

The Importance of a Pure Heart

by Darrell Stetler

A pure heart is necessary to stand in God's holy presence and to see God, and it can be obtained through the new birth, the forgiveness of sins, and the cleansing of the heart.

Duration: 41:40

Scripture: Matthew 5:8, Matthew 6:33, 1 John 3:4-7

Topics: "Purity"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of the holiness message and how it provides answers to four fundamental questions: where we came from, what is wrong with the world, how to fix it, and where we are going. The speaker asserts that Christianity is the only religion that adequately addresses these questions. The sermon focuses on the concept of redemption and how God has provided a solution for the brokenness in the human heart. The preacher highlights the need for a pure heart, which goes beyond the absence of sin, and explains that the cure for the problem lies in the new birth and justification through faith in God.

Transcript

I want to consider this morning from Matthew chapter 5, my text is found Matthew chapter 5 and verse 8. Matthew chapter 5 and verse 8. I'll be looking at numerous scriptures in this message, so you might want to keep your Bible open, follow or just listen or take notes, whatever you want to do. Matthew chapter 5 and verse 8 is my text. These are the words of Jesus and it's pretty hard to improve on His words, isn't it? I remind myself every once in a while that God has not promised to bless my words, He has promised to bless His word.

And so Jesus says, blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. I read a fascinating commentary by Chuck Colson entitled, Generic Spirituality, Why Christianity is Unique. I want to give you some of it, an introduction here.

He said, it's becoming the mantra of the new millennium, says American Demographics Magazine. The phrase, I'm into spirituality, not religion. You preachers been running into that? I'm into spirituality, not religion.

The slogan means people are searching for spiritual experience, but they don't want dogma or doctrine. Today's common view was expressed by Washington, D.C. psychic who said, all religions will take people

to the same place if they practice the spirituality within themselves. Friends, that's far more common than I wish it were.

I can't tell you how many times Colson says, I've heard even Christians say the same thing. How do some believers get sucked into the cultural trends that are so contrary to their faith? Good question. He goes on to say, the answer is that we have not fully understood that Christianity is not just another route to spiritual experience.

It is a claim to truth. Christianity is a world view and it can be tested by seeing how well it answers the fundamental questions every world view must address. What are those questions? Colson says those questions can be broken down into the traditional biblical categories of creation, fall, and redemption.

And I like to add eternity or destiny. So, the question of creation, fall, redemption, and destiny. In other words, every world view, every religious system must answer the basic question of creation.

That is, the ultimate origin, where did we come from? The fall, what is wrong in our world? Can anybody argue but what something's desperately wrong in the world we live in? Where did we come from? What's wrong in this world? And is there an answer? How do you fix it? And then I add eternity, where are we going when we leave this world? Those four basic questions must be answered by every world view and every system of religion. Colson concludes, and rightly so, that by using these three categories or four categories, we can show that among all the religions of the world, Christianity gives the best answers. And he's right.

Christianity is the only one that answers all those questions. Where we come from, what's wrong, how can it be fixed, and where are we going? I take it a step further, without any hesitancy this morning, and say that the holiness message, the Wesleyan message, the message of heart religion, the message of full salvation, is the only thing that answers all four questions like they ought to be answered, and answers them adequately. Well, there's no way I can deal with all four of those areas.

Where we came from, what's wrong, how to fix it, and where we're going. But I do want to pick out one, and that is redemption. What is wrong with the human family? And what God proposes to do about it.

What He has provided to fix what's wrong in the human heart. How does God propose to fix the problem of evil in man? I'm calling this, what is a pure heart? If you take just a casual stroll through a Bible concordance, you will immediately find that the Bible has much to say about the heart. You immediately see the importance that God places on what He calls the heart.

In the Old Testament, the word heart is used some 720-something times. In the New Testament, another 164 times. Now when we think about the heart, we normally think, usually think about one of two things.

We normally think about that organ in our physical being that we hope keeps beating, you know, keeps pumping the blood through our system. Or we think about some emotional object, some center of feeling. You know, we talk about, I love something with all of my heart.

