

Honoring God in Purity

“Give unto the LORD the glory due to His name” (Psalm 29:2)

WHERE ARE OUR HEARTS?

We will begin our lesson today with a story.

One day many years ago a baby girl was born, but she was not wanted. Beyond being unwanted, she was despised. A man found her in a field, lying alone, unwashed, her cord uncut, and he had compassion on this child. He took her in and graciously gave her life. He was not ashamed of her, despite her worthless origins. She grew into a woman, and he married her. He gave her the very best of everything. He clothed her in the most beautiful dresses made with luxurious materials, adorned her with precious and costly stones, and provided her with the most exquisite meals. She had everything, lacked nothing, and was even advanced to the position of royalty. He had taken this helpless child and made her the most beautiful, blessed woman in all the land. She was dearly loved, highly cherished, and greatly valued. She was precious to him.

But she did not dearly love him in return. She loved her beauty, and did not love the one who had made her beautiful.

She took all that he had given her—the clothes, the precious jewelry, and the delicacies—and used them to attract other lovers. She did not remember her former state, from where she had come, and what he had done for her. She chose a life of harlotry, forsaking the one who had given her all she had, forgetting her helplessness and unworthiness without his pure, selfless, and sacrificial love.

Most of you likely realize that this is the story of God and unfaithful Israel found in Ezekiel chapter 16, with God being the gracious, giving man and Israel being the selfish, impure woman. However, as I read this chapter, I do not have much trouble seeing myself. Maybe you are able to see yourself as well. We, just as the woman, were found in a helpless state. As powerless as the newborn baby was to save itself as it was struggling alone in the field, so we have found ourselves powerless to save our lives from sin. God has passed by and graciously called us to life. Truly He has given us every good thing. But how often do we take God’s tender, undeserved, unearned blessings and use them against Him? How often do we take what is beautiful and pure and make it sinful and stained?

I would like to make three introductory points from this story:

First, let us emphasize the goodness of our God. Let us clearly see our hopelessness without Him, honestly admit our destitute state before He became a part of our lives, and humbly recognize that it is only through Him that we have anything and everything. It is not God’s goal to adorn us with the best of physical things: costly clothes, fine jewelry, and fancy meals (even though He has blessed our lives with many of these material things). But God has adorned us with much more precious things than these: a heart to love Him, a mind to know Him, and a body to serve Him.

Second, let us realize that we owe all that we are and all that we have to Him. We *must* strive to understand who God is, what He has done for us, how little we deserve it, and how much we owe to Him! This is a lifelong endeavor, because His love is deep and vast. His word will make a difference in our lives when we realize these things. It will make every difference in our lives! I will echo Paul's prayer for each of us today (found in Ephesians 3:14-19), "For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His spirit in the inner man, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God."

May we strive with all our might not to make the same mistakes as the woman of Ezekiel 16, of whom it is said, "Besides all your abominations and harlotries you did not remember the days of your youth, when you were naked and bare and squirming in your blood." (16:22)

Remembering and being grateful for God and His grace day in and day out, moment by moment of every day, will surely help in our endeavors to be faithful daughters of our great King (Titus 2:11-14). How liberating it is when we mature to see our service and obedience to our Father as a privilege, joy, and pleasure rather than a burden, checklist, and obligation to our parents or our church family. The truth is that God wants our whole heart, and until He has it all that we offer will be in vain! All I have said thus far is to emphasize one thing and to answer one question. Why do we need to care about being pure? The answer is simple. Because we love and appreciate God, and it is our greatest ambition to be all that He would have us to be and to glorify Him in all we do. If this is not the object of your heart today, there is little I or anyone else could say on this subject that would be meaningful to you. Please, cultivate your love for the Lord! He has been immeasurably good to each of us.

Third, it is not hard to see that purity, or a lack thereof, is at the very heart of this story. While this story is an allegory, its implications are very true and real. If we were to continue reading the story, we would see the honorable man having to forsake the ungrateful, impure woman and give her over to the consequences of her sin. This brings us to a critical point. God cannot and will not dwell where impurity is. If it is our goal to dwell with God, then it should be our goal to be pure. Matthew 5:8 clearly states, "Blessed are the pure in heart, *for they shall see God.*" When our hearts, minds, and bodies are pure, God will be glorified, and we will be able to be in His glorious presence.

WHY PURITY?

Why should we seek purity?

We have already talked about the ultimate answer to this question: **because we love our Father, we want to dwell with Him, we want to glorify Him, and it is what He expects of us.** Think about the woman of Ezekiel 16. Her impurity dishonored the gracious man in the worst of ways. How would her purity have brought him glory? Her purity would have shown her faithfulness and loyalty to the one who had saved her. It would have shown that she valued and appreciated the gifts he had bestowed on her. It would have demonstrated a willingness to give and to save the best of herself for the man who had given bountifully to her. In the same way, our ambition to achieve purity will show our faithfulness and loyalty to the One who has saved us. It will

show that we value and appreciate the gifts our Father has bestowed on us. It will demonstrate our willingness to give and save the best of ourselves for the One who has given us all things. In these ways (and more), our purity can glorify God.

