

6 Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God

The little Caribbean island of St. Lucia seemed to Walt and me like paradise. We were there for evangelistic meetings with missionaries our church supported. I loved those island people. Walt preached one Sunday at a big church, and after the service, the women crowded around me telling me how much they enjoyed his preaching. Afterward, I said to Walt, "Honey, nobody introduced me. How did those women know I was your wife?"

He grinned. "Out of the 500 people in the service, you were the only white woman." Oh! I hadn't noticed. I felt such a kinship with those dear women.

St Lucia really seemed almost paradise. The people are loving and gracious. The sandy beaches are pristine, the winds steady and cooling, the sunsets overwhelmingly lovely, the temperature moderate, the mountains verdant and graced with beautiful rivers. Almost like paradise, but not quite.

One afternoon when we were there, I watched Walt and his friend on a tiny overturned Sunfish boat drifting further and further toward far-off Venezuela. They didn't know that the hull of the sail boat had a hole in it, and so it was gradually sinking. Finally, someone on shore realized their plight and took a speed boat out to rescue them.

On another afternoon, on a picnic at a beach, I took the missionary's baby to the truck we'd come in, to get her out

of the hot, tropical sun. A huge earth-moving machine, moving sand from the water onto the land, backed up over the little truck we were in. It stopped just before its huge tires crushed the roof of the vehicle.

Another day we walked on a heaving mass of earth at the base of the Soufreire Volcano. St. Lucia that day gave us a glimpse, not into Heaven, but into Hell with its sulfuric fumes.

A paradise? Almost. But not quite.

Those beautiful blue rivers that wind through the mountains host a terrible parasite, a worm, schistosomes. Left untreated in the children who play in those limpid waters, the parasites can migrate to the spinal cord and brain, and cause seizures, paralysis, and even death. Beautiful blue rivers, but rivers tainted with death!

What a picture it is of the defilement of sin. A person might look serene and beautiful on the outside, but defiled on the inside. And that's terrible, because spiritual impurity cuts us off from communion with a holy God. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

1. Can we find a relationship between the beatitudes we've already studied and this blessing for the pure in heart?

Perhaps the progression is like this:

a. The poor in spirit receive salvation as a gift from God. That settles the problem of our eternal destiny; our sins are paid for.

b. But we also long for the righteousness that makes us right in God's sight. We are made "right" in the eyes of the law.

c. Then we receive mercy. We are protected from the

punishment we so terribly deserved for our sin, and never again will it be brought up to accuse us.

d. In the light of these blessings, why wouldn't we yearn to keep our relationship pure and clean with the holy God who loves us so much He wants us to spend eternity with Him?

2. The Bible definition of purity is: *clean, unmixed, singleness of heart.*

The Hebrew word is actually *acquitted*. The Greek word is *purged*. In other passages of Scripture it is translated *clean, choice, chosen, polished, shut up, close, refined, enclosed, purified, chaste, or sincere*

How might you describe a person pure in heart?

How might you distinguish the innocence of a child from someone pure in heart?

Pure in heart has the connotation of deliberate, thoughtful, active choice, not simple unawareness of evil.

Years ago a bakery in our town was named "Sanitary Bakery." We thought it an odd name for a bakery. Of course you expect your bread to be sanitary! Why not "fresh," or "nourishing," or "tantalizing"? But the truth is, if bread is to be nourishing, it must first of all be sanitary.

3. "Pure in heart" is not simple outward conformity, meeting expectations of people.

Read through the parable in Luke 18:10-14 that Jesus told about the Pharisee and the Publican who were praying in the Temple.

How did the Pharisee describe himself to God?

With whom did he compare himself in this "prayer"?

To what did Jesus compare this kind of praying?
(Matthew 23:25)

Isn't it interesting that when we are trying to justify ourselves before God, we're very careful who it is we choose to compare ourselves with? In contrast, what did the tax-collector pray? (Luke 18:10-14)

Which of the two men went home justified?

4. It's purity of heart we are blessed for, not our behavior. You've heard computer experts say, "Garbage in, garbage out." Whatever information you feed into the computer, that's exactly what you will get when you pull the file up again. As Amy Carmichael wrote, "A glass of sweet water spills only sweet water, no matter how suddenly jarred."

Do you not yet understand that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and is eliminated?

But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man.

For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. Matthew 15:17-19

What ought a Christian guard above all else?
(Proverbs 4:23)

5. “Pure in heart” does not imply sinlessness. As we learned in our study of the fourth beatitude, though we are forgiven sinners, we will still sin. What does First John 1:8,9 say about this?

For us to claim we are sinless requires a very low view of what sin truly is. It doesn't matter how trivial we might try to make sin: the fact is that sin is so terrible, so ravaging, that only the death of Christ can atone for it. So the pure in heart are very aware of their own sin. King David committed adultery and murdered his paramour's husband, but God said

he was a man after His own heart (Acts 13:22). “A man after God's own heart”? How? Not because he never sinned. But when he did sin, what was his passionate response? (Psalm 51:1-3)

6. Indeed, it is when we stand in the presence of our holy God that we become most conscious of our sinfulness. At the beginning of this study, we learned that the beatitudes turn our every-day thinking upside-down. So it is true in this beatitude: the closer we get to the God who is holiness enshrined, the more aware we are of our own sin.

