

## “gods in the closet”

Dr. Jay Zinn • River's Edge Church • 9/27/09

### Ezekiel 8: 10:18; 11:16-21

If I were to open a sealed bottle of purified water and squeeze an eye drop of sewage water into it, I would contaminate it, making it undrinkable.

When we hear words like “pure” or “purity” it tends to solicit thoughts of pure water, or sexual abstinence, chastity, white garments, or a pious, strict adherence to a set of religious disciplines. All of which are true, but something void of requiring any help from God. Mere volition is adequate enough to accomplish the appearance of religious purity. The Pharisees were masters at it.

But when God looks at purity, the “appearance” of it carries no weight with him. To God, purity is the “**absence**” of impurity, filthiness, defilement or imperfection. The Pharisees could wash the outside of the cup as often as they wanted, but inside it was still full of corruption. They could whitewash the outside of the tombs during the feasts to keep people from running into them; but inside they were still full of dead men’s bones. These are the images Jesus used to describe the Pharisees’ attempt at purity and pure devotion. Jesus made it abundantly clear that it isn’t how clean one is on the outside that makes one pure. Just the opposite is true. It is what is in our hearts that defiles and makes us impure (Mt. 15:10-11, 18-19).

When Adam and Eve were created, God made them in his image and said, “It is very good.” Like their Maker, they were pure, clean, perfect, and undefiled. That is...until they became permanently stained by their sin of disobedience. They went from being holy to unholy, immortal to mortal. From being clothed with garments of light to the inferior garments of animal skins.

When God’s holiness comes in contact with the unholy, the imperfect cannot survive...it will die. We will die. Thus, God must act to establish a way for us to approach him through substitution. A life for your life. In the Old Testament God designed a sacrificial system of animals to accomplish this. Animals that were without blemish and perfect, given to shed their blood in the place of our blood. But there was a problem; the blood of animals couldn’t cleanse and make pure the heart of God’s people. It could only atone for their sins once a year, but not permanently.

God used symbols and language to describe purity throughout the Old Testament that would point to the pure sacrifice of Christ who could do much more than make atonement for sins, *he could change hearts*. Such symbols as pure water for sprinkling, unleavened bread for the feasts, pure gold for the ark, white garments for the High priests, and spotless animals for sacrifice...all to point to the holy, undefiled, perfect Son of God, the last and ultimate sacrifice.

Scriptures imply that you cannot create purity from impurity (Job 14:4). Once pure water has been injected with a drop of filth, it is defiled. It cannot re-purify itself. Just as a person who becomes so indebted he makes himself an indentured slave (as in a slave to sin), because he cannot redeem himself. It requires a freeman to deliver a bondman. A corrupt heart can never be a pure heart; it can never change itself or its condition. It can clean up the outside of the person, make it look holy with holy clothes and holy deeds, but it is still unholy and unclean.

Jesus didn’t lay down his life to clean up our outer-man. He came to regenerate our inner-man. He didn’t come to clean up our hearts. He came to give us a “new” heart...his *pure* heart in exchange for our impure heart. He didn’t come to clean up our old creation; he came to make us a *new* creation. He took our tainted bottle of impurity and gave us a new bottle of purity. And what he wants us to do with this new bottle of purity is to *keep it pure*. Jesus said, “Blessed are the *pure* in heart for they shall see God (Mt. 5:8).” Paul wanted to present the church as a *pure* virgin to Christ 2 Cor. 11:2). And Jesus wants to present to himself a spotless, *pure*, and radiant bride (Eph. 5:27).

We are called to be a holy, pure, and godly people, unpolluted and tainted by the world. This is what sets us apart from all other religions. Ours is a religion that is grounded in a sincere, pure devotion of the heart and not of the flesh. Such purity is impacting; it is beautiful, and appealing. There is a fragrance about it that attracts the darkened soul and spirit void of the light of God.

The purity of God in us is a beauty unparalleled in the world. It is what Jesus referred to as the salt and light of God's kingdom. It calls out to us through His Word by His Spirit. And the more I am engaged with God in an intimate level, the more of his glory and purity in me is able to penetrate my exterior shell.

