

Barratt Ministries Challenge

Issue 18

BLESSED ARE THE PURE IN HEART

The Beatitudes Part 6

by Maurice Barratt

“With the merciful thou wilt shew thyself merciful, and with the upright man thou wilt shew thyself upright. With the pure thou wilt shew thyself pure; and with the froward thou wilt shew thyself unsavoury.” (2 Sam 22:26-27).

God hates mixture. He loves purity. God hates mixture so much that He would rather people served the devil “purely” than serve Him half-heartedly. “I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth” (Revelation 3:15-16). Mixture, even in apparently innocuous things, is abhorrent to God. In the law He instructs that a man should not wear women’s clothes, or vice versa. Neither should a vineyard be sown with mixed seeds, “lest the fruit be defiled”. Nor should a garment be made of mixed fibres, such as wool and linen (Deuteronomy 22:5,9,10,11). God loves that which is only one thing: pure, uncontaminated, unmixed, unalloyed, undiluted.

Beware Of The Leaven

God knows that a tiny bit of rottenness is enough to corrupt a huge amount of purity. God often uses the image of leaven in the Bible to illustrate the way a little evil corrupts purity. Leaven (or yeast) in scripture always signifies something bad. “Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? ... let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth” (1 Corinthians 5:6-8). Jesus told His disciples to “beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees”, meaning their teaching which corrupted the word of God and mixed it with the traditions of men. Their “leaven” was hypocrisy, self-righteousness, pride - deadly things, things which kill purity and spirituality; deadly because they cut you off from God.

However, in seeming contradiction to God’s abhorrence of mixture, Paul says “All things indeed are pure” (Romans 14:20). That’s a strange thing for him to say! But now look at Titus 1:15 :- “Unto the pure all things are pure: but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled”. This is the key to understanding Paul’s first statement. All things are “indeed pure” - to the pure. If you are pure inside, in your heart, then all outward things are pure to you. It’s you, your inward condition of heart - purity of heart - that makes the difference. It’s in the heart that purity - or mixture - is found.

Let’s illustrate with a couple of examples. Suppose you happened to see the minister of your church going into a brothel. If you’re pure in heart, your first reaction would be, “Isn’t our pastor wonderful

- he even goes into the brothels to witness to the girls and tell them the gospel!" And you start praying for his success and thanking God for him. But if your mind is defiled and impure, you'll do what most people would do - you'll think you've discovered your pastor committing an immoral act, and you'll start to spread the scandal to the church so that his sin will be exposed.

That's a rather drastic example, but you can tell by people's reactions to almost anything you say whether their hearts are pure or not. Some people's minds are so defiled that you can't say anything to them without them twisting it and putting a double meaning on it. There are many different types of innuendo, and people reveal the state of their own minds by the way they react to the words and actions of others.

How wonderful when you meet someone with a pure heart! Your words react in their pure minds to inspire in them godly thoughts and revelations. They can take the most mundane facts and draw inspiring thoughts from them. They always turn a conversation towards God, not in a forced or stilted way, but perfectly naturally. Why? Because their minds are pure. And the most wonderful thing is - you can become like this!

Two Wisdoms

There are two types of wisdom. One is "from above", from heaven. The other is from below - "earthly, sensual, devilish" (James 3:15-17). This earthly wisdom is what fills the minds and heads of the impure. "But the wisdom that comes from above is first pure". There is no mixture in it. Godly wisdom is the wonderful alternative to worldly wisdom, and it is characterized primarily by purity of heart.

"Blessed are the pure in heart" says Jesus; not "the pure in mind". There is a difference between the heart and mind. When the Bible talks about the mind, it means your conscious thinking. When it talks about the heart, it means your subconscious thinking - your motives and intents which are hidden even from you, rooted deeply in your subconscious. Your heart, or subconscious mind, is in fact the very root of your being, the centre, the wellspring of everything you think and do.

