



## Pure in Heart by Ron Julian

Jesus tells us in the Beatitudes: “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”

This, of course, is terrifying. Is anyone “pure in heart”? I could never claim that my heart has been completely “pure” in anything I have thought or done. To me, Calvin has it right:

*Let the holy servant of God, I say, select from the whole course of his life the action which he deems most excellent, and let him ponder it in all its parts; he will doubtless find in it something that savors of the rottenness of the flesh, since our alacrity in well-doing is never what it ought to be, but our course is always retarded by much weakness. (Institutes 3.14.9)*

Could we get around this seemingly impossible demand for purity by postponing it to the next age? Could Jesus be saying, “One day, in the kingdom of God, you will be blessed by being pure in heart, totally free from sin”? Well, no, he is almost certainly not saying that. I understand each of the beatitudes to have the same structure: those whose lives *today* are characterized by X are the truly fortunate people because they will inherit the kingdom of God *in the future*. Those who are poor in spirit *now* will inherit the kingdom *in the future*. Those who mourn *now* will be comforted *in the future*. And thus, those who are “pure in heart” *now* will see God and His kingdom *in the future*. There is no getting around it; Jesus tells us that only those whose hearts are pure now, today, in this life, will see God, will inherit the kingdom one day.

Since Jesus is telling us that only those who are pure in heart now will see God, we had better try to discover what He means by “pure in heart.” As it happens, I believe that Jesus is drawing on the Old Testament for the concept of being pure in heart. And we see this concept echoed in other parts of the New Testament. To understand who are the pure in heart, we will look at three passages: Psalm 73, Psalm 24, and James 4.

### Psalm 73

The psalmist begins:

*Surely God is good to Israel,  
To those who are pure in heart!*  
(73:1)

The psalmist describes God’s goodness to the people of Israel; that is, to those who are pure in heart. He believes in this goodness, but he also sees a serious problem:

*But as for me, my feet came close to stumbling,  
My steps had almost slipped.  
For I was envious of the arrogant  
As I saw the prosperity of the wicked.*  
(73:2-3)

The psalmist believes that God is good to the pure in heart, but he is deeply troubled by the fact that those who are *not* pure in heart seem to prosper in this world. And in the next verses he goes on to give us a very clear picture of what he means by the “pure in heart” by giving a long description of those who are *not* pure in heart. They are arrogant, wicked, proud, violent, mockers, oppressors, setting their mouths against the heavens. In other words, they are as far from being faith-



ful, repentant, believing Israelites as you could imagine. The psalmist goes on:

*Surely in vain I have kept my heart  
pure*

*And washed my hands in innocence;  
For I have been stricken all day long  
And chastened every morning.*  
(73:13-14)

The psalmist does not think purity of heart is some hypothetical moral perfection that no one can obtain; he sees himself as having kept his heart pure—that is, having kept his heart from arrogance and hostility toward God. But he wonders whether he has been a fool to do so. After all, the wicked are prospering, but he, the one who has kept his heart pure, is suffering greatly. But then he thinks more clearly:

*When I pondered to understand this,  
It was troublesome in my sight  
Until I came into the sanctuary of God;  
Then I perceived their end.  
Surely You set them in slippery places;  
You cast them down to destruction.*  
(73:16-18)

The wicked may be prospering now, but their end will be destruction. But for the one whose heart is pure, for the faithful follower of God, this is true:

*Nevertheless I am continually with You;  
You have taken hold of my right hand.  
With Your counsel You will guide me,  
And afterward receive me to glory.*



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# Pure in Heart, cont.

*Whom have I in heaven but You?  
And besides You, I desire nothing on earth.  
(73:23-25)*

So the meaning of “pure in heart” in this context seems pretty clear. The pure in heart are the believers, those who have purified their hearts from a wicked, greedy, arrogant, rebellion against God. There is nothing here to suggest that the pure in heart are perfectly without sin. After all, in his sufferings, the psalmist doubted God and was tempted to abandon his faith. But in the end he did not because his heart was cleansed from a fundamental rebellion and hostility toward God.

