

Purity

Philippians 1:10

That you may live pure blameless lives

Sermon

Hobart, September 27th, 2015

Launceston, October 4th, 2015

Matthew 23:23-28

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²⁸ Outwardly you look like righteous people, but inwardly your hearts are filled with hypocrisy and lawlessness.¹

Philippians 1:10

10 For I want you to understand what really matters, so that you may live pure and blameless lives until the day of Christ’s return.

INTRODUCTION:

I. STAINS AND RUIN

A. ONE OF THE GREATEST DISAPPOINTMENTS IN LIFE IS TO SEE SOMETHING BEAUTIFUL POLLUTED OR RUINED

* Greek *tithe the mint, the dill, and the cumin*.

* See Lev 11:4, 23, where gnats and camels are both forbidden as food.

* Some manuscripts do not include *and the dish*.

¹Tyndale House Publishers. (2004). *Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. "Text edition"--Spine. (2nd ed.) (Mt 23:23-28). Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.

1. Perhaps it is a piece of pure white linen, or a dress that has a bad stain, or a tear
2. Perhaps it is a brand new car that has been run into or vandalised
3. Perhaps it is a vegetable garden that we have tended all season that is invaded by possums or shredded by a hail storm
4. Or an animal that is injured or poisoned, or abused or malnourished
5. A pristine lake or river that has been polluted by garbage or industrial waste

B. HOW MUCH MORE SO WHEN THE BEAUTY AND VITALITY, THE STRENGTH, HEALTH AND WHOLENESS OF A HUMAN BEING IS EATEN AWAY

1. We grieve when we see someone we love and admire bent and breaking under the destructive power of cancer or other insidious diseases or conditions

C. PERHAPS IT IS A YOUNG LIFE THAT HAS BEEN TWISTED AND CORRUPTED BY DRUGS, ALCOHOL OR OTHER DAMAGING LIFE CHOICES IN THE BEGINNING GOD CREATED EVERYTHING PURE AND GOOD, WHOLE AND TRUE

1. But we have chosen to live our lives independent of God and without reference or respect for him as our Creator, the one who made all things and who has a clear intent for us and his creation

D. THE BEAUTY AND PURITY OF LIFE, AND THE WORLD AROUND US BECAME CORRUPTED, POLLUTED, AND BESMIRCHED

1. The relationship between man and God was rent, torn, neglected and left behind as something with no value, but seen more as a constrictive burden

E. TODAY WE ARE TALKING ABOUT “PURITY”

1. A matter that was at the centre of the religion of ancient Israel
2. A matter that is much misunderstood and misapplied in many religions, including among Christians down through the ages

F. SO WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO LIVE A “PURE” LIFE AS A CHRISTIAN?

1. What really matters to God?
2. What makes us pure or impure in his sight?

G. PRAYER

BODY:

II. OLD TESTAMENT PURITY LAWS

A. ONE OF THE CENTRAL FEATURES OF THE OLD COVENANT LAW WAS THE PURITY LAWS

1. Foods, people, sexual issues, diseases and places were categorised as clean or unclean, pure or contaminating, good or abominable

B. SOME OF THE LAWS WERE PRACTICAL MATTERS OF HEALTH AND HYGIENE

1. But many were there simply to keep Israel from straying from God and following after the lifestyle of their neighbours who did not know or trust in God

a) If you were classified impure, you were excluded from worship of God, and from the community

2. For instance pigs were unclean as they were associated with pagan deities and worship, in particular with Adonis, Tammuz and Attis.^{2 3 4}

a) Clean animals were those that were closest to the Israelites, the ones they had domesticated, or that were native to the places they lived.

3. Discussing the clean animals, Richard Hess points out that

These animals had the longest history of domestic association with the early Israelites, going back to their earliest known period, which they remembered as a time when their ancestors were pastoral nomads.