God also has a heart. His heart is the root of Him. In Genesis 6:5-6 we see both man's heart and God's heart. "And God saw that ... every imagination of [man's] heart was only evil continually. And it repented the Lord that He had made man on the earth, and it grieved Him at His heart". Man's heart inclined towards evil. His desires pulled him that way continually. He couldn't help it. It wasn't to do with his conscious thinking but his subconscious desires and motives. And God's reaction, at the root of Him, at the centre of His being, was grief. But after God had destroyed the world by flood, Noah then offered a sacrifice when he came out of the ark, "and the Lord smelled a sweet savour; and the Lord said in His heart, "I will not again curse the ground anymore ..." (Genesis 8:21). God too, has a conscious and subconscious mind. He spoke "in His heart", to himself, like the foolish covetous man in Luke 12 who "thought within himself" to build bigger barns and "said in his soul, 'Soul, thou hast much goods ...' " (Luke 12:17,19). Covetousness comes from the root, the heart, the subconscious mind.

Discerning The Heart's Motives

Hebrews 4:12 says that the word of God is "a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart". That means it penetrates -right down to our deepest motives. God discerns between our conscious "Thoughts" and our subconscious "intents", between what we think and why we think it. Our conscious thoughts may cover up a root motive of covetousness with apparent goodness, unselfishness and reasonable behaviour. We may not even be aware of it ourselves. This is what the bible calls hypocrisy. It comes from an impure heart. "As a man thinketh in his heart, so he is" says Proverbs 23:7. The context proves the point: "Eat not the bread of him that hath an evil eye ... 'Eat and drink', he saith to thee; but his heart is not with thee". His words were different from his heart. His words seemed pure: his heart was not. "The heart", says Jeremiah, "is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" Not us! "I the Lord search the heart" (Jeremiah 17:9-10). We can kid ourselves that we're not wicked. That's why it is the Lord who has. to search and try our hearts. That's why David said "Search me, O God, and know my heart" (Psalm 139:23). That's why Proverbs says "Guard your heart, for out of it are the issues of life" (Proverbs 4:23).

Does God Know Your Heart?

Does God know each of our hearts automatically? Or does He need permission from us to gain access to our hearts? He knows mankind's heart generally, as we have seen from Genesis. Jesus, too, "knew what was in man" (John 2:25). But as for the secrets of each individual heart, it seems that people have to ask God to search them, as David did. Without us giving God the right to do so, we have no guarantee that He will. He may just leave us to it. Certainly, we need to give God the right to change our hearts, once He has revealed them to us. And this is a relevant point, because it is the only way to get a pure heart. We cannot become pure ourselves. God has to change us.

Seeing God

The pure in heart, Jesus says, will see God. That means that they will behold His face in the future. But it also means that if you are pure, you'll see God now - you'll see Him in your circumstances, in your trials and blessings, in other people and events. People react in one of two ways to difficult circumstances. Some blame the devil. "Oh I'm having a terrible time!", they say. "The devil's attacking again!" They see the devil in everything. That can't be a pure heart! But the pure in heart see God in their circumstances. They know which Master they are serving. They know the devil has no right to do anything to them except what God allows, and because they know God allows trials and chastening for our good, they are happy to accept His will in everything. They see only God in their trials and struggles! They give the devil credit for nothing! Blessed are those people.

Similarly, we react in one of two ways to people. If you see a drunken man lying in the gutter being sick, either you say, "That's disgusting, look where his sin has got him" and turn away - or you see a man made in God's image, broken and desperate, and you weep with compassion and reach out to help. Mother Teresa saw God in the beggars lying in the Calcutta streets, in the stumps of a leper, regardless of whether they were good or bad people.

We can see God in creation if we have a pure heart. Creation shows God's character. So do our creations show our characters. If you want to know my character, it's easy. Just come and see my house. It's full of my character. If my house is an untidy mess, you'll know that's what I'm like inside. My mind is also an untidy mess. If my house is flamboyantly decorated you'll know I'm a flamboyant character at heart. If it's conservatively decorated you'll know I'm that sort of person. Just so, creation shows God's character. But the world do not see God in creation. Why? Simply because they have impure hearts. You should see God every day when you look up - in the sky and the trees, the birds and all of nature. Some religions teach that these things are God, and "worship the creation instead of the Creator" (Romans 1:25).

