

# Purity and Maturity

by Thomas Cook

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*Purity of heart is a work wrought within us in a moment by the omnipotent power of the sanctifying Spirit, while maturity is a natural process involving culture and discipline.*

**Scripture:** Proverbs 4:18, 2 Corinthians 7:1, Philippians 3:13, Hebrews 10:10, James 4:8

**Topics:** "Christian Maturity", "Heart Purity"

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## Description

Thomas Cook preaches about the importance of purity of heart and maturity in Christian character. He distinguishes between purity of heart, which is an instantaneous work of the Holy Spirit cleansing us from sin, and maturity, which involves a gradual process of growth in virtues. Cook emphasizes that purity is the removal of anything adverse to God, while maturity refers to the ripeness and fullness of Christian virtues. He highlights the need for believers to seek both a clean heart and spiritual growth in order to experience the fullness of God's grace and to continually progress in knowledge, love, and conformity to Christ.

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## Transcript

There are various degrees of impunity but strictly speaking, there are no degrees of purity. According to Webster, the word "pure" means: "entire separation from all heterogeneous and extraneous matter clear free from mixture; as pure water, pure air or silver or gold." The word in the New Testament which is most frequently translated "pure" occurs in some of its forms nearly seventy times. We may get at the idea the word was meant to convey by noting how the original is used. It is used of the body not smeared with paint or ointment, of an army rid of its sick and ineffective, of wheat when all the chaff has been winnowed away, of vines without excrescences, and of gold without alloy. The idea is that that which is pure consists of one thing; it is uncompounded, without mixture or adulteration, it has all that belongs to it and nothing else. Gold that is free from alloy, unmixed with any baser metal, we call pure gold; milk that contains all that belongs to milk, and nothing else, is pure milk; honey that is without wax is pure honey. In like manner a pure heart contains nothing adverse to God. Where there is mixture there cannot be purity. By purity of heart we mean that which is undefiled, untainted, free from evil stains, without earthly alloy. It is holiness unmixed with selfishness and pride, or any other polluting and debasing element. When this supernatural and divine work is wrought within us by the Holy Spirit, all the chaff, refuse, and dross are purged away and sifted out of the soul, and the precious residuum is the genuine, the true, the pure, and the good. Then the eye is single and the whole body is full of light. The graces exist in an unmixed state. Love exists without any germs of hatred, faith without any unbelief, humility without pride, meekness without any anger. "Purity of heart is the removal of whatever God could not admit to His immediate presence, and

fellowship with Himself; in other words, the abolition of sin itself."

By maturity we mean all this, and much more. The error of confusing purity of heart with maturity of Christian character lies at the base of nearly all the objections made to instantaneous and entire sanctification. Identifying and confounding these have occasioned most of the difficulties we find among Christians in reference to this doctrine. The Scriptures always discriminate between purity of heart and the ripeness and fullness of Christian virtues. The one is a work wrought within us in a moment by the omnipotent power of the sanctifying Spirit, the other is a natural process involving culture and discipline. Purity has reference to kind or quality, but maturity has respect to degree or quantity. In 2 Corinthians vii. 1, the difference is clearly taught between holiness as a complete and immediate deliverance from all sin and the seemingly paradoxical doctrine of progressive holiness. Holiness is both a gift and a process, and as such it is both instantaneous and gradual, as this Scripture recognizes and explains: "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit; perfecting holiness in the fear of God." By the "flesh" we understand the lower animal nature which we have in common with the brute creation. The "spirit" is the higher, nobler nature, designed to be the temple of God in man. The expression "all filthiness of the flesh and spirit," embraces the whole of those evil propensities of our nature which would lead us to any kind of inordinate sensual indulgence, and all evil tempers, such as pride, envy, self-will, malice, uncharitableness, etc. It is that carnal and fleshly-mindedness of the heart which inheres to our fallen nature, the inward fountain, which we have already described, from which actual sins in the life have their rise. The phrase includes the whole of sin in man, the depraved nature in its entirety. Had the word "all" been omitted, we should have been puzzled to know from how much sin we may be saved, and from how much we may not be saved. But this word covers the whole ground, the remedy extends to the last remains of sin.

