

Honoring God in Purity

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

INTRODUCTION

As a Christian strives to live a life that is pleasing to God, one of the most important traits to consider is holiness. As the Apostle Peter states, “like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior because it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy’” (1 Pet 1:15-16). This is not a new commandment. In fact, Peter himself states that this commandment is part of a law that had been given several centuries before his epistle (see Lev 11:44-47). In spite of all the changes that had taken place between the time Leviticus was written and the time Peter authored his letter, the requirement for the people of God had always been the same, “You shall be holy, for [God] is holy.” Such is also a requirement for the people of God today, and it will be for all the generations to come until the Lord will return.

Holiness is strictly connected to purity. We often hear that 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 reveal 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 become holy involves. Purity is one of the means by which a Christian can work and develop in becoming holy. In fact, purity is one of the building blocks of holiness.

“...FOR I THE LORD YOUR GOD AM HOLY” (from Lev 19:2)

The idea of God’s holiness is repeated over and over in the Scriptures. The words “holy” and “pure” are used countless times in the Law of Moses and in 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 describes 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.

The holiness of God is something that we may not comprehend fully, but nonetheless it needs to be taken very seriously. At the first encounter Moses has with the LORD, God tells his servant to “remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground” (Ex 3:5). Later, as Moses and the Israelites come to Sinai, in preparation for the LORD to come down on the mountain, the warning is given to the people: “Beware that you do not go up on the mountain or touch the border of it; whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death” (Ex 19:12). As we flip through the Bible, we come across the visions of Daniel, with the Ancient of Days’ vest being “white as snow” and the hair of his head “like pure wool” (Dan 7:9). Even as we come to the last book, the concept of the holiness of God is still present. In Revelation 4:8 we read of the four living creatures that day and night do not cease to say: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God, the Almighty, who was and who is and who is to come.”

WHY PURITY?

As we discuss the topic of purity, we must remind ourselves of our goal. It would be easy to claim purity by living in a way that is simply a little less filthy than how the world around us lives. However, that is not how we are called to live. We are not simply called to walk one step behind everyone else. We are called to walk against the flow. Our goal is the same as the one of the Israelites in the wilderness and the Christians to whom the epistle of Peter was originally addressed in the first century. We live in a filthy world and are surrounded by all sorts of unclean behavior, speech, ideology and agendas. However, we are to “be holy as God is holy.” As Jesus stated, “Be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect” (Matt 5:48). That is our goal and our standard.

The reason why the holiness and purity of God are so relevant to us is because we are His people and we were created in His image. When God said, “Let Us make man in Our image” (Gen 1:26-27), He meant for mankind to also reflect His holiness and purity. These traits were partly lost when sin entered the world in Genesis 3. Sin destroyed mankind as he was designed to be and distorted the image of God in which he had been created. The Bible tells the story of how God, throughout history, has been striving to reconcile mankind to Himself. This is nothing mankind could do on its own. God reopened the door that mankind had shut, but even the sacrifice of Jesus has been necessary in the process. However, thanks to God’s love and mercy, we can once again strive to be what God had designed us to be.

HOW TO BE(COME) PURE?

Realize our impurity

The first step in order to become pure is to realize our impurity. As stated in the previous section, we are called to an important goal. However, as we look at ourselves, we honestly need to ask the question that Job asks: “Can mankind be just before God? Can a man be pure before his Maker?” (Job 4:17). We must realize that we have all sinned (Rom 3:23a) and ultimately violated God’s purpose in creating us in His image. We must realize that we have all fallen short of the glory of God (Rom 3:23b), violating His nature through our unrighteousness. We must understand that we are too spiritually unclean to stand in the presence of a God whose eyes are too pure to look upon evil (Hab 1:13). God wants us to be pure and will help us in the process, but He can only do it if we realize our need for His help and for His guidance.

