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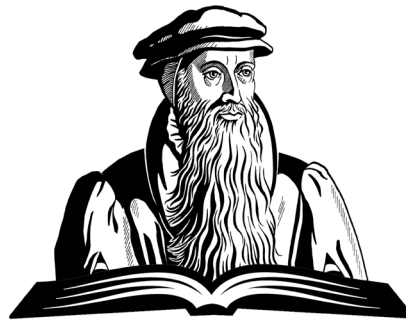
The Beatitudes

by Rev. A. T. Vergunst



Lecture 8

Blessed Are the Pure in Heart



The John Knox Institute
of Higher Education

Entrusting our Reformed Inheritance to the Church Worldwide

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The Beatitudes

10 Lectures

by Rev. A. T. Vergunst

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The Beatitudes

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Lecture #8

Blessed Are the Pure in Heart

Dear friends, welcome again. I'm really delighted to present to you the sixth Beatitude in this part of our studies of Jesus' words in Matthew 5:2–12. I pray that each reflection that we have given to this majestic opening of the Sermon on the Mount may have done at least two things to you. First of all, comfort, as you recognize the workmanship of Jesus Christ in your own heart and life, for that was the intent of this “blessed are.” However, you see many imperfections, and let not these imperfections in how you experience to live out these Beatitudes rob you of the comfort Jesus is giving in these words. God's promise is that He will finish the good work He has begun in you, He will perform it and complete it in the day of Jesus Christ (Philippians 1:6). So let that comfort you. However, it may also [be] that listening to this may have discomfited you—discomfited if you are comparing yourself to these Beatitudes, and you must conclude you are not prepared for the kingdom of God because you miss these essential characteristics in your person. This is what Jesus was teaching to Nicodemus, a Jewish leader of high standard and well liked, but He said to him, Nicodemus, “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot enter (or he cannot see or enjoy) the kingdom of God” (John 3:3). Notice Jesus didn't say you *may not* enter the kingdom, but you *cannot* enter. Think of a fish. He is at home in the water. He's not prepared to live in your beautiful flower garden laying in a comfortable lawn chair. He's out of its place. So the unregenerate person is not prepared to live in the glory of God's kingdom *unless* we are born again from above. So Jesus teaches. So if you miss this [being] born again, seek that new birth, give heed to the Word of God. Place yourself where the Spirit of God is at work through His Word.

Before we consider in detail the sixth Beatitude, let me draw your attention for a moment to something that is very private—your inner being. I am sure that even if you know yourself a little, you know there are thoughts in us. There are imaginations brewing in us, or there are sometimes feelings that we rather don't publish for every eye to see. The reason is clear—there are sometimes thoughts that are very evil, that are very impure—adulteries, or even murders, wishing someone bad, wicked thoughts, wicked imaginations or very proud—though we try to sound humble. We like to hide that, but we can't cancel that. Please do not think that if you recognize this, you're an exceptional or an isolated case—that's not it—but even that doesn't make it less ugly. What is so touching [is that] the Beatitude people don't deny this reality. They don't want to flower this up or minimize it. No, they do hate it. They do mourn it. They resist it, they want to flee it, and they desire daily to be godly like Jesus Christ. So if that is in us, where does this inner drive and this inner warfare against sin come from? Friends, that comes from the One to whom the believer is united. It comes from Jesus Christ and through His Spirit. Ephesians 2:10 says we are the workmanship of Jesus Christ, “created...unto good works,” and exactly this wanting to walk in a God-honoring life, that is the sum of the sixth Beatitude, “Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.”