I don't know if Brother Miles is going to get into that or not, in this love and relationships thing or not. But you know, you don't have to look very far in the Bible to see that the word heart has a much deeper and much broader meaning than that. Many scriptural passages use the word heart to mean the whole of the inner life, the center of man's nature, the real you.

For example, Genesis chapter 6 in verse 5. I preached from it yesterday. God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of man's heart was only evil continually. So God tells us we can think, imagine with our heart.

Mark chapter 12 in verse 30. Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy mind, and with all thy strength. This is the first commandment.

So we can love God with our heart, Jesus says. Daniel chapter 1 in verse 8 says, Daniel purposed in his heart. So we can make choices with our heart.

We can decide things in our heart. 2 Samuel 6.16. Michelle, Saul's daughter, saw King David leaping and dancing before the Lord, and she despised him in her heart. So we can hate with our hearts.

Other passages of Scripture, and I won't take time to give you the references, but let me just run through these. The Scripture teaches the heart can be bitter. It can be sorrowful.

It can be wise. It can be merry. We can understand with our heart.

The heart can be deceitful and desperately wicked, Jeremiah 17.10 tells us. The heart can be hardened. The heart can hold secrets.

It can be enlarged, blind. It can do the will of God. We can err in our hearts.

The heart can have thoughts and intents. The heart can be deceived. The heart can be impenitent.

And the heart can obey. One of the most powerful passages of Scripture in the entire Bible is Mark chapter 7 in verse 21. God says, For from within, out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornication, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness.

All of these evil things come from within and defile the man. Boy, that's pretty serious it sounds to me like. The heart can be evil and absent grace it is a well of evil.

Acts chapter 8 in verse 37 tells us we can believe with our heart. Romans 10 9 says as well, Thou shalt believe if thou shalt believe in thy heart, thine heart, that God hath raised him from the dead. Thou shalt be saved, for with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth man confesseth unto salvation.

So, we see that the heart is very, very important to your makeup. It is the whole of the inner life of man. It is the center of man's character and nature and affections.

Man's heart is what he is. It is his basic nature. Now, with those thoughts in mind I want to look at what God calls a pure heart.

A pure heart. The psalmist declares the condition of man's heart are the nature that is necessary to stand in God's holy presence. In Psalm 24 verse 3 and 4, Who shall ascend unto the heel of the Lord, and who shall stand in his holy place? And then he answers his question, he that hath clean hands and a pure heart.

Jesus said in my text, Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Listen again to the Apostle Paul as he states that the goal of God's commandment is love out of a pure heart. Brother Miles talked to us about love yesterday.

Did you know that if that commandment is kept, and if we live as we ought in that regard, it must come from a pure heart. Paul goes on writing to Timothy in 2 Timothy 2.22 And says, flee youthful lust, but follow after righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart. James echoes the same truth in 4.8 when he says, Cleanse your hands, ye sinners, and purify your hearts, ye double-minded.

When Peter looked back on the day of Pentecost, The most memorable thing in Peter's mind was not the cloven tongues like as of fire, Not the mighty rushing wind, Not the other languages that were used on the day of Pentecost. The most memorable thing as he looked back on the day of Pentecost, In Acts chapter 15 and verse 9, he said, Our hearts were purified by faith. In the light of that, Peter later wrote in 1 Peter 1.22, Seeing that ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth of the Spirit, Unto unfeigned love of the brethren, See that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently.

There it is again. That love that Brother Miles was talking about must flow from a pure heart or it will be imperfect. Our love for God and our love for our fellow man can never be what it ought to be unless it comes from a pure heart.

So the scriptural evidence is overwhelming. God requires a pure heart. The Bible teaches that a pure heart is possible.

The Bible declares that God does purify a man's heart. The Bible gives us examples of those who received a pure heart in this life. And flowing from a pure heart is the lifestyle of a holy man, a holy woman that is pleasing to God.