However, there are other good reasons and motivations to seek purity.

1. We want to give the gift of our purity to our future husband.
2. If God is to bless us with a husband and children, we want to be able to teach our children about purity by our own example.
3. We want to be a light in the world. Purity **IS** attainable!
4. We do not want to be a stumbling block to our brothers.
5. Since God is pure, we can better understand Him through a pure heart and mind.

Why do we not seek purity, or what hinders us from it at times?

The ultimate answer to this question is directly related to the ultimate answer to why we would seek purity. If our relationship with God is not as it ought to be, we certainly will not be giving our hearts to Him entirely. What may be some of the things we are failing to give completely?

1. We are too entertained by impure forms of media that it is hard to give them up.
2. We are concerned with our image. We don't mean to cause our brothers to stumble, but we want to look good and show off our figure!
3. We are deceived by Satan into thinking that being better than the world is good enough. ("At least I don't watch *those* movies." "At least I don't wear shirts *that* low." "Well, at least I haven't lost my virginity.")
4. It is easier to let our minds dwell on worldly things than to focus on heavenly things. We have not brought every thought captive to Christ.

WHAT IS PURITY?

Before we continue, let's make sure we understand what purity is. Dictionary.com lists several definitions for the word.

- the condition or quality of being pure; freedom from anything that debases, contaminates, pollutes, etc.
- freedom from any admixture or modifying addition
- freedom from guilt or evil; innocence
- physical chastity; virginity
- freedom from foreign or inappropriate elements; careful correctness

Each of these definitions support Biblical truths about what purity is. Purity involves all aspects of our character, including our hearts, minds, and bodies.

God's character inherently demands our purity. From the very beginning of scripture (Leviticus 11:44-47) we see that God calls us to holiness, and purity is a means by which we may attain holiness. The term "holiness" means "to be set apart." That definition, together with ideas that appear more frequently like "to be consecrated," "hallowed," or "to be made clean," tells us what holiness results in, but it does not necessarily imply what the process is in order to get there. This is where the concept of purity, of becoming pure and staying pure, helps us understand what the process to becoming holy involves. Purity is one of the means by which a Christian can

work and develop in his or her process of becoming holy. In fact, it is one of the building blocks of holiness. The idea of God's holiness is repeated over and over in Scriptures. The words "holy" and "pure" are used countless times in the Law of Moses and the instructions to build the tabernacle. In the same way, the building of the temple is marked by the purity of the materials used. In 1 Kings 6:21 we are told that the inside of the temple was overlaid with pure gold. 2 Chronicles 4:20-22 is just one of the many examples that describe the temple accessories and tools: "...the lampstands with their lamps of pure gold, [...] the flowers, the lamps, and the tongs of gold, of purest gold; and the snuffers, the bowls, the spoons and the firepans of pure gold; and the entrance of the house, its inner doors for the holy of holies and the doors of the house, that is, of the nave, of gold." Where God is, holiness is present, and purity is required. (L. Cum)

How do we prepare our hearts and minds to seek purity? If we continue to look at the building of the temple, the dwelling place of God, we may easily find some applications in preparing our hearts for purity.

PREPARING OUR HEARTS/MINDS

Please turn with me to 1 Chronicles 29.

In this chapter we read about King David making preparations to build the temple, the house of God. Let's read verses 1-20 of this chapter. Try to visualize these events in your mind as we read through them.

1 Chronicles 29:1-20a

Then King David said to the entire assembly, "My son Solomon, whom alone God has chosen, is still young and inexperienced and the work is great; for the temple is not for man, but for the LORD God. Now with all my ability I have provided for the house of my God the gold for the things of gold, and the silver for the things of silver, and the bronze for the things of bronze, the iron for the things of iron, and the wood for the things of wood, onyx stones and inlaid stones, stones of antimony and stones of various colors, and all kinds of precious stones and alabaster in abundance. Moreover, in my delight in the house of my God, the treasure I have of gold and silver, I give to the house of my God, over and above all that I have already provided for the holy temple, namely, 3,000 talents of gold, of the gold of Ophir, and 7,000 talents of refined silver, to overlay the walls of the buildings; of gold for the things of gold and of silver for the things of silver, that is, for all the work done by the craftsmen. Who then is willing to consecrate himself this day to the LORD?" Then the rulers of the fathers' households, and the princes of the tribes of Israel, and the commanders of thousands and of hundreds, with the overseers over the king's word, offered willingly; and for the service for the house of God they gave 5,000 talents and 10,000 darics of gold, and 10,000 talents of silver, and 18,000 talents of brass, and 100,000 talents of iron. Whoever possessed precious stones gave them to the treasury of the house of the LORD, in care of Jehiel the Gershonite. Then the people rejoiced because they had offered so willingly, for they made their offering to the LORD with a whole heart, and King David also rejoiced greatly. So David blessed the LORD in the sight of all the assembly; and David said, "Blessed are You, O LORD God of Israel our father, forever and ever. Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, indeed everything that is in the heavens and the earth; Yours is the dominion, O LORD and You

