

The Delight of Pure Faith

9-25-11

God said He will refine His people like pure gold, and they will call on His Name and He will answer (*Zech 13:9*).

Many of us have learned to draw closer to the Lord after experiencing the heat of the Refiner's fire. None of us have yet become as "pure gold", but the chastening of God certainly makes us better people.

Still, the topic of purity and faith is fraught with difficulty. Think "Puritans." These tall-hatted icons of early Americana are forever associated with strict religious ideals, persecution of dissenters and witch hunts. Modern day equivalents include various Christian fundamentalists, the old order Amish, orthodox Jews and Muslim sects such as the Taliban, all of whom exercise strict religious control over the lifestyles of their followers. The secular world sees these examples and draws the short-sighted conclusion that "pure religion equals pure control" over peoples' lives. No wonder young people abandon the church in droves today. Where is the joy in all this control stuff?!

Unequivocally, the Bible advocates purity, sometimes understood as "modesty." "Women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation..." wrote Paul to Timothy (1 Tim 2:9). But what is modesty? The dictionary defines it as moderate, sober, self-control, freedom from vanity, egotism, and as having regard for decencies of behavior, speech, dress, etc. Yet we all know that one person's moderation is another person's excess. Differences of opinion about what constitutes modesty are not hard to find, which brings us back to the question of "pure religion." How do we understand spiritual purity and how do we convey it to others without falling into the trap of religious control and modern-day witch hunts? Is any joy to be found in the Refiner's fire?

Purity is associated Biblically with the presence of God. The first use of the word "pure" in Scripture occurs in *Exodus 25:11*, where the Lord instructs Moses to cover the Ark of the Covenant with pure gold, including the Mercy Seat. The lampstand and utensils were also covered with pure gold, and pure incense was burned before the Ark.

Jesus said in the sixth Beatitude: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." If we want to experience God powerfully in our lives, we need to be purified in some way. Yet Eliphaz rightly asked Job: "What is man that he could be pure?" (*Job 15:14*) Isaiah said: "Woe is me, for I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips." (*Isa 6:5*) David said: "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity." (*Psa 51:5*) And Jeremiah summarized: "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it." (*Jer 17:9*) If these great men of God were so impure, what hope have we?

Jesus wouldn't have said the pure shall see God if He hadn't understood it was possible to see God. Fortunately, the New Testament gives us the keys to forming spiritual purity, which is always an inside job! First, the blood of Jesus cleanses us: "...how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" (*Heb 9:14*) [For more about the Blood of Jesus, [see my earlier sermon here](#)]. Second, the word of God makes us clean: "You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you," said Jesus to His disciples (*John 15:3*).

How can the word of God make us clean? Scripture calls the word of God "pure milk" (*1 Peter 2:2*), a perfect image of nascent growth. God's Word imparts something new in our spirits that can grow in purity. "The word of God is living and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit." (*Heb 4:12*) It's supernatural. Millions of people have found their lives transformed simply by hearing the word of God and coming under conviction that they had to change the way they were living. To accomplish this, Scripture says we have to humbly accept the word of God in our hearts: "Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word which is able to save your souls." (*James 1:21*) Finally, we have to obey the word through the power of God's Spirit. Peter wrote: "Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart!" (*1 Peter 1:22*) God's Spirit gives us the ability and power to obey His word, even when our flesh resists!

How to begin? The truth is our souls can yearn for God, but only the image of Himself that God placed inside us, even our spirits, can "see" God. Pure faith is the connection of our spirit with God's Spirit. Job replied to Eliphaz: "I have sewn sackcloth over my skin and laid my head in the dust... my prayer is pure." (*Job 16:15,17*) At least Job's prayer was pure, even if he was only an impure man. Ask Jesus to come into your heart. Ask Him again if you've

already done this before. He is the living Word of God, who sows the pure seed of God's Spirit. When His Word is mixed with our faith, our pure prayers open a channel for His Spirit to do His supernatural work within us. From there, our faith in God will accomplish the work of purifying our hearts. (*Acts 15:9*) This is the delight of pure faith, forever yearning for the cleansing power of God's eternal Spirit, forever rejoicing at the sure mercies of God. Like the Psalmist, we can delight in hearing the instructions of God (*Psa 1:2*) and we can delight to do His will (*Psa 40:8*). As Isaiah said, we can even delight in the fear of the Lord. (*Isaiah 11:3*)

Lord, send us Your purifying Spirit so we can learn see You in more of Your glory!