So, we better look at this question. What is a pure heart? It's clear that a pure heart, that this pure heart that enables us to ascend into the hill of the Lord and stand in His holy place, this pure heart that will enable us to see God, which is the goal of all of God's commandments, which enables us to call on the name of the Lord out of a pure heart, this pure heart is not the native character of man. It is not the natural state of the human being, is it? Coming back to the question, what's wrong with man? I don't think anybody would argue that man in his native state and man as we see him living out his life, in a general sense in this society and world we live in, is not a state of purity.

It's not the natural state of man. But that pure heart is necessary to stand before God and please Him. The pure heart that God speaks of is in sharp contrast to that heart that I read to you about a while ago, from which proceeds, God says, evil thoughts and adultery and fornication, wickedness, covetousness, and on and on.

The whole catalog of sin proceeds from a wicked heart, not a pure heart. Such an evil heart is the plight of mankind. It's the native state of man.

It's the moral condition in which he is born. Man is born with a nature that produces evil, not good. Man is born with a nature that defies God's law.

Man is born with a nature that can produce the most wicked, tainted actions and attitudes that are imaginable. And yet, God demands a pure heart. What can we do? What's the remedy? Is there any

hope? Is there a fix for this problem? Friends, I want to tell you, I'm glad I can preach this message.

I told my daughter, when I get a message like this on my heart, I just can't wait to preach it. Because I'm the bearer of good news. God has an answer for the problem of an evil heart.

God has an answer for what's wrong with man. God has an answer for the wickedness that flows from his heart in a natural state. God has an answer.

The cure begins in the new birth. When I'm born again, my sins are forgiven. My acts of transgression are washed away.

My guilt is gone. I'm made spiritually alive. It's a new beginning.

It's a spiritual birth. I'm justified in the sight of a holy God. The record is cleared in heaven.

And my name is written in the Lamb's Book of Life. And I'm adopted into the family of God. And I become God's child.

And I am given victory over sin. Now let me stop right there at that crossroads. I think it's one we need to reemphasize in this day.

I maintain that one of the marks of a new birth experience, one of the marks of being made a new creature in Christ Jesus, all things passed away and all things become new, is that you do not want to tolerate sin in any degree or any variety in your life. Let me give you some Scripture. Turn with me for a moment.

I'd like for you to follow this. Hold me accountable here. If I'm missing it, don't tell me now, but tell me after service.

1 John chapter 3, verse 4 to 6. 1 John chapter 3. Give you a moment to turn there. 1 John chapter 3, verse 4. God says this, Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law, for sin is a transgression of the law. Now let's analyze that just a minute.

God's telling us what an act of sin is. Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth the law, for sin is a transgression of the law. That is, sin is lawlessness.

Sin is choosing to break God's law. Now that requires two things. It requires knowledge and choice.

Friends, sin is not a mistake. Sin is not an accident. Sin is lawlessness.

That needs to be underscored. God tells us that whosoever committeth sin transgresseth the law, for sin is lawlessness. Verse 5, And ye know that He, that is Jesus, was manifested to take away our sins, to take away our acts of lawlessness.

And in Him is no sin. Aren't you glad that Jesus came to deal with lawlessness? To take away our acts of lawlessness? Why friends, that's shouting ground. I say, Hallelujah.

Is there anybody here that didn't have an ugly old pile of lawlessness in your life at some point? And you came to the foot of the cross, and you confessed your sins, and you repented of those sins, and you put your faith in the merits of the shed blood of Jesus Christ, and called for Jesus' sake, blotted out your transgressions, and took away your acts of lawlessness. Hallelujah. Verse 6, He said then, Whosoever abideth in Him sinneth not.

Now friends, if every Christian has to sin in word, thought, and deed every day, there are some scriptures that shouldn't be in the Bible. And this is one of them. Because God says, On the basis of sin is lawlessness.

Remember that. On the basis of sin is lawlessness. Whosoever abideth in Him sinneth not, does not choose a pathway of lawlessness.

Does not choose to break God's law. For whosoever sinneth, whosoever chooses to break God's law, hath not seen Him, neither known Him. Now friends, if you're living a lifestyle of lawlessness, you are not, biblically speaking, a born again Christian.