² James Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, Abridged ed, 1922, 2002, p. 471

³ H.G. Link, J. Schattenmann, *Pure, The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology, Vol 3.*, Zondervan, 1978, p. 104.

⁴ “...during a full moon once a year, pigs were sacrificed, not to lesser deities, but to Osiris himself — the mighty green-faced Lord of the Underworld — and to mysterious Thoth, the moon-god magician who helped resurrect Osiris’ mummy in the moonlit swamps of Egypt.” —[mythinglinks](#)

This tradition was carried on in Egypt even in later dynasties, when the pig began to be considered “unclean”.

Boars played vital roles in the mythologies of Adonis, Attis, and Tammuz as well. A boar ripped open a tree so that Adonis could be born, but it was also a boar that eventually killed him. The gods of these stories are vegetation gods, and they are represented by the boar or pig. Pigs were associated with the earth- they were close to it, rolled around in mud, and were set out into newly sown fields to tramp down the seeds. They rooted for their food in the earth as well. Pigs were also associated with death, not only because of their connection to the earth, but also because they would eat carrion. So in many places around the world, they became associated with deities of vegetation, death, and the underworld. <https://tresabelle.wordpress.com/2009/10/04/the-sacred-pig/>

...the animals sacrificed were those closest to Israel, most like them, and most valued by them. This may imply a substitutionary role for those sacrifices.⁵

4. Even foreign territory was unclean

5. They weren't to marry a foreigner and certainly not to make idols or worship foreign Gods as the first of the commandments make clear.

a) P.J. Budd explains what the concept of purity, clean and unclean was meant to achieve;

The concept of *purity* is specifically concerned with arrangement within social time and space, and about the boundaries separating inside and outside. The unclean is that which blurs the boundaries or which does not fit in the defined space in which it is found.⁶

6. The purity laws in their entirety were designed to separate the Israelites from the rest of the world, to remind them that they were not ordinary, unclean people.

a) To show what was appropriate and not appropriate for God's people in his land

C. THEY WERE THE CALLED OUT, HOLY PEOPLE OF GOD

1. And as such they were to stay close to him, to be in intimate, uncontaminated, pure relationship with him

a) And to not stray out of that relationship, not to be unfaithful to the covenant God made with them

2. There is a beautiful, often used Hebrew word that describes this covenant relationship, called *Hesed*, or *Chesed*

a) It means loyal love, covenant love, and is often translated “loving kindness”, faithfulness or mercy.

b) This lay at the heart of the relationship between God and his people, and should have been reciprocated

D. LATER THE RELIGIOUS AUTHORITIES TOOK THE LAWS OF IMPURITY TO EXTREMES

⁵ Richard S. Hess, *Israelite Religions: An Archaeological and Biblical Survey*, Baker Academic, 2007, p.188, 189

⁶ Ronald E. Clements, *The World of Ancient Israel: Sociological, Anthropological and Political*, Cambridge University Press, 1989, p.286

1. Replacing true faithfulness, holiness, covenant loyalty and loving kindness with purity by law and exclusion

2. According to Link and Schattenmann,

A Pharisee was defiled even by sitting on the clothes of one of the people of the land, who could not read the Torah.⁷

3. The purity laws became issues of law—legalistic, self-righteous and egotistical

a) They were no longer about an intimate, humble, trusting, thankful, loyal, faithful, and worshipful relationship with their creator and one true Lord and King

b) They were finding their identity in the laws themselves, and condemning and excluding those who didn't follow their legalistic interpretations and rulings

c) And they were militantly intimidating and misleading others into the same approach

Matthew 23:23-28

²³ “What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you are careful to tithe even the tiniest income from your herb gardens,* but you ignore the more important aspects of the law—justice, mercy, and faith. You should tithe, yes, but do not neglect the more important things. ²⁴ Blind guides! You strain your water so you won't accidentally swallow a gnat, but you swallow a camel!”

