyn Murray O'Hare? He was raised and indoctrinated in atheism, and he worked with his mother for years, but he still had a life-transforming experience that turned him into a believer in God.

The truth of the matter is that faith is a sign of health. Skepticism is a mark of illness. Unbelief is abnormal; faith is normal.

In our studies of the Beatitudes, we have come to Matthew 5:8, and the requirement for a pure heart. Here is the beatitude which demands that every person who reads it should stop, and think, and examine himself.

The Word of God considers the heart the source of the will, the intellect and the emotions. Fear and courage, love and lust, joy and jealousy, hatred and happiness, all make their habitation in the heart.

Jeremiah 17:9 tells us that the heart is the womb of deception, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?" In Mark 7:21-22, Jesus said this about the heart, "From within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly."

Why we do the things we do is a mystery that the finest minds cannot explain. There are halos and horns in the human heart. The Psalmist reminds us in Psalm 8:5 that we have been created just "a little lower than the angels," but at times our thoughts and conduct are downright devilish. **Locked within the heart is the divine spark to achieve righteousness.** But often we end up doing the ridiculous.

Jesus teaches us that if we are ever to be happy in our Christian service, we must have a pure heart. He is not saying that we must attain sinless perfection, a spiritual state in which it would be impossible for us ever to sin again. Nor does it mean we must live in a monastery, looking pious and mouthing religious slogans.

The word “pure” is used twenty-eight times in the New Testament alone. But what does it really mean? Are the pure in heart half-divine, half-human beings? Do they have no normal desires, no healthy drives, and no emotional feelings? Are they saints who have lost all contact with the real world? Of course not! Jesus addresses ordinary people who have ordinary problems, and He gives them an extraordinary way to experience happiness.

Ezekiel 36: 26 tells us that a pure heart comes from the hands of God, "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh."

We cannot gain a pure heart by our own efforts. Our generation has been told to think positively. There is certainly much value in having a positive mental attitude. But there is also a great deception of we tell ourselves, "My thoughts are positive therefore my heart is pure."

Our hearts cannot be made right with God through any mental process. A pure heart is the result of a divine miracle made possible by the will of God through the death of Christ on the cross. John 1:13 tells us it happens when we are born "not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God." In other words, a pure heart happens when a person commits his or her life to Jesus Christ.

We all want what comes from having a pure heart: happiness. But how many of us are willing to go through the painful process of change that makes it possible to be happy in an unhappy world?

I am sometimes amazed at the simplicity of the teachings of Jesus when it comes to everyday application. It is only through the deception of Satan that seeks to cause us to be confused when it comes to living out these biblical principles of happiness. Jesus gives us precise steps with predictable results guaranteed by God to produce genuine, lasting happiness. The first four deal with man's relationship to God; the last four deal with man's relationship to man.

What then is the message of the Beatitudes? Our relationship to other people is as vital to our happiness as is our relationship to God. Happiness has a horizontal dimension as well as a vertical dimension. **We cannot say, "I love God," and not love other people!!** According to 1 John 4:20 it is impossible to love God and not love other people, "For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen."

This is quite a challenge. After all, God is easy to love. He is perfect in every way. But the jerk next door, or the boss down the hall, or the secretary across the isle – that is a different story all-together!

In January we make a New Year's resolution: "I will be more understanding of others." In March we scratch that out and write, "I will try to be more patient when dealing with the incompetent people that I work with." By June we scratch that out and settle for "I will probably slap someone in the face first thing in the morning."

Imagine that the beatitudes have been grouped in stacks of four - the first through the fourth on one side, the fifth through the eighth on the other.

Notice how the first principle, "Happy are the poor in spirit" relates to the fifth, "Happy are the merciful." When our stubborn, rebellious spirits have been broken, we are then able to be merciful.

Also notice how the second principle, "Happy are those who mourn," relates to the sixth, "Happy are the pure in heart." **When we mourn over our sin, our hearts are purified.** Purity of heart comes from having faced up to the reality of who we are inside. It comes from having looked into the mirror of our souls, seen the unspeakable and mourned over our moral and spiritual imperfection, permitting the master potter to create a new heart within us.