Throughout the whole process, we must beware of the devil. The moment he sees someone setting his heart on becoming pure in order to please God, Satan will try his best to destroy that desire and have that soul on his side. Satan will try his best to distract us from our goal and “lead us astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ” (2 Cor 11:3). He may try to convince us that we are doing just fine and that we do not need any improvements, so we can relax and enjoy our achievements. He may try to distract us by getting our attention on something else, portraying it as more important. Finally, the devil may even try to discourage us, telling us that our goal is unachievable and we should settle for a lot less – or maybe that we would be better off not even trying, using our precious time and energy somewhere else. We must not get distracted by Satan, and we must keep in mind that, in the condition in which we are, we need God’s help and that He is indeed willing and ready to help us. After all, God sent His Son to die for us so that we would have eternal life if we believe in Him (John 3:16).

Purpose purity in your Heart

After realizing our condition, we must purpose that we will work on purity. In the world in which we live, purity does not come overnight, and certainly does not come on its own. We must purpose in our hearts that we will actually pursue purity and try to become pure(r). Ezra had purposed in his heart that he was going to study and practice the law of the Lord, and that he would have taught it to the people in Israel (Ezra 7:10). Ultimately, purity is a matter of the heart. We must purpose in our hearts that we will pursue purity in order for our minds and our whole selves to become pure. We must guard our hearts with all diligence (Prov 4:23a) because whatever we purpose and whatever we put in them will be reflected on our daily life, our behavior, our character and ultimately on where we will spend eternity.

Get purity from its Source

Through his proposition Ezra certainly grew in purity. In fact, “The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes” (Psalm 19:8b), and “The words of the Lord are pure words; as silver tried in a furnace on the earth, refined seven times” (Psalm 12:6). There is no other place where one should look for instruction on how to gain purity but the Bible Itself. On the other hand, spending time learning the Word of God in order to live it will influence one’s purity. Since the Bible is the Word of God, it reflects His character, just as the personality of an author can be seen in their books or the technique of an artist in their paintings. With God being holy and pure, His Word cannot be but holy and pure as well.

The more we become familiar with the teaching of the Scriptures, the more our perspective changes. If we let the Word of God influence our lives, we will be able to change how we look at this world, and we will be able to have a higher perspective for our days here. We will start being less concerned with the worries of this world and will become more preoccupied with doing the will of God, trying to please Him rather than trying to fit with our worldly-minded peers. Writing to the Colossians, Paul states that “if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God,” and then he adds: “Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth” (Col 3:1-2). As our perspective changes, we become more focused on the things that really matter, those that have to do with our Lord and our eternal life with Him.

Flee immorality

As our mind spends more time on “the things above,” we will become more concerned with pleasing God and we will work to be more like Him. That is the only way we will make our hearts, thoughts, words, deeds, actions and character purer. Throughout this process we will also desire to stay away from immorality. We will have no desire to even get close to immorality, and our hearts and minds will start working differently. We will “consider the members of our earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire...” (Col 3:5). We will lay aside the old self and put on the new self, as Paul tells the Colossians to do (Col 3:9-10). Our new self will be concerned with the things of God, and purity is one of them.

Doing the bare minimum is not enough. What we usually try to do is to live a superficial Christian life where we look like Christians, but we will also want to keep doing some of the things that please us. As long as we can keep using certain language, spend time doing activities we consider fun rather than dedicating even a small portion of those hours to God and His Word,

as long as we can watch certain movies or hang out with certain friends – as long as we can keep doing all that we please and only do the bare minimum for God, we will only look like Christians. That will be the extent of our Christianity, and there will be no depth to it. If we think we can get by as Christians just by doing the bare minimum, we are completely mistaken. In being a Christian there is no bare minimum! The first and foremost commandment as quoted by Jesus Himself is “You shall love the Lord your God with *all* your heart, and with *all* your soul, and with *all* your mind” (Matt 22:37). Following God requires our whole self. Our whole self is involved in the purification process, too. There is no concept of “bare minimum” in the commandment quoted by Matthew, and there is no concept of “bare minimum Christianity” anywhere else in the Bible.