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⁷ H.G. Link, J. Schattenmann, p. 105

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4. Jesus called them whitened sepulchres, because they looked “pure” and “clean” on the outside, but inside, in their hearts, they were impure, unclean, putrid, festering and dead.

a) Though they were focused on legislating right morals and behaviours, they were “lawless” in the sense that God wasn’t in the picture.

b) They lived without true faith, respect and relationship with him, and clearly without true justice or mercy, or *hesed*

III. PURITY IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

A. WORD DEFINITIONS:

1. The two most common Greek words are *hagnos*, which is associated with purity, sincerity and holiness, and *katharos*

2. The experts tell us that in the New Testament *katharos* and *hagnos*;

are found in a specifically limited and usually metaphorical sense.⁹

a) In other words, under the New Covenant, purity is now a spiritual issue, not merely a physical, outwardly religious, ritualistic matter.

B. KATHAROS

1. in common use means religious, physical or moral cleanliness.¹⁰

a) It is the word we read in Matthew 23:25 & 26.

2. to be clean, cleansed, literally or metaphorically¹¹

a) As a figure of speech it can mean to be like a vine pruned so it can bear fruit, or being purified by fire

b) It means to be unstained and free of guilt

c) Free from corrupt desire, and sin

⁹ H.G. Link, J. Schattenmann, p. 100

¹⁰ H.G. Link, J. Schattenmann, p. 100

¹¹ H.G. Link, J. Schattenmann, p.102

- d) To be sincere, pure, free from pollution or adulteration, from any additive that is false¹²

C. HAGNOS

1. In the NT *hagnos* refers to purity and integrity, or the measures taken to make one worthy and holy in God’s sight.
 - a) Being morally pure, sincere in Christian life and service, blameless, innocent.¹³
 - b) It originally meant to stand in awe of someone, or someone who inspired religious awe, or the attribute of a deity, or things having some relationship with a deity
 - c) It then came to mean religious purity
2. The religious authorities that Jesus confronted focused on the legalistic, moralistic, outward rules and regulations of religious purity and cleanness.
 - a) Their approach separated people, and had them focused on *outward conformity* rather than *inward purity and integrity*, or awe and faith in relationship with God

D. WHAT WAS THE PURE AND CLEAN LIFE THAT JESUS BROUGHT BY WAY OF CONTRAST?

1. Jesus made that quite plain in rebuking the religious leaders of the time

Matthew 23:23

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E. THESE ARE THE INNER ATTITUDES, THE MIND AND HEART THAT TRULY SETS APART THOSE WHO ARE GOD’S PEOPLE

1. These reflect God’s will for his people

¹² See Strongs Concordance, Greek 2511,

¹³ H.G. Link, J. Schattenmann, p.101

* Greek *tithe the mint, the dill, and the cumin.*

2. *Justice, mercy and faith* characterise those who are part of the Kingdom of God

a) Because that is the *mind, the heart and the life of God*

b) They all have to do with *Godly relationships*

3. *Justice* has to do with rescuing those who have been mistreated, unloved, marginalised, excluded—setting things right, bringing an end to relationship damaging behaviour

4. *Mercy* has to do with truly understanding the needs of others and acting accordingly to help them

5. *Faith*, and faithfulness has to do with loyalty, reliability, integrity and sincerity in relationships

a) Trusting and being trustworthy

F. THIS IS WHAT THE PURITY LAWS POINTED TO

1. Justice, mercy and faith

2. True covenant trust and reliance on God to love and lead us in relationship with him

3. In the way of faithfulness to God and to our neighbour

4. It is the life the prophet Micah called Israel back to

Micah 6:6-8

⁶ What can we bring to the LORD?

What kind of offerings should we give him?

Should we bow before God with offerings of yearling calves?

⁷ Should we offer him thousands of rams

and ten thousand rivers of olive oil?

Should we sacrifice our firstborn children to pay for our sins?

⁸ No, O people, the LORD has told you what is good,

and this is what he requires of you:

to do what is right, to love mercy,

and to walk humbly with your God.