So let us look at what Jesus says here and examine the blessing of being pure in heart. What is that exactly to be *pure* in heart? Secondly, what is the promise that He gives, “for they shall see God”? What is it to be pure in heart? Let’s first take a note at the grammar of this sentence that may already relieve a troubled heart reading this Beatitude. Notice what Jesus didn’t say. He didn’t say, “Blessed are the pure *of* heart.” To be pure *of* heart, which also will be meaning we are pure *in* heart, that was our condition before we fell, when God created us perfectly. Then our hearts were like a fountain of purity, out of which streamed thoughts of purity, motives of purity, love that was pure. This *pure of heart* is the condition of the unfallen angels that are surrounding God’s throne. It is already the condition of the souls of the redeemed who have moved from grace here to glory hereafter. They are pure altogether *of* heart and *in* heart. This was also the condition of our Lord Jesus Christ, the perfect, undefiled, sinless Son of man. Friends, He was pure *of* heart, perfect, and pure *in* heart—all that flowed out of Him was pure. Therefore, it is Jesus Christ alone who could answer the requirements that are listed in Psalm 24:3–5. There’s a question there, “Who shall ascend into the hill of the LORD? or who shall stand in His holy place? He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity nor sworn deceitfully. He shall receive the blessing from the LORD, and righteousness from the God of his salvation.” So this misreading of the sixth Beatitude has caused many sincere hearts to be deeply troubled. Let’s not forget that to be born again is not to have a perfected heart. That is not until we move from grace to glory. Within each regenerated person will, to the last breath on this earth, be a spiritual warfare of the flesh against the Spirit. The old indwelling nature, friends, that is the old indwelling sin, is not regenerated, is not born again, is not changed or converted. Besides this reality of the old man, there is born a new principle of life within the heart, and this new part delights in the law of God after the inner man. This is the one that hungers and mourns and is meek. This is the one that delights in holiness. This is the one that strives to be perfect in love. The Apostle Paul puts it all together perfectly in Romans 7, and he concludes (in verse 25), “So then with the mind (my renewed mind) I myself serve the law of God (in devotional love to Him and others); but with the flesh the law of sin.” There is the battle. So we will therefore not be pure *of* heart till we are completely freed from the old heart. The Apostle Paul again in Philippians 3:10 confesses this spiritual desire as well as battle when he says, “And that I may know Him (Jesus), and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death,” that all that old man is dead and gone. So, please, let it be clear to us all, here spoke a man, the Apostle Paul, who was pure in heart, and yet he admitted that still he wasn’t pure of heart.

So what does it mean to be pure in heart? The word *pure* is best defined first by comparing it with three Scriptures, which use this similar word, the pure. In 1 Timothy 1:15, Paul writes to his young spiritual son, “Now the end of the commandment is charity (love) out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned.” Now pure in that sense means sincere, upright. Again in 2 Timothy 1:3, Paul wrote about serving God “with pure conscience,” an upright conscience. Paul even had that conscience before he was converted, when he was genuine (though he was wrong), living by his conscience. It was erring but still genuine, pure, sincere. In James 1:27, James also used the word *pure*: “Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and the widows.” Now again, friends, that can’t mean sinless religion. That is not there. It means an upright and sincere and devoted religion. So let’s look at seven brief comments about the pure in heart to expound this more clearly. First, the pure in heart are those whose heart—that is, your inner person, your mind, your will, your affections—are sincere in their desire or their aim to live to God’s glory. Wherever you find these pure in heart, in no matter what culture or age of the world, they all breathe in essence the prayer of Psalm 86:11. What’s that say? “Teach me Thy way, O LORD; and I will walk in Thy truth: unite my heart (with one focus) to fear (esteem, to love) Thy name.”

Now secondly, the pure and heart will never deny that their sinful flesh is still present. They

don't deny a lack of good and holy thoughts. They don't deny the presence of covetousness or discontent. As Arthur Pink comments, "The heaviest burden of the pure in heart is the discovery that there is still an ocean of unclean waters indwelling in him." That's how the pure in heart thinks and speaks.

Now thirdly, the pure in heart take this matter to the Lord. They're honest in their confessions and petitions. Listen to David, how honest is he. He says, Lord, "incline my heart unto Thy testimonies (unto Thy Word) and not to covetousness" (Psalm 119:36). Please, Lord, turn my eyes away from the vanities [as] he is still thrilled with some of those things. He says, "My soul cleaveth unto the dust (it clings to the earthly): quicken Thou me (make me alive) according to Thy Word" (Psalm 119:25).

Fourthly, the pure in heart pursue holiness or Christ likeness in all their life, and this pursuit is most of all personal, because the pure in heart see within their own heart so much that is still wrong, so much impurity in their motives, in their words or actions. Maybe you say, well, how then, what are the impurities they observe? Well, let's just look at this for a moment—all the impurity, of the shallowness, the fickleness, the partiality of our devotion in our love to God and love to our neighbor, in contrast to the steadfast and the pure and the genuine love we see in Jesus.

Now fifthly, the pure in heart also do all to walk separately from all that is impure and unholy. As they see the dishonor done to God their Father and to the Lord their Savior, they shrink from any unnecessary association with the impure of the world. They daily [strive], and yet often fail, to have a conscience void of offense, yet they strive for it all day. Richard Sibbes makes this comment, he says, "If the company doesn't stir us, it will taint us, unless we are put upon them in our daily callings," [which is] unavoidable, of course; but he says we should make a special choice in our company and walk in continual watchfulness. See, that's the intent of the pure in heart.