You have some repenting to do, some forgiveness to find, and hallelujah, the fountain is open. Verse 7, Little children, let no man deceive you. He that doeth righteousness is righteous.

What is righteousness? It's the opposite of lawlessness. Even as He is righteous, He that committeth sin, committeth lawlessness, is of the devil. Boy, we preachers couldn't get by with that kind of preaching, could we? He that sinneth, committeth lawlessness, is of the devil.

For his seed... No. He that committeth sin is of the devil. What are the works of the devil? It's lawlessness.

So, verse 9, Whosoever is born of God, doth not commit sin. Does not commit lawlessness. For his seed remaineth in him.

What is that seed? That seed is the seed of righteousness. He cannot sin. Does that say He's incapable of sin? No, it does not.

It says He is enabled not to sin. There's a whole big difference. Friends, we don't preach that you lose your will when you get saved.

The Calvinists believe that. Isn't that right? If I can't lose my salvation when I get saved, I lose my will. No.

We don't preach that you're unable to sin when you get saved. We preach that you're enabled not to sin when you get saved. You're enabled not to live in lawlessness against God.

You're enabled not to violate the knowledge of God's law that you have and that light that He's shed on your pathway. Now, I'm spending a little time here because I believe we need to reemphasize this in our day. He is enabled not to sin because He is born of God.

So, the new birth turns us away from lawlessness. I'm regenerated, touched with a new touch of life. But friends, even though God forgives my transgressions, my acts of lawlessness, and blots them out in His book, writes my name in the Lamb's book of life, even though I'm His child, even though every sin is forgiven, every sin is washed away, every act is forgiven, I'm justified before God, even though that is true, there is yet remaining in the heart of a born-again person a nature, a principle that produced all the acts of lawlessness in the first place.

All the vile sins are possible to man. God, for Jesus' sake, forgives those sins. But after the new birth, there yet remains a nature of sin.

Richard S. Taylor calls it a leftover tendency to assume autonomy or control. It's a state of chronic resistance. Friends, it's a nature that caused man to rebel in the first place.

But friends, I'm the bearer of good news. What is this, Wednesday? I lose track, can't meet. I'm the bearer of good news.

God can not only forgive our acts of lawlessness, blot them out forever. I want to tell you, He doesn't leave us to struggle on with the nature that caused lawlessness in the beginning. He doesn't leave us with no hope.

If He did, it would not be a cure for the problem. What's wrong with man? I come back to my declaration in the beginning. The message of holiness is the only message that adequately answers the problem that man has.

The nature of sin remains. The state of chronic resistance. But God can forgive and He can cleanse.

The plan of redemption, the plan of God, and the privilege of man, is to not only know a change of action through redeeming grace, but it's a change of nature as well. It's a change from a condition of impurity to one of purity. It's a change from a condition of rebellion to one of complete surrender.

It's a change that brings about purity in the basic moral character of man. A purity that cleanses the disposition to rebel against God. A purity that satisfies a holy God.

Paul says it like this in Romans chapter 5 and verse 19, For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners. Now, not many people theologically struggle with that. By the disobedience of Adam, many were made sinners.

We're constituted by nature sinners. You believe that? Every evangelical church believes that. But many, many don't read the rest of the verse.

Romans chapter 5 and verse 19, By the disobedience of one, many were made sinners. So by the obedience of one, shall many be made, constituted by nature, righteous. Friends, I want to tell you that's not accounted righteous.

That's not God looking at man, but seeing Jesus. That's not suppressing the nature of sin. That's not even being given the presence of the Holy Spirit to have power over the old nature.

That is a change of nature. That is a purifying of the nature of man. That is a pure heart, a changed nature.

Hallelujah! I like the little children's story. Maybe you'll remember it. Of the little boy who came home one day with a little pig.

And he wanted to make that pig his pet. But he just had one problem. The little pig kept acting like a little pig.

He wanted to wallow in every mud hole. He enjoyed stretching out and grunting, laying down in that filth. The little boy had an idea.