As to when this deliverance may take place, the verb "cleanse" is in the aorist tense, which denotes that it is an instantaneous work. According to the best New Testament grammarians, we have no English tense exactly like the aorist in the Greek. It denotes a single momentary and decisive act, in opposition to a continuous and never-completed work. Hence says Dr. Beet: "It is worthy of notice that in the New Testament we never read expressly and unmistakably of sanctification as a gradual process." We grasp by faith the sin-consuming power which sweeps the heart clean at a stroke.

Cleansing is spoken of here as a human work, because it is by faith we appropriate the purifying power. On God's part all is done. The atonement is complete, the provisions ample. Christ's great work was restorative as well as atoning. Through the shedding of His blood He has procured for us cleansing as well as forgiveness. This is the teaching of the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews: "By the which will we are sanctified, through the offering of the body of Jesus once for all." What is meant is that through His atoning work Christ has procured or purchased complete deliverance from sin for us exactly as He has made forgiveness possible to us. It is the will of God that we should be sanctified in the same way as we are justified "through the offering of the body of Jesus once for all." Provision is made for our sanctification as fully as for our justification. The human work in entire cleansing is to appropriate the salvation Christ has purchased and promised. The promises are the means and instruments of our cleansing. In order to cleanse a filthy garment, the fuller uses niter and soap -- both the fuller and soap are cleansers. So exactly is it with salvation, it is both a divine and human work. God provides the salvation, and we cleanse our soul by believing the promises.

I cannot wash my heart  
But by believing Thee  
And waiting for Thy blood to impart  
The spotless purity.

But while the doctrine of instantaneous cleansing is undoubtedly taught by this text, the doctrine of progressive holiness is also taught. Being purged from all iniquity is one thing; a symmetrical, well-proportioned, and fully developed Christian life is another. There can be no increase of purity, but there may be an eternal increase in love, and in all the fruits of the Spirit. After cleansing, our ceaseless prayerful effort must be to gain more knowledge, robuster virtue, deeper sanctity and every other form of spiritual excellence. This is what is implied by "perfecting holiness in the fear of God." The word "perfecting" is defined in Baxter's Greek Testament Lexicon thus: "to carry into practice, to realize," which means that the perfect inward cleansing instantaneously wrought by the Holy Spirit is to be constantly and progressively carried outward into all the acts of daily life. As knowledge increases and conscience is cultivated, there will be quickened sensibilities and more accurate perceptions of duty, which will lead to constant increase of moral beauty and all the fruits of righteousness, until we "stand perfect and complete in all the will of God."

It may not be generally known that the word "health" and the word "holy" come from the same root. Perfect health is the absence of disease, perfect holiness is the absence of sin. Christian purity brings finality to nothing but inbred sin. It is the soul restored to perfect health, but perfect development. A babe may be perfectly healthy, but there is a vast difference between childhood and manhood. There are "babes," "young men," and "men of full age," in a state of entire sanctification. Purity expels disease from the soul, maturity builds up the soul in vigor and beauty. The one is the field cleared of noxious weeds, the other is the ripe waving harvest. Purity is the best preparation for growth, but it is not the consummation of growth. A steady and constant growth in grace is the ideal in Christian life. But to secure this there must be a pure moral soil such as results from entire cleansing. "The heart may be cleansed from all sin," says Bishop Hamline, "while our graces are immature, and entire cleansing is the best preparation for their unembarrassed and rapid growth." We must seek a clean heart first, and look for maturity in the order of Divine appointment.