G. JAMES REINFORCES THIS

James 3:17

But the wisdom from above is first of all pure. It is also peace loving, gentle at all times, and willing to yield to others. It is full of mercy and good deeds. It shows no favoritism and is always sincere.

a) Earlier he wrote;

James 1:27

Pure and genuine religion in the sight of God the Father means caring for orphans and widows in their distress and refusing to let the world corrupt you.

H. IT ALL COMES BACK TO “WHO GOD IS!”

1. He who is just, merciful and faithful
2. He created us to be *like him*, to share life with him, to be his people, and him to be our God

I. SO WHAT MARKS OUT GOD’S PEOPLE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT AS PURE AND CLEAN, AND DIFFERENT TO THE FALLEN WORLD AROUND US?

1. The life and righteousness of Jesus that he shares with us
2. He has made us pure and clean through his blood shed on the cross
 - a) He has included us in his body, his family, the life of God
3. He has called us to grow in the ongoing new life of justice, mercy and faith that we have in him through the Spirit

1 Corinthians 1:30

God has united you with Christ Jesus. For our benefit God made him to be wisdom itself. Christ made us right with God; he made us pure and holy, and he freed us from sin.

4. It is only through being *united with Jesus* that we are made *right with God*, made *pure and holy*, cleansed from sin and guilt

5. He shares with us the holy nature of God
6. He shares his heart and mind, that is loving, pure and holy—that is faithful, just and merciful
7. As the people of God, the new Israel, fully cleansed and purified in Christ, we are to be Christ’s lights to the world
 - a) Ambassadors, witnesses, examples, invitations, the living words of the gospel

J. THE HOLY SPIRIT LEADS US, EMPOWERS AND TRANSFORMS US

1. Cleaning and purifying our innermost thoughts and attitudes
 - a) The New Testament continually encourages us to live the new life we have been given, and not to return to the unclean, impure lives our human nature leans towards
2. Paul continually called wayward members to put on Christ, and put off the old man.
 - a) To walk worthy of our calling to live in Christ, to be his ambassadors, sharing the new life of the Kingdom
3. Later in 2 Corinthians he wrote;

II Corinthians 11:2-3

2 For I am jealous for you with the jealousy of God himself. I promised you as a pure bride to one husband—Christ.

4. This is our word *hagnos*, holy, chaste, pure, which we see again in v 3.

3 But I fear that somehow your pure and undivided devotion to Christ will be corrupted, just as Eve was deceived by the cunning ways of the serpent.

K. NOW THAT WE HAVE BEEN FREED FROM UNCLEAN LIVES

1. We are called to be careful stay close to God through our undivided devotion and relationship with Jesus so we don’t wander off again

L. THIS IS THE KEY TO PURITY AND HOLINESS

1. Staying close to our Saviour and being led by his wisdom
 - a) Allowing him to live in us, and through us
2. Learning more and more about God and his way of love, justice, mercy and faith
3. Walking according the Spirit rather than the flesh and the ego
 - a) Because we are his cleansed and holy people
 - b) And our destiny is to be the pure, cleansed bride of Christ at his return

M. V 3: “UNDIVIDED DEVOTION” IS ABOUT FAITHFULNESS

1. Gk word is *haplotes*, “sincere devotion”
 - a) It means, “simple goodness, which gives itself without reserve”
 - b) Sincere devotion, simplicity: ἀπλότης ¹⁴
 - c) As Paul encouraged the Philippians

Philippians 1:10

10 For I want you to understand what really matters, so that you may live pure and blameless lives until the day of Christ’s return.
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N. SO IN THE NEW COVENANT WE HAVE SOMETHING MUCH MORE THAN A MORAL OR ETHICAL CODE,