Creation is not God, but it is God's work. You can see Him in it without identifying it as Him.

Joseph

Finally, I have an example of a man who was pure in heart. It is Joseph. Joseph was possessed of what seems to us to be a certain naivety - look at how he told his brethren his dream, which he ought to have known would provoke them to jealousy and anger (Genesis 37:9-11). But Joseph wasn't foolish. He was just pure in heart. He might have been foolish as the world judges foolishness - according to "the wisdom of this world" which has to be cunning and devious, or tactful and diplomatic. But Joseph's motives were unmixed with any of those things.

If anyone ever had cause to see the devil in his circumstances, it was Joseph. Betrayed by his brothers and sold into slavery, wrongly accused of rape and thrown into prison in Egypt - yet he never once complained. He never once accused either God or man. In fact, he saw God in it all. When he was finally reconciled to his brothers, he told them "Be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither; for God did send me before you to preserve life" (Genesis 45:5). Joseph saw only God's plan in it all. It is easier for us to see it looking back in hindsight - we understand that Joseph could not have been made ruler of Pharaoh's household if he had not been sold into Egypt, and he would have never been promoted had he not interpreted the baker's and butcher's dreams in the prison.

But it is a lot more difficult to see God in our circumstances, because we do not know the end of our story. Or do we? Yes, in fact, we do! Paul tells us that "all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28). In the end, that's all we need to know. If you are called by God, if He is your Master, everything that happens works together for good. That doesn't mean that everything is good. It means it is all working together for a good purpose. God knows what He is doing. If you believe that, if you have faith, you can be like Joseph and see God in everything, blame the devil for nothing, and blame men for nothing. You can be pure in heart!

"Now the end of the commandment" (that is, the purpose, the fulfillment of the commandment) "is love out of a pure heart" (1 Timothy 1:5). That's the goal; the aim of the whole law of God is to make you like this. It is possible, because Jesus said so. It is possible for you!

Experiences From Life

by Joanna Barratt

Bad Company Corrupts Good Morals

Saturday again. With our pockets full of money my friend and I caught the bus to Bellvue Amusement Park. It's been closed for quite a number of years now but when it was open it used to house a circus big top, a zoo and a fun fair where you could purchase all sorts of amusing rides. My friend and I had been coming to this fun fair for a few weeks now and I was getting quite blasé about it, but at first I remember feeling very nervous and frightened. I was 11 years old and had already had a good education at Sunday School. A very well known verse to all of us Sunday School children was "Be sure your sins will find you out". As God's wrath hadn't fallen upon me immediately I began to think He didn't view me as the sinner after all, but regarded my friend as the culprit.

I grew up in Wythenshawe, which has always been a very poor district of Manchester, made up of the "working class" and the "dole class". My friend lived in a house at the top of the avenue where I lived and was 11 years old like myself. At that particular time her father had a job with an insurance company and he used to go round the houses collecting the payments every week. When he came home each evening his pockets would be stuffed with money and during the night my friend used to rifle through them and take out some of the collections.

Some weeks my friend and I would have as much as £20 each to spend and what we didn't get rid of at Bellvue we would use during the week to purchase sweets and chocolates and all sorts of trivial things. I'd never known what it was like to have money before and the experience was terrific, with so much money I could even afford to be benevolent!

Living On The Bread Line

From as far back as I can remember Mum always seemed to have financial struggles. Dad never appeared to be in occupation for very long, being on the sick quite a lot of the time for one reason or another, some of which I remember were genuine! At that time Dad used to give Mum £10 each week and out of that sum she had to pay the rent, gas, coal, electricity, bus fares, as well as food and clothes. Consequently she learned how to make her money stretch and we were always taught the art of thrift, i.e. going to the baker's shop just before closing time on Saturday evenings or very early on a Monday morning for any stale bread that they might still have. This was also the way we purchased our vegetables, and as far as meat was concerned we were always amazed at what the butcher was prepared to sell as "scraps for the dogs".

