

VIRTUE 17

PURITY

LORD, who may dwell in your sanctuary? Who may live on your holy hill? He whose walk is blameless and who does what is righteous, who speaks the truth from his heart and has no slander on his tongue, who does his neighbor no wrong and casts no slur on his fellowman, who despises a vile man but honors those who fear the LORD, who keeps his oath even when it hurts, who lends his money without usury and does not accept a bribe against the innocent. He who does these things will never be shaken.

—Psalm 15

But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk, or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure, or greedy person—such a man is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.

—Ephesians 5:3-5

Webster's definition of *purity* is, "Free from anything that taints, impairs; clear, unmixed."⁴⁰ Applying this concept to a Christian's life is not much different—God wants

us to be free from life-impairing sin (Hebrews 12:1) that grieves the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4:30). He also wants us to be pure in the sense that we are unmixed with the things of this world (2 Timothy 2:4-6; Galatians 6:14).

How is such purity achieved? Let's break the process into two steps. First, we are made *positionally pure* before God when we receive Christ. When we receive Christ, we transition from children under God's judgment and wrath to adopted, forgiven children (Romans 5:9-11; John 3:16-36). Then, we go through a lifelong process of *progressive purification* (2 Corinthians 7:1; 1 John 3:3-6; James 2). The first purification is a gift that we receive by faith. The second is a process that takes a lifetime, and one that is never finalized until after we die. The Lord works on us continually (as we submit to Him), as He is the author and finisher of our faith (Philippians 1:6).

Before we take a look at the areas of our lives that He desires to purify, let's first take a look at *why* He desires purity in our lives. As Christians, we need to have purity with a purpose—and that purpose is love, not piety or self-righteousness. First Peter 1:22-23 offers insight into this: "Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart. For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God." Purity comes by obeying the truth, and this is done so that we have sincere and deep love for our brothers.

When it comes to the areas of our lives where God desires purity, the most obvious one is sexual purity. But we will cover that topic last. First, let's look at some other areas that are also important.

God wants us to have *relational* purity. This means that we esteem and hold our relationships with God, family, and friends in ways that are pure and genuine—free from deceit, selfishness, and being two-faced.

Academic purity is also important. This includes being thorough in our research, careful in our details, and not cheating. *Bodily* purity is another key area. The Bible states that our bodies are living temples of the Holy Spirit and that we should honor God with our bodies

because they were purchased by Christ for a great price (1 Corinthians 6:19). *Athletic* purity can include training and eating in honorable ways, competing fairly, and giving glory to God for both our wins and our losses. *Entertainment* purity means simply putting no vile thing before our eyes: “I will be careful to lead a blameless life—when will you come to me? I will walk in my house with blameless heart. I will set before my eyes no vile thing” (Psalm 101:2-3). Purity at *work* means giving it our best and maintaining honor and integrity in our daily transactions.

Sexual purity seems to be one of the key areas where purity is important—especially because it seems to be one of the top areas in which young men struggle. The book of Proverbs has been used for centuries for training the young leaders of Israel (particularly young men during the time of Christ and earlier). Of the 915 verses spanning thirty-one chapters, sexual purity is covered more thoroughly than any other topic pertaining to destructive sins. Gluttony receives some treatment; so does lying and drinking. But sexual sin is a main theme that runs throughout the entire book.

Sexual purity is even put at the top of the list in Scripture passages that encourage purity in various areas of our lives:

But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God’s holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk, or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure, or greedy person—such a man is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God (Ephesians 5:3-5).

A true knight realizes that one thoughtless move can possibly ruin a lifetime of achievement—just like a single arrow can knock a knight off his horse if he lets his shield down during a battle charge.

This is why we should avoid sexual sin in both our thoughts as well as our actions (sex outside of marriage).

As a historical example of a knight committed to purity, there is perhaps no better example than Joan of Arc, who was probably the most famous female knight who ever lived. While she was renowned for many of her knightly characteristics and virtues, she was perhaps best known for her purity. Here are a few examples:

- When lying down on a battlefield with an arrow shot completely through from her shoulder to her back, her fellow soldiers offered to “charm” her wound (i.e., use sorcery). Her reply was, “I would rather die than do what I know to be sin.”⁴¹
- In several recorded instances, she used the flat side of her sword to strike the backs of prostitutes that followed her (male) knights into camp after battles. In fact, she broke her sword over the back of one prostitute (which she later regretted).
- She retained her sexual purity her entire life.

Finally, what are some of the practical benefits of living a pure life? First, as we strive to live a life based on purity (keeping in mind, of course, that this is a laudable goal but one that will not be fully achieved while living in our sinful bodies), we gain *power through God* and *boldness before man*: “Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God and receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him” (1 John 3:21-22).

Such a lifestyle can also lead to an effective prayer life. For example, King David said in Psalm 66:18-19: “If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened; but God has surely listened and heard my voice in prayer” (see also Deuteronomy 1:42-45). We gain access to God’s throne room by no virtue of our own but rather only grace. If we want God’s ear in our prayer lives, we need to keep a short list of unrenounced sins. Fortunately, there is

forgiveness if we ask with a sincere heart: “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

REFLECT

She entirely abstained from swearing. I felt myself inspired by her words, for I saw she was in deed a messenger of God; never did I see in her any evil, but always she was as good as if she had been a saint.

—Bertrand De Poulengey, a squire who accompanied Joan of Arc into battle⁴²

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

Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing, and perfect will.

—Romans 12:2

Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

—Psalm 51:10

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

—Matthew 5:8

Every area of our lives is to be under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. And that means the searchlight of God's Word must penetrate every corner of our lives.

—Billy Graham

RESPOND

1. What is the main area of your life where you struggle with purity?
2. How can you rely on God's Word and Christian fellowship to help you improve in this area?
3. How will God's grace and forgiveness help you with your struggle in this area?
4. What benefits flow into our lives when we strive for purity?
5. How can you help others who also struggle in this area?