1. We are adopted as his fully legitimate, set apart, pure and holy children, not by purity laws and right behaviour, but by God’s will, and grace
2. We have God himself living in us, and ascribing the faithfulness and sincere and pure devotion and holiness of his Son to us, freely and without limit or condition
3. As purified, holy people we are called to live who we are
 - a) To think, and live the life we have in Christ

¹⁴ A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature: ἀπλότης

4. Of course, we aren't pure and unadulterated in all of our thoughts, words and deeds by any means
 - a) There will be aspects of the old, unclean man that remains until Jesus resurrects us and completes our purification
 - b) That is why we need the ongoing purity and holiness of Jesus, covering our uncleanness
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IV. THE HEART OF SPIRITUAL PURITY

A. SPIRITUAL PURITY IS ALL ABOUT LOVING LOYALTY, FIDELITY, AND FAITHFULNESS TO OUR CREATOR.

1. Sin is the opposite
2. Sin isn't so much about breaking purity laws, as about living without God, outside his *chesed*, his loving covenant, and doing our own thing for ourselves,
3. Sin is about pride, arrogance, getting our own way, controlling others, pleasing our senses, rather than loving God and neighbour
 - a) Like the Pharisees, it is judging, bullying and dividing people
 - b) The fruits of the flesh

B. IT IS EASIER FOR RELIGIOUS PEOPLE TO HONE IN ON OUTWARD PURITY

1. And to end up more like the Pharisees than Jesus, focusing on religious rituals, or being harsh on those who are struggling with life issues
2. Jesus came not to condemn or vilify the unclean of his society
 - a) But to rescue and revive, to free, to rescue, to forgive and give new life

C. THE NEW LIFE IN CHRIST

1. The new life in Christ is one in which we live in covenant loyalty, and loving faithfulness

2. We are called to be chaste and faithful, sincerely and totally devoted and loyal in our relationship with God
 - a) And in our relationships with each other, particularly our spouses
3. The laws against idolatry and adultery plainly reflect this chaste purity, and loyal devotion that is who God is.

D. CHASTITY AND FAITHFULNESS IN MARRIAGE IS NOT JUST ABOUT NOT COMMITTING PHYSICAL ADULTERY

1. The principle that we are talking about is much larger, more profound and important than just that
 2. Israel was unfaithful and went after other god's, other lovers
 - a) They were disloyal, they put other gods and their own desires before God
 3. The Father and Son and Spirit never betray each other, never lie or deceive or act unfaithfully to each other
 - a) And they never do so towards us either
 4. The new pure and holy life in Christ is one in which we are merciful, just, faithful and loyal to our families, friends and our Christian family
 - a) We live out the heart and love of God by being faithful, just and merciful towards everyone, as Jesus did
 5. The new covenant life in Christ is characterised by the fruits of the Spirit, not those of the flesh
 - a) It is about being peacemakers, forgiving, merciful, gentle and faithful and kind to all
 - b) Because that is at the heart of who God is; Father, Son and Spirit
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CONCLUSION:

A. IN GOD'S SIGHT, IN CHRIST AND THROUGH THE SEAL OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, WE ARE ALREADY CLEAN AND PURE

1. We are already truly God's holy people because of covenant love, God's justice, mercy and faithfulness.
2. Our marriages, our families, our congregations, our relationships with fellow members and with all people, are to reflect who we are
3. They are to reflect God and his kingdom, his holiness, his purity, his covenant faithfulness and love towards his children and Christ's love and fidelity towards his bride

B. THE KEY TO LIVING GOD'S HOLY LIFE

1. The key to living God's holy life, is, as we read in II Corinthians, that we have a pure, sincere, and complete devotion to our relationship with Jesus Christ
2. Through that relationship, Jesus graciously shares with us his life that is pure and upright
3. His faith in the Father's loving covenant faithfulness, his justice and his mercy
4. The Holy Spirit helps us grow in loyal, pure and undivided devotion to him, trusting that he that has begun a good work in us will complete it, and make us his pure, holy and spotless bride at his return

C. PRAYER
