

Rediscovery in 2010 Part 8

We are still on a journey of rediscovering some fundamental truths of our faith. Last week we talked about rediscovering the power of prayer. This morning we are going to talk about **Rediscovering the Pursuit of Purity**. Last Sunday I told you I didn't feel like I exactly had a sermon, just a series of things I felt the Lord spoke into my heart about prayer. This morning I feel the same way about this message. I don't know if this will be a great sermon, but if you listen and hear my heart this morning, I believe you will hear a word from the Lord.

Purity is something that our culture admires in its water, its food supply, but not so much in behavior. We want pure, organically grown vegetables, but we laugh to scorn anyone that talks about living a life of sexual purity or spiritual purity. I suppose part of that stems from the past failures of the church to live a pure life before the world. We have failed so many times and there have been so many hypocrites in the church who demanded purity at one level - demanded purity from others - but then lived a secret life of impurity and sinfulness. I understand the source of and the reason for the cynicism and the skepticism, but failures, our personal weakness and mistakes nor the world's skepticism changes the fact that God has called us to live a pure and holy life. We are to live a life in the pursuit of purity. I've used that phrase twice now and I want to take some time to develop that thought this morning.

Let's start first with understanding what we mean about being pure. There are a couple of different words used in the New Testament to refer to this idea of being pure. But speaking in a spiritual sense, we are talking about being spiritually and morally clean, washed, our sins forgiven and our guilt taken away. The question then is, how do we get ourselves clean? God created us to enjoy the innocence and purity of his presence, pure fellowship unhindered by sin. But when Adam and Eve sinned, it put that stain of sin upon each one of us. The bible tells us that all of us have sinned and missed the mark. Because we are all sinners, that sin has stained our heart and scarred our very nature. Their sin, and now our sin, separates us from a pure and holy God. **How do we rid ourselves of the stain of sin and the burden of guilt and condemnation we all carry?**

The ancients tried to atone for their sins through animal sacrifice and through ritual

baptism. They would try to wash their sins away, but water applied to our flesh will not rinse away that stain of sin upon our heart and soul. How do we rid ourselves of that sin stain? The book of Job asked the question long ago, **“How then can a man be righteous before God? How can one born of woman be pure?” Job 25:4.** What can we do to become pure? Can we earn purity? Can we work for it? The bible gives us the answer in 1 John 1, **“...the blood of Jesus, [God’s] Son, purifies us from all sin. If we claim to be without sin we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” 1 John 1:7-9**

We can’t purify ourselves from our sins. We can’t earn it or work for it, but Jesus will purify and cleanse us if we will repent of our sins and put our faith and trust in him. He came to give his life as the sacrifice that atoned for our sins. He took our place on the cross and bore what should have been our punishment for our sins. Believe upon him and he will make your heart and spirit pure and clean within.

Position of purity. He purifies us. We get a new heart. We become new creations in Christ Jesus. We become partakers of his divine nature. Our sins are forgiven and we are declared to be righteous in Christ and clean. We are pure, not by our efforts, but by His efforts on Calvary. So is that it?

What about some of those daily struggles we have with remaining pure? I mean, some days my thoughts aren’t so pure, some days my actions aren’t pure, my behavior isn’t pure. What do we do about that? We have been cleansed and purified through the saving, atoning blood of Christ. Our spiritual position in Christ is declared to be righteous. But there is a process in staying pure that we call sanctification.

Process of purity. We call it the process of sanctification, of being set apart unto God in purity and holiness. It is what has happened to us and what is happening to us as we are being made conformable to the image of Christ on a daily basis. This is the process of discarding the remains of that old way we lived before becoming a follower of Christ. It is choosing to get rid of anything and everything that keeps you from freely serving and following the Lord. It is a lifetime of choosing to serve God rather than serving the world or serving yourself. It is a lifetime of loving Jesus more than you love the world.

So how exactly is this purifying process happening? Is it all up to us and our efforts to stay pure? No, not exactly. We have been made pure through the blood of Christ that cleansed and purified us from sin (past tense). And we are being made pure through the blood of Christ that continually cleanses us from sin (present tense). That's all him and his doing. He makes us pure. But...

This process of remaining pure, pursuing purity, is a cooperative effort between the Holy Spirit's loving work and our now redeemed choices. We say yes to the Holy Spirit's work of bearing good fruit in our life. We choose to live by the Spirit and walk by the Spirit. There are any number of things that contribute to this process.

Purity flows from applying the word of God. Paul tells us that **“Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish but holy and blameless.”** **Ephesians 5:25-27.**

The word of God applied to our life will keep on rinsing and washing over us and keep the sin and wickedness off of us. The daily washing of the word is a means to pursuing purity.

James says the word of God is like a mirror that we stare into. It reflects back to us who we are and who we must become. It shows us those areas of our life that need attention, those areas that should be discarded, cut away, pruned back. If we are going to be a holy, pure, follower of Christ, we need to study God's word and live in obedience to that word.

Purity flows out of a renewed mind. The bible tells us **“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”** **Romans 12:2.** We are allowing the Holy Spirit to point out those thoughts that are no longer pleasing to God. We are discarding the old way of thinking and replacing it with choices and thoughts that are pleasing to God, that lead to obedience and life. The bible tells us to think on, to dwell on pure things and the God of peace would be with us. Fill your mind with God's word and things that are pure and his peace will keep you.

Purity flows out of obedience. Peter said, **“Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth...”** **1 Peter 1:22.** Obey God and his word and purity

will follow.

The Holy Spirit is at work showing us the right things to choose and the things we should reject or refrain from touching or using or experiencing. If we live by the Spirit and walk by the Spirit, in other words walk in obedience to God's word and the leading of the Holy Spirit, we won't gratify or indulge the desires of the sinful nature. (Galatians 5:16). Instead, with the Holy Spirit's help we will pursue purity and godliness.