exalt Yourself as head over all. Both riches and honor come from You, and You rule over all, and in Your hand is power and might; and it lies in Your hand to make great and to strengthen everyone. Now therefore, our God, we thank You, and praise Your glorious name. But who am I and who are my people that we should be able to offer as generously as this? For all things come from You, and from Your hand we have given You. For we are sojourners before You, and tenants, as all our fathers were; our days on the earth are like a shadow, and there is no hope. O LORD our God, all this abundance that we have provided to build You a house for Your holy name, it is from Your hand, and all is Yours. Since I know, O my God, that You try the heart and delight in uprightness, I, in the integrity of my heart, have willingly offered all these things; so now with joy I have seen Your people, who are present here, make their offerings willingly to You. O LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, our fathers, preserve this forever in the intentions of the heart of Your people, and direct their heart to You...”

In 1 Kings 6 we read of the building of the temple, using all of the precious and pure materials that were provided by David and the people of Israel that we just read about in 1 Chronicles 29. Everything was done just as God had instructed it to be done. Everything was perfectly prepared and wondrously beautiful. It had taken seven years. In 1 Kings 8 the temple has been completed, and a powerful scene ensues...

1 Kings 7:51-8:11

Thus all the work that King Solomon performed in the house of the LORD was finished. And Solomon brought in the things dedicated by his father David, the silver and the gold and the utensils, and he put them in the treasuries of the house of the LORD. Then Solomon assembled the elders of Israel and all the heads of the tribes, the leaders of the fathers' households of the sons of Israel, to King Solomon in Jerusalem, to bring up the ark of the covenant of the LORD from the city of David, which is Zion. All the men of Israel assembled themselves to King Solomon at the feast, in the month Ethanim, which is the seventh month. Then all the elders of Israel came, and the priests took up the ark. They brought up the ark of the LORD and the tent of meeting and all the holy utensils, which were in the tent, and the priests and the Levites brought them up. And King Solomon and all the congregation of Israel, who were assembled to him, were with him before the ark, sacrificing so many sheep and oxen they could not be counted or numbered. Then the priests brought the ark of the covenant of the LORD to its place, into the inner sanctuary of the house, to the most holy place, under the wings of the cherubim. For the cherubim spread their wings over the place of the ark, and the cherubim made a covering over the ark and its poles from above. But the poles were so long that the ends of the poles could be seen from the holy place before the inner sanctuary, but they could not be seen outside; they are there to this day. There was nothing in the ark except the two tablets of stone which Moses put there at Horeb, where the LORD made a covenant with the sons of Israel, when they came out of the land of Egypt. It happened that when the priests came from the holy place, **the cloud filled the house of the LORD, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD.**
[emphasis added]

What a truly amazing time in Israel's history.

- They had willingly, gladly, joyfully, unhesitatingly, abundantly provided and prepared for the building of the dwelling place of God.
- They had carefully, meticulously, diligently followed God's instructions for His dwelling place.
- They witnessed the glory of the Lord fill the dwelling place they had prepared, because God was pleased with the provisions they had made for Him and the willingness of heart with which they had made them.

Why are we talking about the temple? Because we are a temple! ***“Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.” (1 Corinthians 6:19-20)***

There are many things we can learn about pursuing purity from the example of these great moments in Israel's history.

Are we willingly, gladly, joyfully, unhesitatingly, abundantly providing and preparing our “temples” so that God may dwell in them?

As we are considering purity, let us consider the things we may gladly give so that our Lord may be glorified in us. As previously stated, God has given us a heart to love Him, a mind to know Him, and a body to serve Him. It is also true of us that, “all this abundance that we have provided to build You a house for Your holy name, it is from Your hand, and all is Yours.” All that we have to give has been given to us by our Father, and we should joyfully return what He has provided! We must give our hearts to holiness so that we may love our Lord fully. We must give our minds entirely to the pure truths of His word so that we may be pure as He is pure. We must give our physical bodies to his service, keeping them pure, so that He may be honored through us. We must give our very best every moment of every day. Purity is a lifelong endeavor!

Are we carefully, meticulously, and diligently following God's instructions that He may be honored by our purity?