After the second forty days of Moses' encounter with God on the mountain, he returned with a radiant face which he later covered with a veil. People were fascinated by this glory on Moses. When Jesus went up on the Mount of Transfiguration his garments were made bright by God's glory. The disciples were fascinated by this and wanted to just stay there. This is what will fascinate the people around us if they see God's purity in us, radiating from within out to our faces.

The radiance of God shines from pure and undefiled hearts. Hearts kept pure for a bridegroom who will return for such a bride. A pure heart is the result of pure devotion and loyalty which has sought for no alliance with idols, no other lovers, and no other king except Jesus. Loyalty, devotion, chastity, consecration, holiness, and undivided hearts are all words that are synonymous with purity. It is the pure bottle of water that remains guarded and sealed from invading impurities, kept only for the lips of the bridegroom when he returns.

Jesus said, "The pure in heart will **see** God." This is confirmed by the Psalmist when he said,

"Who may ascend the hill of the Lord? Who may stand in [God's] holy place? [It's the person] who has clean hands (outward) and a *pure* heart (inward), who does not lift up his soul to an idol or swear by what is false." *Psalm 24:3-4*

Throughout the Bible there is this theme about God's jealousy for his people and the never-ending struggle for their hearts to remain consecrated, holy, and loyal to him. A struggle for them to not take a pure relation with him and mix it with other lovers, other gods, and other idols that will keep them from beholding his beauty and majesty. God's chosen ones were constantly going after the *inferior*, the created, rather than the *superior*, the Creator. They obsessed over the sex, wealth, and idolatry of other nations.

To get their hands off the inferior and impure, God would send messengers to bring them back; and when they refused to listen to his prophets, he would send the oppressors of the gods they flirted with. They became subjects to these other lovers until they cried out to God for a deliverer.

Purity is complete, undivided, consecrated, holy, sincere devotion to the one and only God. There is no other and no need for another lover. There is none who can compare. Everything else created by God and man is inferior to the beauty of the Lord.

So let's examine ourselves. *Are there any gods in the closet? Have we tainted our bottle of pure water with defilement? Do we love anything or anyone more than we love God? Have we or do we use our bodies as a temple for prostitution with someone we are not married to? God says only the marriage bed is undefiled (Heb. 12:4) and he will judge anything outside of that (Heb. 12:4).*

Paul addressed this strongly in his letter to the Corinthians when he said,

"The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body...Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never!" (See 1 Cor. 6:12-19)

Sexual immorality is one idol that Jesus dealt with in a couple of churches in Revelation. But here's another god in the closet, a defiling impurity we are guiltier of bowing down to than any other, and we don't even realize it. It's called using our tongue to backbite and gossip about our neighbors or brothers and sisters in Christ? Does such cursing of others come out of our mouths rather than blessing? And can we be *purely* devoted to the saints with hearts contaminated with resentment, unforgiveness, and bitterness toward others in the body of Christ?

If we truly love Jesus who is the Head of the Church, how can we hate the rest of him, which is his body, the church? We cannot have a pure and devoted heart to Jesus while we hate a member of his very own body. That's like a wife who says to her husband, "I love your head, but I can't stand the rest of you."

If we allow unforgiveness of any kind to take root in our hearts against someone, we will corrupt and defile our bottle of water. We will begin to align ourselves with the "accuser of the brethren" and become an instrument of the devil to spread hate and dissension among the other members of the body. We will align ourselves in agreement with demons. We will make ourselves the devil's mouthpiece speaking curses rather than blessing. Out of an embittered heart the mouth will eventually speak and defile ourselves and others. It will spread gossip and bring a disease into Christ's body, like a hateful wife who serves up dinner with a virus to her husband to make his body sick. So unforgiveness is an idol that needs to be kicked out of the closet.

Just how pure is our heart? How devoted are we to our King? Does it show in our daily lives? Does it show in our check books? Does it show in how we spend our time, with whom we spend our time, and where we spend our time? Does it show on Sunday mornings? Does it show when we are given an opportunity to do a kindness to someone in need? Does it show when the opportunity to shut down gossip about other church members comes around? Does it show up when illicit sex, pornography, drugs, or excessive drinking knocks on our door?