He took the pet pig and had some surgery performed. And took out his pig heart and put in a lamb's heart. I know that's not true to reality, but it illustrates what I'm saying.

You say, is that biblical? Let me read it to you. Romans chapter 6 and verse 6 if you want to turn there. Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed.

Why? That henceforth ye should not serve sin. The old life is crucified until we act different because we are different. On the inside the nature has been cleansed.

The sin nature destroyed. The inwardness of sin decisively dealt with by the grace of God. The inner aversion of a carnal heart against the will of God is removed.

The root of bitterness is crucified. Now friends, let me just say this for a moment. If you have been saved, but you have not been sanctified wholly.

Your heart has not been purified. You are going to continually struggle with an unexplainable drawback in your heart. Even while you are not living in lawlessness.

There is something on the inside that will be unexplainable. An unexplainable drawback to God's full perfect will. It will be something that draws back at the full authority of God.

You will find it easier at times to argue with God than to just obey Him. If your heart is not purified. It will show up in a resistance to authority structures that God has placed in your life.

Did you know a lot of times our arguments with authority structures are only substitutes for our arguments with God? You know why? If your heart has not been purified, you want to be the authority. The argument with the rule book is only symptomatic of an argument with God. The argument with the discipline is only symptomatic of an argument with God.

You say, is the discipline the Bible? No, it's not. And I don't try to make it the Bible. But I did make a commitment to an organization called Bible Methodist Connection of Churches when I cast my lot with them and became a member.

And I said I'd live by that book of discipline. Are you living by that book of discipline? Or do you have an argument with it? I just thought I'd ask. A carnal heart doesn't want to be told what to do.

There's an unexplainable drawback at the full will of God. Especially in some specific sensitive areas that are peculiar to your personality. There's some areas of life you just can't seem to say a great big I will.

A big yes. No matter where it leads you. You want to bargain with God and rationalize with God and give partial obedience at times.

There's an inward craving in a heart that is not purified for this old world. At times you find yourself wanting to fit with this world. Friends, that's a carnal expression.

I want to fit in. I want to be approved by this world. Now I want to tell you, all of us want approval.

I understand that. That's why I said our relationships can never be what they ought to be unless they're coming from a pure heart. There's nothing wrong with sanctified approval.

But friends, it's got to be sanctified approval or it will get out of hand. There will be an inward craving to find your identity in this world. Rather than an identity that is God's identity for you.

An inward tendency to live for the things of time instead of the things of eternity. And maybe this is the greatest expression of a heart that is not purified. An inward tendency to live for self.

And the desires of self and the glory of self and the gratification of self and the fulfillment of self. Rather than the glory of God. But oh, I want to tell you, the nature can be purified.

Until to do God's will is your highest goal. You want to say yes to Him. To walk in the light is your greatest thrill.

To be like Jesus is your greatest goal. The disposition to rebel against God is gone. It's marked by loving God and seeking God and desiring Him.

To know Him better and love Him more and to serve Him in all things. Your nature is such that you don't feel uncomfortable in His holy presence. It's been purified of all that is contrary to purity.

You say preacher. And let me just stop and say this. I may be talking to someone this morning who has never heard this kind of message before.

And if that's so, I want to say to you. You follow God and walk in the light is all I ask. I don't ask anybody to agree with what I say because I said it.

You follow God, you walk in the light, you keep your heart open. And see where God leads you. I believe He will lead you to heart purity.

You say preacher. Let me see if I understand this now. If I have a pure heart, will I ever make a mistake? Will I ever have a faulty judgment? Will I ever misunderstand or be misunderstood? Will I ever be tempted to sin? You know the amazing thing about God's plan of redemption is.

He tailored it to human beings. And if you get sanctified, you'll be just as human as you were before. Your heart will be pure.

Your head may not be perfect. I may make a mistake that is not an act of rebellion against God. But may I say again, God does not call a mistake that is not an act of rebellion sin.

He doesn't. And friends, we make a mistake when we do. I may have a faulty judgment that is not an act of a malicious nature.