We must follow God's instructions to ensure the purity of our hearts.

- We must keep our hearts with all diligence, day in and day out. (Proverbs 4:23; Mark 7:21-23)
- We must seek and serve God purely, not for ulterior motives and not with any distractions that would pull our hearts away. (1 Timothy 1:5-7; Colossians 3:2; 1 John 2:15-17) We must beware of the guiles of Satan, who seeks to pull our hearts away from being purely devoted to Christ. (2 Corinthians 11:3)
- We must seek the pure word of God. (Psalm 12:6; 19:8; 119:9)
- We must hate sin and anything that is impure. (Psalm 97:10)

We must follow God's instructions to ensure the purity of our minds.

- We must keep our minds free from things that would defile it. Maybe this means giving up our favorite TV shows, music, websites, friendships, etc. (Romans 8:5-6)

- We must meditate on things that are honorable, right, pure, lovely, of good repute, excellent, and praiseworthy. (Philippians 4:8)
- Our speech must always be full of grace (Colossians 4:6), and we must refrain from the disgrace of speaking of things that are done in secret (Ephesians 5:11-12).

We must follow God's instructions to ensure the purity of our bodies.

- We must flee immorality and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace. (2 Timothy 2:22; 1 Corinthians 6:18)
- We must dress with modest apparel. (1 Timothy 2:9-10)
- We must carry ourselves as godly women, and not in a way that is provocative or attention seeking. (1 Peter 3:3-4)

Striving for purity demands sacrifice. We see the Israelites giving away things that were costly and precious to them, but their sacrifice resulted in something far greater than anything they could have given away. God dwelt among them. The glory of the Lord filled the temple because God was pleased with the provisions Israel had made for Him and the willingness of heart that they had made them with. It was a wondrous sight to behold. He promised that if they maintained uprightness and kept a humble heart, He would hear their prayers, be a refuge for them, forgive them of iniquities, provide for them, and protect them (see 1 Kings 8 & 9).

If we purposefully prepare our hearts, minds, and bodies for purity, we will provide a dwelling place for God. Is this what we desire?

WHAT ARE THE CONSEQUENCES OF IMPURITY?

Let's redirect our attention to the book of Ezekiel. Hundreds of years after the temple had been built, Israel had become so impure and defiled that God had no choice but to bring judgment on them for their countless iniquities. God, through His prophet Ezekiel, prophesies of the impending doom on the people of Israel and Judah.

Ezekiel 9:9-10

“Then He said to me, ‘The iniquity of the house of Israel and Judah is very, very great, and the land is filled with blood and the city is full of perversion; for they say, ‘The LORD has forsaken the land, and the LORD does not see!’ But as for Me, My eye will have no pity nor will I spare, but I will bring their conduct upon their heads.”

In chapter 8, God takes Ezekiel through the temple itself, and shows Ezekiel that it has been defiled with all sorts of idols and unimaginable abominations. In Ezekiel chapter 10 we find a sad and grim picture, a stark contrast to the joyous occasions of 1 Chronicles 29 and 1 Kings 8.

Ezekiel 10:18

“Then the glory of the LORD departed from the threshold of the temple...”

God could no longer dwell in His house, because it had been defiled and made impure. Just so, God will not dwell with us nor will we ever be in his presence if we let any impurity or unholiness dwell in our hearts, minds, or bodies.

Is this where you find yourself today? Have you been serving God with an impure heart and impure motives? Has your mind been filled with lust, filthiness, or worldliness? Have you given your body to lasciviousness or engaged in actions that God would forbid? Please be mindful that God cannot and will not dwell where impurity is.

RESTORED TO PURITY

The fact is that each of us would have no hope of being pure were it not for the blood of Christ (Proverbs 20:9). Yet even in Ezekiel 16, where we saw the unworthy, impure woman, we also see God's desire to forgive her at the end of the chapter (16:60-63). God, in His great and unfathomable love, desires that we may dwell with Him just as Adam and Eve were able to at the beginning of time in the garden. Before the foundation of the world, He planned a way to restore a sinful, broken people to Himself. Hebrews 10:10 states, "We have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all."

Hebrews 10:19-22

"Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, and since we have a great high priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water."

Here we see that the blood of Christ has made us clean and has once again restored us to the holy place, the dwelling place of God.

Ultimately, if we remain pure throughout this life, we will dwell with God eternally in heaven. In Revelation chapter 21 we find another bride, beautifully and purely adorned for her husband. This bride is the people of God: those who have kept themselves pure, holy, and righteous for their Master. A loud voice from the throne says, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them..."

1 John 3:2-3

"Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. *And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.*"

Certainly our purity honors God. When the world around us is able to look at us and see something different and unique about us, they may come to realize that it is because we have made our hearts a throne for our Father in heaven.