When the Prophet Isaiah saw God sitting on His throne in the Temple, what was his response? (Isaiah 6:1-5)

What did the seraphim do to help him understand he was cleansed from his sin? (Isaiah 6:6,7)

The disciple John, who described himself as the “disciple Jesus loved,” tells us he leaned on Jesus’ breast at the last supper. He felt so familiar with Him, so loved, he got as close as possible to the Savior. But what did the old man John feel, when in exile on the Isle of Patmos one Sunday morning, as Jesus appeared to him? (Revelation 1:17)

The Apostle Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 12:1-3 that he was caught up into Paradise into the very presence of God Himself. He heard things so sacred he could not repeat them. Still, how did he describe himself in First Timothy 1:15?

So the closer to God we come, the more aware we will be for our need for purity in heart.

7. The blessing of this beatitude is for ordinary people like you and me!

If you feel envious of the people in the Bible who had the incredible joy of looking into the face of our holy God without fear, then take heart. We have the same right to enjoy the presence of the Lord Jesus, as surely as did the Apostle John, or Paul, or the Prophet Isaiah!

Genesis 16:1-15 tells the poignant story of Hagar, Sarah's maid. When Sarah discovered she could not get pregnant, she gave Hagar to Abraham so she could have a son through her. Hagar seems to have gotten snippy with her mistress because she got pregnant. Of course Sarah reacted in frustration and mistreated the girl. So Hagar ran away.

The Scripture says "The angel of the Lord found Hagar beside a desert spring along the road to Shur." God cared enough about this defiant, frightened slave girl to seek her out!

He told her she was to go back home, and then made some

wonderful prophecies about the child she was carrying. What name did she give God? (Genesis 16:13)

Why?

Hagar looked on the face of holiness incarnate, God Himself, and so can we, as we guard the purity of our hearts.

8. The contaminants of purity of heart lie all around us, outside, in the world, and inside our hearts, so we must make a determined, conscious effort to avoid contamination. Not just what we see and hear, but our imagination.

A friend of ours would not take the interstate into the heart of the city to work for several weeks because of a huge highway sign that ostensibly was selling mattresses. But the advertisers had a picture of a seductive woman lying full length on the mattress. And of course, that was what they wanted you to notice!

On my AOL page, there will be at least one article every day, and often two or three, with pictures, and headlines like, "You'll not believe the wardrobe accident this star suffered," or, "See the daring photo of this singer."

I would have thought a Hallmark Store safe from pornography, but there I once opened a book at random, to a page about a homosexual encounter. I still find those words hard to erase from my mind.

How can we protect our hearts? By making a determined, conscious effort to avoid contamination. Examine Romans 6:11-14 and notice how we are to do this. What are we to “reckon” ourselves to? (Romans 6:11)

Sin wants to “reign in us.” Why do we not have to let it? (verse 12)

How should we present ourselves to God? (verse 13)

Why do we not have to let sin have dominion over us? (verse 14)

How did King David express his conscious effort to do this? (Psalm 101:2,3)

What vow did Job make? (Job 31:1)

In all this, can you sense the purposefulness of keeping your heart clean, the need to bring every thought under control, “into the obedience of Christ”?

For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds,

Casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God,

Bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ,

2 Corinthians 10:4,5

9. So we will endeavor constantly to replace our wayward thoughts with deliberate meditation on the truth.

Children in England used to sit around in a circle and play the game, “Don't think about a white bear.” But it's very hard “*not* to think about a white bear.” So we will not sit around thinking, “I'm *not* going to think about evil things.” Instead, we will but focus deliberately on the good and true.

What does Ephesians 4:21-24 tell us to “put off,” like we might discard an old garment?

Our minds are to be “renewed,” changed. (Romans 12:2 says the same thing: we are to be “transformed by the

renewing of your mind.”) According to Ephesians 4:20-24, then what are we to “put on”?

What nine things are listed in Philippians 4:8 that we ought to specifically think about and meditate on?

And if we meditate on these things, we are promised in Philippians 4:9, that “the God of peace will be with us.”

Second Corinthians 3:18 tells us that as we look at Jesus through the Word of God we will be transformed into His image, “from glory to glory,” day by day growing more like Him.

10. But primarily, we are kept pure by the Holy Spirit, who lives in us, and Christ Himself, who pleads for us.

“Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when He appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as He is pure” (First John 3:2,3)

What was the promise made to us by our High Priest Jesus, which we studied in the second beatitude? (Hebrews 4:15,16.)

What does Hebrews 7:25 further promise?

Because by one sacrifice
He has made perfect forever
those who are being made holy.
Hebrews 10:14

Because I want a heart-to-heart
relationship with my Father,
the High King,
I will make careful life-style choices.