Purity flows from refinement. Another way we are made pure is through the tests and trials of this life. The bible speaks of it as a refining process. It burns away the dross, the impurities, the stuff that doesn't belong in our life. God told Israel through the prophet Isaiah, **"I will turn my hand against you; I will thoroughly purge away your dross and remove all your impurities....afterward you will be called the City of Righteousness, the Faithful City."** Isaiah 1:25-26. We may go through the fire of refinement, but if we trust the Lord all we lose are the impurities and the stuff that doesn't belong in our lives anyway. Afterwards we are called righteous and faithful. Job said, **"But he knows the way that I take; when he has tested me, I will come forth as gold."** Job 23:10. Tests and trials come for a reason and part of that reason is to remove the impurities that would destroy us and defeat us. When we come through, we are refined and shining as pure gold.

Why do I want to be pure in the first place? Apart from being saved and made pure in terms of salvation, why should I listen to you about this pursuit of purity? Why pursue holiness and purity? I'm glad you asked. **Why pursue a life of purity?**

- 1. Because God said for us to be holy.** **"As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: 'Be holy, because I am holy.'" 1 Peter 1:14-16.** We pursue this pure and holy walk because God said that was how we were to live. We stand in the holiness and purity provided through Christ, but we also pursue that pure life through our discipleship, devotion, study of God's word and prayer.
- 2. Because the pure will see God.** That's what it's all about. To be pure again, free from sin is to be restored to God's presence. **"Blessed are the pure in heart for they will see God."** Matthew 5:8. I don't think that simply means someday, after time is no more or we are in heaven that we will see God. I believe Jesus is telling us that those

whose sins have been forgiven and have purposed in our heart to love him and serve him and live for him and turn away from wickedness and wrath and sin, that we will live close enough in his presence that we will see his glory, his blessings, his favor, his countenance abiding with us. If sin separates us from God and from fellowship with the Lord, then purity, the absence of sin, means there is nothing that is separating us from God. Nothing clouds our vision, nothing hinders our relationship with God. With a pure heart we see God.

3. Because the pure in heart receive blessing from the Lord. There is a blessing that comes from knowing you made the right choice in seeking God, in choosing God's way. You don't have to go back under the guilt of sin and wrong choices but you are free to make righteous choices and to pursue a life of purity with God. **"Who may ascend the hill of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol or swear by what is false. He will receive blessing from the Lord and vindication from God his Savior."**

Psalm 24:3-5

I've given you the mechanics of purity but I want to share another thought with you about pursuing purity. We have talked about the word pure as being cleansed from sin. But I want you to think about purity for a moment as being free from impurity. Pure, as in nothing added, nothing phony or fake, 100% of one single, solitary thing. Single minded, nothing to distract or hinder you. Think of becoming singularly focused on one thing. We've been talking about the pursuit of purity. I want to flip this around now and I want us to think about a pure pursuit. Think about a sold-out, nothing held back, nothing in reserve, totally 100% pure pursuit of God and life with Him.

What if everyone in this church became passionate about this pure pursuit of God and this pure pursuit of purity? What if nothing else was as important to us, we were just 100% pure followers of Christ. Sold out. 100% pure. What if that was more important than going to work, than boyfriends or girlfriends? What if that was more important than money or retirement or enjoyment or recreation? What if pursuing God and knowing him, serving him, living for him and obeying him became the pure, uncompromised driving force in your life? What could happen? What would happen?

What would happen if we lived our life not only in pursuit of purity, but if we lived

our life in pure pursuit of a life pleasing to God? Consider this:

Pure pursuit. Living with...

One pure heart - to see God.

One pure motive - to please God.

One pure desire - to obey God.

One pure mission - to serve God.

One pure life - to honor God.

One eternal joy - to be with God

What if we all made this commitment to pure pursuit? Some of us need to start by repenting of our sins and asking Jesus to take away sin's stain and make us pure on the inside. Cleanse us from sin.

Some of us need to invite the Lord to come into our life and prune away the dead stuff. Some need to ask him to come into our life as a refiner and burn out the dross, the impurities, the stuff that interferes with my life with God.

I'm looking for somebody that is willing to say I want to be pure and live pure and I want to give my life to a pure pursuit of God and life with him.

"There is a generation that are pure in their own eyes, and yet is not washed from their filthiness." Proverbs 30:12. I'm looking for a generation, old or young, senior adults to this newest generation that will be honest with themselves and with God. Look at your life. Are you pure in your own eyes but still impure and unwashed in God's eyes? Still tolerating stuff in your life that God hates? Repent and ask God to cleanse you and forgive you and then devote yourself to that singularly pure pursuit of God and godliness.

Are you ready to see what could happen if we got a pure vision of God. A pure vision of what he has for us. A pure vision of what life with God and life lived for God can mean. It is life as it was meant to be lived. That other stuff you've been entertaining, that other stuff you've been pursuing, that other stuff that has gotten a hold of you and has been toying with you and seducing you - that's not life. You know it in your heart, way down in your gut, you know that isn't the way to life.

A day is coming when lines will be drawn. Living an impure life, living at 50% - half

serving God but keeping half of your life and your affection for your own pleasures and desires - that won't make it. God is calling us to a passionate and pure pursuit. It means we cast off and remove every "thing, desire, affiliation or pursuit which prevents us from experiencing the fullness of God in our lives." Remove everything that distracts, pollutes or insulates you from all God has for you.

Pure. Raw. Unadulterated. Committed. Unreserved. Passionate. Extreme. Pure pursuit. If just one person would hear this and be challenged by it and live it, who knows what might happen in God's kingdom. I dare you to accept the challenge to live in pure pursuit of a pure and pleasing life with God.