Being a Christian does not mean living an unnatural life. If does not mean escaping from reality. Rather it means living in the now, knowing who we are and to whom we belong. **It means living with a clear definition of our problems, knowing that with God's help we can face the impossible and stand in the winner's circle.** It means sailing through the stormy seas of life smiling in triumph, transforming adversity into opportunity. It means understanding the truth of Romans 8:37 that says, "We are more than conquerors through him that loved us."

By the same token, having a pure heart does not mean that we will be free from conflict or live a life without controversy. It will not spare us from the harsh realities of life.

Just think about Jesus. He had a pure heart, and He lived in controversy every minute from Bethlehem's manger to resurrection morning. He was born part of a despised minority. **The legitimacy of His birth was brought into question by the religious leaders of His day.** He was called a drunkard, a heretic and a demonized madman by religious leaders. **The state had Him put to death as an insurrectionist.**

No, a pure heart will not get us out of conflict and controversy. It may well be the very thing that gets us into it.

We can understand purity of heart in two senses. The first meaning is to be without hypocrisy, or to be sincere. The word "sincere" comes from two Latin words. "Sin" means "without" and "cere" means "wax." Therefore, the word "sincere" literally means "without wax."

It is a term that was brought into existence by ancient merchants as they purchased expensive stone statues. The one thing that could make a statue worthless was a crack in the stone. **In an effort to deceive a prospective buyer, a seller might mix rock dust with wax and rub the mixture into a crack on a statue.** **In the dim inside light, the wax made the statue appear flawless.** **But outside, the sun's heat would melt the wax and expose the fraud.** **Therefore, for a statue to be "without wax" meant that it was authentic, genuine, just as it appeared to be.**

From time to time, the enemy of our soul, Satan, and sometimes because of our making bad decisions, we face trials and adversity, where our contents are tested. If we are simply cosmetic Christians whose faults and defects are hidden by the wax of phony religion and pretend righteousness, we will be exposed as hypocritical frauds. **Why? Because when the heat of reality hits our lives it usually separates that which is real from that which is false!**

The second meaning of being pure in heart is to be cleansed, or without defilement. While it is true that Christians are already pure by the blood of Jesus which was shed upon the cross, we must choose to maintain our fellowship with our heavenly Father, through our constant confession. **This truth is seen in James 4:8-10, "Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands,**

you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom (do you see the connection here between mourning over wrongdoing and purity of heart?). Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up." 1 John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

Who takes the next step? We do. The Bible says, "If we confess our sins..." **That is our part!** It is not up to God to chase us down! Sure, there is Holy Spirit conviction, but it is up to us to call on Him for forgiveness! **What is God's part?** "He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

When Jesus taught His principles of happiness, He was looking eye-to-eye with the religious leaders of His day, who pretended to be pure. They were proud of their religious background and involvement. They had kept the letter of the law, but their hearts were cold, and hard, and hateful.

They worked from the outside in, while Jesus was saying to work from the inside out. It was this same attitude that Jesus addressed in Matthew 23:27-28, "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 dead man's bones and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness."

The Bible says in 1 Samuel 16:7, "The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart." **We can pretend to be pure outwardly, but God is recording our inward thoughts, examining our motives, and cataloging our relationships.** And, listen very carefully, I promise you that in due time, you will have the opportunity to look at yourself as you really are! And I promise you, without purity, that look will be extremely painful!

An impure heart is the reason for much unhappiness. When our hearts are at war with God, there is tension, frustration, anger, confusion, bitterness, loneliness, fear and guilt. **When we tell a lie, our heart hurts.** **When we commit adultery or fornication, our heart hurts.** When we slander another with a barbed tongue, our heart hurts. **When our actions are dishonest, our heart hurts.**

And, if you can live in sin and disobedience toward the Lord God of glory, and it does not cause you any pain in your soul – my friend you have a major problem on your hands.

Jesus said, "Happy are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." Is there joy and happiness in your heart today because of your right relationship with Jesus Christ as your personal Savior? Or is there misery and frustration because of some hidden or excused sin? What is your answer today?

If you are not saved, why not?

Everyone please stand for prayer.

Father,

Your Word has spoken to my heart today. Give me the courage to examine my motives and the attitude of my heart. Give me the courage to change for Your glory. In Jesus' name. Amen.