## Psalm 24

*The earth is the LORD'S, and all it contains,  
The world, and those who dwell in it.  
For He has founded it upon the seas  
And established it upon the rivers.  
Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD?  
And who may stand in His holy place?  
**He who has clean hands and a pure heart,**  
Who has not lifted up his soul to falsehood  
And has not sworn deceitfully.  
He shall receive a blessing from the LORD  
And righteousness from the God of his salvation.  
This is the generation of those who seek Him,  
Who seek Your face, the God of Jacob. Selah.  
Lift up your heads, O gates,  
And be lifted up, O ancient doors,  
That the King of glory may come in!  
Who is the King of glory?  
The LORD strong and mighty,  
The LORD mighty in battle.  
Lift up your heads, O gates,  
And lift them up, O ancient doors,  
That the King of glory may come in!  
Who is this King of glory?  
The LORD of hosts,  
He is the King of glory. Selah.*

This psalm has some tricky aspects to interpret, and we will not explore those now. Our main concern is, once again, the idea of a pure heart. What does it mean? It would be possible to interpret David as saying, “Only a morally perfect person could stand before God”—in other words, no one is worthy to stand before God. But that doesn't seem likely in this context. The psalm looks as if it were

intended to be recited in a ritual ceremony of entrance into the city and the holy place, perhaps when David returned the Ark of the Covenant. The question is asked as the people approach, “Who may ascend into the hill of Yahweh?” And then the reply is given, “He who has clean hands and a pure heart.” A blessing is promised to such a one, and indeed the people describe themselves as being such ones, the generation of those who seek the face of God. They are among the pure of heart that come with sincerity before God. Then the psalm ends with a call and response about opening the gates so that God (represented by the Ark, perhaps) may enter in.

The point, then, is not that only morally perfect people can go before God. Rather, as they approach the holy place the people are agreeing that God only accepts those who seek to bring their lives in line with His will. Their actions (as represented by their “clean hands”) are in keeping with God's will, and their inner commitments (as represented by their “pure hearts”) are also in line with what God wants. In other words, it is those who repent and turn towards God that will receive His blessing.

Many suggest that Jesus has this psalm in mind when he speaks the beatitude of Matthew 5:9. The psalm speaks of the pure in heart. It says that God blesses them. And it describes them as those who seek the face of God—that is, those who want to see God. That Jesus has this psalm in mind seems quite plausible to me. In any case, both this psalm and Psalm 73 portray the pure in heart not as the morally perfect but as the repentantly faithful. Their hearts are pure because, unlike the wicked, they have sought to purge godlessness from their inner lives.

## James 4

*What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. And you are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel... You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God... Submit therefore 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. Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning, and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.*

The context of this passage is important. James is writing to churches filled with people who *claim* to be Christians. They “believe” the gospel of Jesus Christ. And yet they live as if the gospel were not true at all. Their inheritance in the kingdom of God seems to mean nothing to them. Their entire focus is on gaining wealth and power in this life. They fight and even kill to gain wealth. They treat people poorer than themselves with contempt. In other words, although they call themselves believers, their mindset is exactly like those the psalmist called “wicked” in Psalm 73. They want the things of this world, and they are ignoring the will of God to get them. James calls them “double-minded.” On the one hand, they think of themselves as believers. But on the other hand, their actions and motives are entirely worldly. Their “hands” (actions) are unclean and their “hearts” (motives) are impure in that they act and think like unbelievers.

James' admonition to his readers is: “cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.” That is, they need to repent of their unbelieving thoughts and actions and truly embrace and live out the gospel. To James, to have a pure heart is to have a single mind, a sincere faith. They need to truly believe what they say they believe. And then they need to act in keeping with those beliefs.

## Purity of Heart

The preceding passages help us to see what Jesus means when he says, “Blessed are the pure in heart.” He is not talking about some hypothetically perfect people. He is not saying that only morally perfect people can be saved. No, to Jesus *all genuine believers* are among the pure in heart. All have hearts cleansed of their fundamental unbelief and hostility toward God. They are not just ritually pure or outwardly moral in their behavior; they are genuine in their inward desire to trust and follow God.

Kierkegaard wrote a famous book called *Purity of Heart is to Will One Thing*. In that book Kierkegaard wrote a great prayer:

*Father in heaven! What is a man without Thee! What is all that he knows, vast accumulation though it be, but a chipped fragment if he does not know Thee! What is all his striving, could it even encompass a world, but a half-finished work if he does not know Thee: Thee the One, who art one thing and who art all! So may Thou give to the intellect, wisdom to comprehend that one thing; to the heart, sincerity to receive this understanding; to the will, purity that wills only one thing. In prosperity may Thou grant perseverance to will one thing; amid distractions, collectedness to will one thing; in suffering, patience to will one thing. Oh, Thou that givest both the beginning and the completion, may Thou early, at the dawn of day, give to the young man the resolution to will one thing. As the day wanes, may Thou give to the old man a renewed remembrance of his first resolution, that the first may be like the last, the last like the first, in possession of a life that has willed only one thing. Alas, but this has indeed not come to pass. Something has come in between. The separation of sin lies in between. Each day, and day after day something is being placed in between: delay, blockage, interruption, delusion, corruption. So in this time of repentance may Thou give the courage once again to will one thing... Oh, Thou that givest both the beginning and the completion, give Thou victory in the day of need so that what neither a man's burning wish nor his determined resolution may attain to, may be granted unto him in the sorrowing of repentance: to will only one thing.*