Now sixthly, the pure in heart will not only fight against every sin in their own life and heart. No, they go beyond that, they will also do all to purify others—their family members, their friends, their co-workers, they'll do all to promote an environment of love and purity in where they work or where they live, in their neighborhoods, in the nations in which they live. So in that effort, they'll do all to promote holiness in others, and in that effort to promote, they reveal the sincerity of their heart. Indeed a hypocrite may be exercised to a certain extent with his or her own sin, because they know how that eventually may affect them; but they will not really be exercised with the sins they see in others, for there's no real love for God and the souls of others in their heart.

Then lastly, the pure in heart are such who increasingly sense the need and to make use of the great High Priest, Jesus Christ. The purest in heart are those whose hearts reach forth, like the Apostle Paul, to Jesus Christ. In Philippians 3:9, you can read the intensity of the pure in heart in Paul's need for Jesus. This is how he puts it: he says, "And be found in Him, not having mine own righteousness (my own purity, my own law work), which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith." Then he concludes this portion in Philippians 3, with the admission and confession, and here we have a wholly pure-in-heart man speaking—he says, I "look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall change [my] vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body" (vs. 20–21). Paul himself could never reach the goal of perfection, of perfect purity. Therefore, he looked daily to Jesus Christ who is able even to subdue all the corruptions by completely transforming His believing people.

So far then, looking at the pure in heart, please take heed that Jesus proclaims us already blessed when we are pure *in* heart even though we are not pure *of* heart, and that's because this purity in heart, expressed in these longings and these wrestlings, is a fruit of being united to Jesus Christ and having the Spirit dwell within you. How will that be evident? Well, it's like when new owners move into a house. The house will be cleaned and emptied of all the old furniture and junk that was left. Finally, the new house will be fixed up and will be restored, and new furniture will come to sit in the house. Now that's the picture of God's work. When God's Spirit makes

His residence in our heart, He begins to clean house, and He begins to restock the house with the graces and the virtues of godliness as we see in Jesus Christ. So let us then conclude with asking what is the promise Jesus declares to such pure in heart? The promise is, they shall see God. *See God*. That promise is not only true for the life hereafter, that's also for the life here on earth. Let's first consider this seeing of God, what it is, as promised and as experienced here on earth already? This seeing God is not something literal, it's not something physical. God is a Spirit, and the Lord Jesus Christ is no more on earth. So seeing God has the sense of experiencing Him spiritually through the Word in our hearts. For example, we find delight in grasping something of the great glory of God as He is revealed in Jesus Christ; and seeing Him and sensing this glory is enjoying Him. David writes in Psalm 63:1-2, "O God, Thou art my God; early will I seek Thee: my soul thirsteth for Thee... to *see* Thy power and Thy glory, so as I have *seen* Thee in the sanctuary," or in the temple. Now again, David is not referring to a physical seeing of God, he is referring to a spiritual experiencing of the message of love, the message of the pardon of sin, the message of the acceptance with God the Father, the sense of peace and joy in believing the Word of God. Believe me, such are the sweetest moments in the life of a believer when we may so see God and taste His grace. Yet don't fail to notice that this seeing of God and this experience of the communion of God is always in the context of holy living. The pure in heart, *they* shall see God. There is connection between that joy of communion and the living in purity. Psalm 97:11 reads, "Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright (or pure) in heart."

In our relationship with God, friends, we will experience the exact same as in an earthly relationship with your spouse, your children, your parents and your friends, even if you don't physically see them. When we act in sin, when we offend or hurt them with our words or actions, it will instantly bring a chill and a distance in our *communion* of our union, and we do not see and feel and enjoy the love and the closeness and the intimacy. Now so it is in our relationship between God and His people. Sin grieves the Spirit, and when the Spirit is grieved, He withholds Himself. He will not be comforting. We will not be seeing God and enjoying God. He will not reassure us through His ministry of the joy and the peace we have in God.

Now besides seeing God in communion through faith as we live here, the pure in heart will also see God with their own eyes in heavenly glory, in the future new earth, that of course, will still be in the person of Jesus Christ because God remains invisible. Listen how God spoke about that through the Apostle John, in 1 John 3:2, "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it does not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is." We shall *see* Him, Jesus as He is, and it will instantly transform us entirely. So in this afterlife, God will be seen in and through the full glory of Jesus Christ His Son, for it is still true that God remains invisible and is only visible to us humans in the visible person of Jesus Christ. Matthew Henry concluded on this—he says, "It is the perfection of the soul's happiness to see God, to see Him forever, and to never lose sight of Him. This is Heaven's happiness." So may God bless these thoughts to comfort and to convict, as He knows what we need most. Thank you very much.