A friend of mine was once conversing with a good man and a leader in the Church on this important subject, when he said to him, "I would just as soon believe that my son could go to school tomorrow morning without knowing a figure in arithmetic, and come home at night a complete mathematician, as I could believe that any man could in a day become a perfectly matured Christian." My friend replied, "You are confounding things that differ. I am speaking of one thing, and you of another. "Suppose," he said, "your son, with no knowledge of arithmetic were to go to school tomorrow, and that he were put into simple addition, and that at the end of the month, and of the year and at the end of two or three years, he were in simple addition still, what would you say to that?" "Why," said he, "I should say that there was something wrong in the boy, or in his teacher, or both." "Exactly," replied my friend, "that is just what I want you to see, that if we do not grow in grace, if we are always in a state of spiritual babyhood instead of advancing to manhood, it is because there is something wrong that needs removing." That "something" is inbred or heart sin.

Purity is not the goal of Christian life, but rather a new starting-point on a higher plane. In conversion, all the graces of the Spirit are implanted within the soul, but they exist in germ only, they are not developed. So long as sin remains within us, not only are the graces of the Spirit within, but their opposites are there also, which are like weeds about the root of a plant impeding its growth. No grace of the Spirit can be helped in its development by the presence of its opposite. A little unbelief cannot help, but must hinder the growth of our faith, a little pride will have the same effect on our humility. To one who thought that we needed a little sin in our hearts to keep us humble, we ventured to suggest, "Why not have a great deal,

and be perfectly humble if there be reason in that?" Proclivities towards sin cannot help a soul into conformity to God. Just as a child, who has an organic disease, grows very slowly and unevenly, if at all, so a Christian who has not been entirely sanctified grows very irregularly. There must be perfect health before there can be real and vigorous growth. Sin in the heart makes us like a child that is sickly, or a tree with a worm at the root. Some hope by cultivating the graces of the Spirit to grow into purity, which is like a man cultivating the vegetables in his garden to grow the weed out from about the roots of the plants. Common sense says, "Pluck up the weeds and give the plants a fair chance of growth and development." This is the Divine method. God cleanses the heart from inbred sin, after which growth is more rapid and symmetrical; advancement in knowledge, the love of God, and every kind of grace become possible then, as never before. Purity of heart is not so much the enlargement and increase of the graces, as the plucking up of the weeds of inbred sin, which obstruct their growth. Maturity is the result of experience, trial, and conflict, it is a natural, gradual process of development, which requires time. But purity is by faith, and therefore a present and instantaneous experience. There may be preparations for it, and approaches to it, but there is a moment when the work is done.

Says Dr. Adam Clarke: "We are to come to God for an instantaneous and complete purification from all sins, as for instantaneous pardon. In no part of the Scriptures are we directed to seek the remission of our sins seriatim -- one now and another then, and so on. Neither a gradation pardon nor a gradation purification exists in the Bible ... For, as the work of renewing and cleansing the heart is the work of God, His Almighty power can perform it in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye." And it is this moment our duty to love God with all our heart, and we cannot do this until He cleanse our hearts, consequently He is ready to do it this moment ... "Believing now, we are pardoned now; believing now, we are cleansed from all sin now."

But only as a complete deliverance from sin is holiness a present possibility. A mother is not content that her child should be in perfect health, she longs that it may grow to perfect maturity." So deliverance from sin is but the stepping-stone, the vestibule and threshold of the higher life. Through a blessed and glorious state, yet when compared with the breadth and length and depth and height to which the soul may attain through the rich and abundant grace of God, it is not a really high state of spiritual attainment. None are so eager for spiritual advancement as those who are entirely sanctified. Like the racer who strains every nerve and muscle eager for the prize, they are always "reaching forth unto those things which are before." Their ideal is never reached, because the higher they climb the more the horizon enlarges to the view. The more God is known and loved, the more the soul "follows hard after Him." "The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day." And even when the "Perfect Day" has come there will be continual progression in knowledge, love, and conformity to the image of the Lord Jesus, as the beauties of the God-man are unfolded before our enraptured vision.

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