Kierkegaard is probably borrowing from James, who tells us purity of heart means not being double-minded. Kierkegaard says something similar: purity of heart is to will one thing. And that one thing is God. But Kierkegaard rightly acknowledges that our own sin provides the biggest obstacle to being pure in heart. It is so easy to be distracted and confused and stubborn. And so he prays

that God will grant us the victory which is repentance, so that we might be pure in heart and might will one thing.

Kierkegaard is here praying for the blessing that Jesus speaks of in the beatitude. We are blessed, we are fortunate, if we are single minded. We are fortunate if our sin leads us not away from God but to repentance, where we remember again that we want God and



## Provost's Update from Eliot Grasso

Gutenberg College is moving forward, and I am greatly encouraged. Since I stepped into my new role as Provost on July 1, it is clear that the wealth of opportunities for us to serve our current students and to locate future students continues to grow as we become increasingly visible in the community and in the region.

In May, Gutenberg became a sponsor for the Classical Conversations Parent Practicums in the Northwest. This has been a tremendous and unprecedented opportunity for us to interact with students who have a high likelihood to benefit from our project. Between Alaska and northern California, hundreds of parents are convening to discover how best they can build their families through Christian classical homeschooling. I am honored that our school is investing in these families. Leaders in the CC community have received Gutenberg graciously and warmly. Families are delighted to learn about our school and our desire for our students to become spiritually and intellectually sustainable through encounters with the Great Books.

You may have noticed that Gutenberg has an increased social media presence over the last few months. We are actively working to help those who will benefit from our school to locate and interact with us. We want to be clear about how we can help others, and our method for doing so. Becoming visible and known through a variety of means will be critical.

His promises above all else. To have hearts sincere in their commitment to God makes us a truly fortunate people.

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I'm excited about the new Workshop Series we launched this spring. We want families to be able to get to know Gutenberg's faculty and community through firsthand experience, and the workshops are making that possible. The day-long workshops are designed for a variety of interests and age groups. Attendance for workshops has been good, and we have scheduled more workshops for the fall. Register at [workshops.gutenberg.edu](http://workshops.gutenberg.edu).

Our position on biblical authority is as firm as ever. And, we continue to strive to listen empathetically to other voices, holding to the commitment that all human beings, regardless of where they are in their intellectual and spiritual process, are infinitely valuable to God.

The longer I'm here, the more obvious it is to me that Gutenberg College is one of



Board Chairman speaks with Classical Conversations families at GCBBQ.

the most significant educative initiatives to have taken place in North America in the last two-and-a-half centuries. The curriculum, culture, founding documents, and ethos all harmonize to create an environment that is committed to biblical truth, respectful of human complexity, and devoted to intellectual rigor and honesty.



**Faculty Stand behind 2017 Graduates:** Arminas Novakas, Tobias Humphrey, Meredith Wilkins Bishop, Paul Bishop, Ian Hughes, Nicholas McLaughlin

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## Gutenberg Receives Matching-Gift Pledge!



Near the end of June 2017, Gutenberg College received a matching-gift pledge of \$10,000. This pledge will match dollar-for-dollar any new donations or any additional donations current supporters might wish to make. This matching campaign will end on August 31st, the end of Gutenberg's fiscal year. We invite you to join in. To donate online, go to [www.gutenberg.edu](http://www.gutenberg.edu).

On a recent visit to Gutenberg College, the donor making the anonymous pledge had this to say about the reasons behind the matching pledge:

"While I lived and studied in this building, I was profoundly impacted—both educationally and spiritually. My time here was the most formative season of my life. I not only learned skills that have helped me with my career, I was nurtured and ministered to, and I want others to experience the same—having the opportunity to both learn and grow in wisdom. I've decided to put my money where my mouth is and want to encourage others to support this

amazing place so that even more students can attend Gutenberg College and come away as profoundly impacted as I was."

We want to thank this donor for the financial support and the words that provide the special meaning behind the support. We hope the sentiment expressed above resonates with you like it has with us.

We hear similar stories from others who have come through our doors. Many of you have generously supported Gutenberg College over this past year. We are very thankful for each and every one of you.

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