If we want to see God, we must keep our bottles sealed from such impurities. If we want to see his favor in our church and experience his presence, then we must be as devoted to each other as we should be to him. We must forgive one another, honor one another, defer to one another, and love one another. We must love his Word that the Psalmist says will keep our ways pure (Psalm 119:9). We must spend time with him in prayers and fasting so that we may subdue the lusts of the flesh and release the fruit of the Spirit.

Some phrases implied in the Greek to define *purity* are,

- An unstained condition of a spiritual nature
- To be free of baser ingredients (as pertaining to gold purified by fire)
- Tested by the sunlight
- Undivided loyalty

If God were to shine the light on the hidden things of our closets, what kind of idols would he find there? What gods are in there that we have refused to clean out? As long as we cling to them, our heart will be divided and we won't be able to see God in the fullness of his glory.

When the Spirit of God snatched up Ezekiel in Babylon and carried him back to the temple in Jerusalem, he showed him an idol erected at the north gate; inside the court behind a hidden door were seventy elders with censers worshipping creatures painted on the walls; each at the shrine of their own idols. At the entrance of the north gate to the temple, women were mourning for the god Tammuz; in the inner court at the entrance to the temple, twenty-five men, with their backs to the temple, faced the east to worship the sun.

Ezekiel saw a lot of religious activity in God's temple at Jerusalem, but not for God. Their hearts were filled with gods in the closets; polluted, tainted, corrupted hearts that could not see God because they mixed him in with the company of other lovers.

They were oblivious to how much they were breaking God's heart. They couldn't even discern the fact that God was watching and that they were driving his presence out of the temple for good.

Today we can fill our churches with religious activity; have church services filled with people in the name of God. But how discerning are we about breaking his heart? How discerning are we of how much he really knows about the gods in our closets? And do we know if we're drawing his presence toward us or driving it from us?

These images evoked in Ezekiel challenge me. I often wonder how much I fill my thoughts, my heart with the distraction of other gods and idols that may seem trivial and harmless, but I contaminate how I see God and experience him. Derek Prince, a great teacher, once said that the reason he didn't take time to watch television or movies is because he didn't want to clutter his mind with images that distracted him from planting seeds and thoughts about God. As much as I enjoy a good movie, book, or television show, that statement has stayed with me for years and keeps me in check when I find myself slipping into overkill on shows.

Paul said, "Everything is permissible for me—but not everything is beneficial. Everything is permissible for me—but I will not be mastered by anything."

There are many activities such as sports, entertainment, and recreation that are not inherently sinful. But when it begins to master and dominate your time more than God does, then it is dangerously teetering over the threshold of becoming an idol that injects impurity and a divided loyalty. "Not so," you may say, but ask yourself, how beneficial is this permissible thing in my life? And, if the Lord "tested it with sunlight" and said, remove it from your life because it's taking up too much space in the closet with him, would you do it? Would your obedience be instant?

For years I have been a political junky of the conservative nature and loved to watch and listen to shows to keep up with the politics of the day. It was my source of entertainment and permissible. I felt like it was my patriotic duty to "stay informed." But recently the Lord has asked me to lay it aside because it was cluttering up my mind, battling for ground where he wanted to plant more seeds of time with him. So I had to decide to obey. Something permissible was becoming an idol to me. How could I tell? It was hard to let go of it. When I'd get in the car, my hand would automatically go to the dial to turn on conservative talk radio; or when I finished the day, to turn on the political news channel. It was tough. It was hard at first, but now I'm enjoying replacing that time more with God and thinking less about what he's working out in his own sovereign time.

When God asks you to give up something as benign as political news, or computer games, or TV games, or whatever "permissible" thing is starting to take shape and form in your closet...just because he wants more time with you; what would your reaction be? What kind of "junky" are you in a permissible area that might be bordering on encroaching on God's real estate in your heart?

For me, purity isn't about the outside, it is about the inside. It is about devotion and loyalty; about an undivided heart. It's about seeing the fullness of God's glory without the cluttered closet of other gods fighting for my attention and blinding my vision.

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

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