

# A PURE HEART

By

Curtis Dickinson

It was 19 years ago when Albert C. Outler, then professor of theology at Southern Methodist University in Dallas, expressed the belief that “we’re in for a very bad time in the next 25 years.” He said that the church has been so busy passing judgments and offering advice on secular issues, it has lost sight of its primary mission of “calling people’s attention to the sovereign grace of God.” At the same time other leaders were predicting a great revival in the next 10 years. Edward Carothers, then associate general secretary for the United Methodist Board of Missions said, “It is my guess that the next 5 to 10 years will purge the churches of their essentially non-Christian members.”

These predictions were made when drug abuse was just getting started among young people, obscenity and vulgarity were new to television, pornography was kept behind the counter and video porn was not available.

There are more people attending church now, but the “great revival” certainly has failed to slow down the plunge into the moral cesspool of our modern hedonistic society. That society has come to expect nudity in its films, obscene language in its “literature”, filthy lyrics in its pop songs, and everyone involved in “sex” without benefit of wedlock.

With so many talking “religion” and with “Jesus Loves You” plastered everywhere, why haven’t we cleaned up our act? Churches are bigger and richer and enroll millions of young people in their activities. Polls have indicated that 94% of the nation’s citizens believe in God. How is it that the moral deterioration can continue as the church rolls increase?

To get to the basic answer we must go back to the basic purpose God had — and still has — for the wondrous creature called man. “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness” (Gen. 1:26). All other purposes and efforts stand as obstacles to our being what we ought to be — to being normal — for if we are created to be in God’s image, then any deviation from that image leaves us short of the goal. All “fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23).

We are well aware that the doctrine of evolution negates the normal, the image of God, and encourages those who think of their ancestors as animals to act like animals. But this is only part of the story. Moral weakness is not limited to atheistic evolutionists but permeates the whole fabric of our society, including much of that segment involved in the churches.

At the very outset of His ministry, Jesus said, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” It is this heart purity that brings one back to the purpose of God and holds him there; therefore, it is the foundation of Christian discipleship. One might assume, at first, that purity of heart can be attained only after years of training and experience in growth, but, on the contrary, it stands at the beginning of discipleship to enable one to grow into the likeness of Christ. Heart purity is not the condition of never being tempted by an evil thought but the state of a heart fixed on only one thing, as opposed to having it diluted by affections for many different things. Pure orange juice is juice of the orange without the addition of grapefruit or other juices or imitation flavor. A

pure heart set on doing the will of God without the addition of other goals. It does not mean that one renders a perfect performance but that it is in his heart to do so. As Kierkegaard said, "Purity of heart is to will one thing."

It is the heart of Mary, who gave such undivided attention to Jesus that her sister, Martha, scolded Jesus for not bidding her to help in the kitchen. Jesus said that Mary had chosen the better part while Martha was "cumbered with many things." How cumbered we so easily become when we set our hearts on a multitude of things rather than the one thing of glorifying God and being fashioned in His image.

Jesus promised that all necessary things will follow the one with a pure heart. "Seek you first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matt. 6:33).

This is an elusive priority. "Yes, I will put God's kingdom and righteousness first, but *first* I must attend to my financial security." "I want God to be first, but *first* I must resolve this problem." We want to put Him first, but *first* there is this family obligation, this business problem, this social duty. *But first* is the sure sign of a divided and impure heart.

Jesus taught us to pray for God's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. In heaven nothing goes against the Father's will. Angels who sinned were cast out! Jesus was raised to the Father's right hand because He passed through this world of temptation always doing the Father's will.

In contrast to this simple ambition, the modern church focuses on the world and tries to accommodate itself to it in every particular in order to 'grow' the church. It follows the world in its distortion of music, to abandon the beauty of natural harmony and rhythm to adopt the sensual and raucous noise of "Rock", adopting a few religious words to it, of course. It institutionalizes after the order of business corporations and grooms its leaders in the worldly art of public relations. For example, a local church advertised a meeting featuring the "most sought-after speaker in the brotherhood." I went to listen, expecting to be uplifted with great truths from God. All I heard were some jokes and a pep-talk on being "positive." The name of God was not mentioned nor that of Jesus, and not one verse of scripture was quoted. The speech was aimed at pleasing the world, not at bringing us to God.

The question is, do we want to fit into society or fit into God's purpose? Is the church to fit into society or to call it to repentance? What the world needs to hear is the teaching of Jesus, and what it needs to see are Christians who have their hearts set on the will of God, not on the collective will of man.

When, from the cross, Jesus cried, "It is finished," He did not mean that He had done everything that needed to be done or that He was capable of doing. All the sick were not healed; all the hungry had not been fed; all the lepers were not yet cleansed and all the blind had not been given sight. There was much more to be done. All the people had not heard the gospel. But Jesus had done what He came to do: the will of the Father. "I do always the things that are pleasing to Him," He declared (John 8:29), and His death was the main purpose of His entry into the world of human flesh, to please the Father. Speaking of His death, He said, "I am come to do thy will, O God," and "Not my will, but thine be done."

He could say "It is finished" because He had fulfilled His purpose. He knew what it was to be pure in heart. Never once, not even under the greatest pressure, was there in

His heart any mixed feelings or desire to go his won way and please Himself rather than the Father.

There is no end to the variety of activities offered believers today, and even though they may not be bad in themselves, they may so divert one's attention and divide one's heart that the eternal object is pushed aside.

God will ultimately accomplish His purpose to make His people immortal and gloriously in His image. This is our only hope and will be gained only by those who desire it above all else.

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”

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