I may be tempted to sin. I may even misunderstand God's will and be out of His will for a period of time. But as I walk in the light and walk with God, God will be patient to lead me.

And He'll bring me into line and help the holiness of God to shine out through my life. But I want to testify to you. The rebel of the soul can die.

The rebel of the soul can be crucified. The malicious nature of sin can die. Until it is the thrill of your heart to do the will of God.

And your motive before Him is pure. In the pure light of heaven. Someone described the nature of sin like being out of tune with the will of God.

I remember years ago going to the Cincinnati Symphony when I was just a boy. And it was fascinating to me because when you arrived at that symphony hall and sat down and looked down there at all of the players. All the instruments.

They were all sawing away on their violins or tooting away on their horns or plucking away on their instruments. Different kinds. And it was just absolute chaos.

Didn't make any sense. Wasn't any rhyme or reason to it. But all of a sudden from over at the side there would be a man standing in the wings and he would start walking across.

He was the concert master. The first chair violinist. And everybody in the crowd on cue got real quiet and all the playing stopped.

That concert master would signal for the note. The A that would tune the orchestra. And for a moment again it sounded like chaos.

But they weren't playing tunes. They were tuning their instruments. Turning those knobs and tuning that horn.

And then in walked the conductor and raised his arms and the music began. And it was something that was beautiful and orderly and meaningful. When the human heart is purified by the Holy Ghost.

It is brought into harmony with the Holy God. Hallelujah. Now let me, and my time is getting away.

I'm going to mess around and preach as long as Brother Cravens if I'm not careful here. Let me tell you one other thing. There is more to a pure heart than the absence of sin.

Just like there is more to light than the absence of darkness. You can't make yourself pure by beating out the sin of your life. I remember when I was a boy.

I'll never forget. We used to live in a house that had a basement. But the entrance to the basement wasn't on the inside of the house.

It had one of these things that you open those doors. And you walk down from the outside of the house into the basement. Well, we kept our bicycles and lawn mowers and so forth in the basement.

But as a boy, I had figured this out. That the door of that basement was on the outside. And that meant somebody didn't have to come in my house to get in my basement.

And as a boy, I could just see that big old burly criminal down there. Hiding, lurking in the shadows, you know. When I went down to get my bicycle.

You had to go down the steps to the basement and turn left. And you had to go about, as I recall, probably 15-20 feet down the center of the basement there. There was a light, you know, and it had a little string on it that you pulled the string to turn the light on.

There wasn't a switch at the door. And so I would go down in that basement. And I had figured out that there might be somebody in there.

Because of that outside entrance to that basement. And I knew I had a ways to go in the dark to get to the light. And so I would start down through.

I knew it was in the center of the basement. And I would get in the center and start walking down. And I would start swinging my arms like this, you know.

Part of that, you know, I told myself I was trying to find that string. But I was doing more than trying to find that string. I was trying to beat out the darkness, you know.

But you know, I learned something. The answer to darkness is not to beat out the darkness. The answer to darkness is turn the light on.

And friends, I want to tell you the answer to sin in the human heart is not to try to by some austere method to pound and beat and die and so forth. The answer is to let the Holy Ghost come in. And let God turn the light on.

And let him apply the shed blood of Jesus Christ. To cleanse from all sin. I must close.

I believe the crying need of the church in this 21st century. And the crying need of every unsanctified believer. Is the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

And the purity of heart that results from that baptism. I believe the pure heart is the only thing that will produce a consistent victory in your life. Lift you above the pull of this world.

Prepare you to live with victory in a sinful world. Prepare you to meet temptation with victory. Prepare you to be useful.

And yes, prepare you for heaven. I begin with a quote from Chuck Colson. He said, we have not fully understood that Christianity is not just another route to spiritual experience.

It's a claim to truth. I close with a quote of my own. Holiness is not just a claim to some ecstatic spiritual experience.

It is a claim to meet the need of the human heart. And it's the only thing that will. Blessed are the pure in heart.

For they shall see God. I want us to stand together.

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