Just fleeing immorality is not enough, either. Fleeing immorality is an important aspect of the life of a Christian, but by itself it is not enough. Paul warns Timothy to “flee from youthful lusts” (immorality) *and* to “pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart” (2 Tim 2:22). Paul requires Timothy to do *two* specific actions. Fleeing immorality is just the first half of the process, and in and of itself this part alone will not allow someone to become pure. It is what one does after fleeing immorality that makes the difference. When one flees immorality *and* pursues purity, the process will make sense and will be complete. Running away from immorality is necessary in order to allow for purity to take its place. This allows our hearts to stay away from impurity and allows us the opportunity to develop purity.

We need to grow, and will grow, in our ability to flee immorality. Fleeing immorality in a world that presents it under every form and in just about every corner is not always simple. It is difficult to live in a society that calls immorality “love,” “family” or “marriage.” Sometimes it may even be difficult to simply live a dating relationship differently than how the world does and advocates. However, fleeing immorality is a necessary first step for our purification process. The Corinthian Christians needed to flee immorality, too (1 Cor 6:18). Corinth was renowned for how their worship to idols was carried out *through* immorality. However, Paul urged the brethren in Corinth to remember that it is actually by being purified that we allow God to dwell in us. Our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, and just as we emphasized at the beginning of this lesson, the temple was built with the purest of the materials.

As we strive to become purer, our hearts and minds will have to run from immorality. However, as we grow in purity, we will actually start desiring to flee immorality. We will have a more heavenly view of this world and all its wickedness. We will become so disgusted by the immorality that we see every day that our pure hearts will feel oppressed and our souls tormented, just as it happened to Lot (2 Pet 2:7-8). At that point we will desire Heaven with God even more strongly, and we will strive even more to increase in purity.

Keep working on it

We know that there is no such thing as “bare minimum Christianity.” The last step of our growth towards purity actually involves all the previous steps cyclically repeating throughout our “upward spiral.” We will have to grow and keep growing in our purity. As we grow in purity, we will realize areas of our character that need work, and we will purpose to become purer. We will seek the Scriptures for help on improving the unsatisfying areas of our lives. All throughout this

process we will strive to flee immorality. However, as we grow, we will start desiring to flee immorality because we will crave purity more and more. We will be ready to do whatever it takes in order to please God, just like Jesus instructs in Matt 5:29-30. We will keep growing, and we will not be willing to stop in spite of times when failure may occur. We will be ready to roll up our sleeves and start where we left off, not being willing to repeat the same mistakes we have made. We will also be able to become an example and an encouragement to others in spite of our age. In fact, Paul told even Timothy “Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but rather in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity, show yourself an example of those who believe” (1 Tim 4:12). We will not look down on others, but we will encourage and help them instead. On top of all this, it is at a time when Satan wins victories in this world that our growth in purity becomes of crucial importance.

Get to know God

Getting to know God is the most important aspect of our growth towards purity. This part of the process is an underlying and overarching step throughout the whole growth process. It is the start, the progress and the goal. It is the standard that we use for our growth. It is the step that adds meaning to all the other steps of our growth towards purity. If we ever removed God from the picture, the meaning of our growth process and even the meaning of purity itself would vanish. God is the source of purity because He is holy. All that God is and all that God surrounds Himself with is pure and holy. God cannot tolerate it to be any different. It is for this reason that in the beatitudes Jesus says: “Blessed are the pure in heart, for *they* shall see God” (Matt 5:8). Jesus is saying that those who will be like God – who will be “holy as He is holy,” who will be “perfect just as He is perfect” – who will be pure as He is pure, will be able to be with Him for eternity. We must get to know God in order to become pure, and we have to learn His character from His Word in order to become like Him. “How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping it according to Your word” (Psalm 119:9).

CONCLUSION

Purity is one of the building blocks of holiness. We need to grow in purity in order to become more like God meant us to be since the beginning. Without striving for purity we cannot be pleasing to God, and we definitely cannot be like Him. However, we are called to be like Him because *we were made to be like Him*. We were made to be holy as our Heavenly Father is holy; we were made to be perfect as our Heavenly Father is perfect. We were made to be pure just like our Heavenly Father, so we can spend eternity with Him.

It seems fitting to let the words of John conclude and remind us of who we are, what we hope for, and how we are to act as we wait for our hope to be fulfilled: “See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. 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” (1 John 3:1-3).
