

# The Old Hickory Bulletin

## Old Hickory Church of Christ

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### Purity of Heart

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” (Matthew 5:8).

“If somehow we could get every person to examine his/her own heart, our task of evangelism would be easy” — how many times have we heard, or perhaps expressed, that sentiment? The beatitude quoted above is certainly one of the most profound, pointed, and penetrating proclamations our Lord ever uttered. It would not be an overstatement to say that “Blessed are the pure in heart” is what Christianity is all about. Regardless of one’s faithfulness to the forms/actions of religion, the heart must be right in God’s sight. The Pharisees of Jesus’ day were so concerned about the externals of serving God they seemed to forget the “weightier matters”: “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithes of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone.” (Matthew 23:23). Make no mistake — careful obedience to details of what God commands is important! Some people react to the thought of “obedience” by going to an opposite extreme: “Doesn’t matter about obedience if the heart is right.” The prophet Samuel’s rebuke to King Saul was: “Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, He also has rejected you from being king.” (1 Samuel 15:22, 23). Actually, careful obedience to God’s will proceeds from a pure heart, intent on doing exactly what God requires.

The heart, of which Jesus speaks, is neither the physical heart which pumps blood to all parts of our body, nor exclusively referring to our emotions. The Bible heart is best defined in Scripture by those actions it is said to perform. This heart can:

Love - “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.” (Matthew 22:37).

Trust – “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding.” (Proverbs 3:5).

Purpose – “So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver. (2 Corinthians 9:7).

Think – “For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” (Hebrews 4:12).

Reason – “When Jesus perceived in His spirit that they reasoned thus within themselves, He said to them, ‘Why do you reason about these things in your hearts?’” (Mark 2:8).

Purity of heart, then, involves our ability to obey God with our love, trust, purpose, thinking, and reasoning. Purity of heart in the Sermon on the Mount refers to that “singleness” of intention (Matthew 6:22), that determination to focus on God and His will for our lives.

Our hearts have not only the potential for good, but also for evil. Jesus explained this principle to the Pharisees who were critical of Him and His disciples for eating without the traditional washing of hands — “What comes out of a man, that defiles a man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness.” (Mark 7:20-22).

So much of the social thinking about the problems of mankind has focused on the environment in which mankind lives. What was wrong with the environment in the Garden of Eden? Yet man fell into sin and unhappiness!

The importance of the “pure in heart” beatitude is seen in the significance attached to the heart in the Scriptures. Consider the following examples: (1) the people before the flood: “Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.” Genesis 6:5. (2) God’s statement to the prophet Samuel: “For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.” (1 Samuel 16:7). (3) David’s declaration: “He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake.” (Psalm 23:3). (4) Solomon’s inspired advice: “Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life.” (Proverbs 4:23).

Has there ever been a time in which it was more difficult to “keep our hearts” than the time in which we live? It is as if Satan’s influence permeates every part of the

entertainment industry — movies, television, books, magazines, and the internet — all are used as tools of Satan to produce impure hearts. Also, we are often in the company of those with impure hearts. How does God tell us that we may have a pure heart? It is by the exercise of a will determined to follow God. Specifics include the following actions on our part: We cleanse our hearts by faith (Acts 15:7-9) which produces obedience. “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, having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever.” (1 Peter 1:22, 23). As a Christian, we pray as the Psalmist did: “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.” (Psalm 51:10). Submission to God in the words of James, “bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,” will do much for our heart: “Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.” (James 4:7-10).

Deliberate thinking, perhaps even reciting in our minds certain passages, will help us to keep our hearts pure. Christians for two millennia have found the apostle Paul’s advice to be most helpful: “Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy — meditate on these things.” (Philippians 4:8).

May our prayers include the request: “Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer.” (Psalm 19:14).

- Carl Witty

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## Why Go To Church?

Why do we need to go to church? Can we not just worship God in our homes? Do we have to dress up and meet with a group of other people to somehow validate our worship? These questions are sometimes asked by people who want to serve God, but who do not understand the role of the church in God’s plan. Occasionally they have been disillusioned by what they have seen in organized religion and would like to separate themselves from what they perceive to be hypocritical or covetous practices.

According to the New Testament scriptures, the church is not a building or some nebulous institution which has authority over Christians. The church can hear and speak (Matthew 18: 17); it can fear (Acts 5: 11). The church is simply a group of people who have been saved from their sins by the blood of Jesus. Paul reminded the Ephesians elders that the church had been purchased by blood (Acts 20:28). As individual Christians, we have been redeemed, i.e., purchased and liberated, by the precious blood of the unblemished Lamb, Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1:7; 1 Peter 1:19). From these scriptures, we see clearly that the church is composed of all those individual Christians who have had their sins washed away (Acts 22:16; Revelation 1:5).

The church is sometimes referred to as the body of Christ. Jesus is identified as the head and Savior of that spiritual body of people, the church (Ephesians 1:22-23; 5:23). The church does not have the power to save anyone from their sins; only Jesus can do that. The church doesn't save; it IS the saved!

When one understands the composition of the church, the question of why one must belong to the Lord's church is clearly answered. Those who belong to Christ are members of His body, the church. Who wouldn't want to be a part of that group of people? Indeed, we all need to be members of the Lord's church.

All of this is not to say that we can only worship while in the company of other Christians. Surely God will accept worship offered by single individuals, but the Lord also understood the need for mutual support, encouragement and discipline among His disciples. For that reason, disciples in the first century met together in local groups, i.e., congregations, as directed by the apostles of Jesus. The congregation of disciples in Jerusalem met together regularly to remember the Lord's death through the Lord's Supper and to pray together (Acts 2:41-42). The author of Hebrews encouraged his readers not to do as some of their brethren had done - forsake the practice of assembling with other brethren for the purpose of mutual worship and encouragement (Hebrews 10:24-25).

We need to meet with other Christians in a local congregation (also referred to as a church in the New Testament; see Galatians 1:2 and Revelation 2-3). Together we can worship God and work in His service, submitting to the One who is our Head, Jesus Christ.

- Allen Dvorak

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> "Sin causes the cup of joy to spring a leak!"

> "Don't forget in *darkness* what you've learned in the *light*!"

- > "Many a church needs the fire of a revival to throw out its frozen assets!"
  - > "Circumstances do not necessarily change you; they simply develop what is in you!"
  - > "Don't fret over what you'd do with your time if you could live it over again. Get busy with what you have left!"
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**THIS WEEK'S LESSONS:** Sunday morning: "*Choices Happy Couples Make!*" (Text: Prov. 5:18); Sunday evening: Hebrews Class: 12:14-29.