Mum would take us to jumble sales and instruct us to buy really big garments which we would bring home, unpick, cut out again and remake into more stylish clothes for ourselves.

A Deceptive Gift

One particular week I remember, Mother having more expenses than normal and she was complaining about not having enough money for her needs. I knew I had money that I hadn't managed to spend yet, and dearly wanted to give it to her, but I was afraid she might ask too many questions so, after a lot of thought, I went outside and rubbed, a £5 note in the dirt in our front garden and then brought it in to her, telling her that I'd found it on the ground.

Mum could hardly believe her eyes. After all, £5 was half her normal weekly income. She began to jump around the room with her arms raised in the air shouting "Praise the Lord! Hallelujah! Praise the Lord! Thank you Jesus!" She also tried to thank me but I couldn't take it. She honestly believed that God had given her that money, and suddenly the stark reality of what I was doing stared me in the face and I knew that she'd been "blessed" because I was a thief. My hands hadn't personally taken the money from my friend's father's pocket, but my hands had readily accepted and spent it, and the bald truth of what I had done filled me with shame. Without realising it Mum was thanking Jesus for my crime, and I felt awfully embarrassed.

Fear Of Debt

Throughout my life I've had to manage the small amounts of money I've earned. At the age of 16 I left home and with only a very small wage coming in each week I found myself a flat. My rent was £3, then there was gas, electricity travelling expenses to and from work, tights and personal needs, and with what was left I would purchase food. Out of £5.50 there wasn't usually much left, and my food bill had to be subsidised with my luncheon vouchers. I was always frightened of debt and would never consider taking anything on hire purchase in case I wasn't in the position to pay the instalments. I got by, and over the years age and inflation played a part in putting me in a better financial position; but I still wasn't "flush".

A Costly Appeal

At my church there was a big appeal for a central heating system. They had decided to take out the old-fashioned electric overhead heaters, which were a drain on the financial resources of the church, and install radiators to make the heating more cost effective. The minister challenged his church for individual members to pledge £200 over the course of a 6-month period. I can't remember how many sponsors he needed because it was a few years ago, but I do remember my heart being filled with a desire to be one of those people. My fears concerning financial debt had never gone away, but I really wanted to prove my dedication to God and the church by this sacrifice. At the time I was working for the temporary employment agency and knew that any day I could have a phone call to say that there was no job for me the following week, so I prayed really hard and asked God to make sure that for the next 6 months I was kept in full time employment and then, in faith, made my commitment to pay £200 to the church.

Satisfaction

Every month after this commitment I made out my cheque for the allotted amount and I never missed one payment. At the end of the 6-month period I felt a tremendous sense of relief knowing that I was free from my debt, but I also felt a wonderful warm sense of satisfaction knowing that I had sacrificed and given from a pure heart. It had cost me a great deal but it had been well worth it, because I had done it all myself.

There are so many ways in which we can indulge in impure hearts and motives, and I could bring so many examples from my own experience of times when I would have loved to do this if God hadn't had mercy on me and pricked my conscience. Only recently in one of my articles, I mentioned the time when people were constantly praising me for my "spirituality" and "growth in the Lord", just because I was involved in so many activities in the church. I wanted to accept their compliments so badly, but God wouldn't allow me to hide from the truth - which was that I was living a double life, church one minute, night clubs the next - as in reality I was living a lie.

Truth Hurts

God sorted me out and exposed me to myself. It hurt, but I was really grateful He kept me soft inside. The real danger is when we get hardened and refuse to face the truth; it's then that God can't help us, without something really drastic happening. And more often than not, He lets those people carry on believing lies and "hands them over to a reprobate mind".

The pure in heart can look at and thank God when somebody blesses them. The impure hide in shame. I know!!