

## The Purity of the Church

Tonight my topic is on the purity of the church. My aim is not to speak of the local church in-of-itself, but rather to broaden our scope to address the universal church. When I say “universal church,” I am speaking of God’s children past, present and future. I am referring to the assembly of all the saints who have gone before us all the way through to the brothers and sisters who have yet to come to know Christ before His return. These are the believers throughout the ages who call upon the name of the Lord for forgiveness of sins and repent from the impure ways of this world.

In the beginning, this assembly consisted of two people walking with God in the Garden of Eden. The purpose of this relationship was pure and its commitment undefiled. Sin had not yet infected the covenant between God and man. Man worshipped the Creator, the Creator was pleased with man. This reciprocal union had nothing hindering their communion one with the other. And man was to be fruitful and multiply in order for this pure assembly to grow so that God’s perfect image bearers would fill the earth and subdue it for His glory.

However, sin entered the world. Through his lying and cunning and deceit Lucifer brought the image bearers to shame. They lost the relationship they once cherished with the Father. They were naked, alone and shamed. And they hid themselves from the only One Who is PURE and HOLY, and were condemned to an eternal punishment – separation from God.

### **Isaiah 59:2**

*But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear.*

**Analogy:** Yet what really happened that day goes beyond our comprehension. Who is effected when a leader or ruler of a people makes poor decisions? Is it only the leader who will feel the consequences of his own bad choices? We may wish that were so, but we know better. The people under that ruler will also suffer the consequences in some way. Adam was to rule and subdue the earth. His sin not only affected him and his wife, but all of creation would be darkened by the curse as well.

### **Romans 8:22-23**

*For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.*

The reason this topic of the purity of the church is so important is because it determines our unity or separation from God. Much like Adam and Eve were cast out of God’s presence, so too every man born is cast out and is doomed to eternal separation. This is because sin cannot and will not be tolerated before a holy and righteous God. This goes back to the fundamentals of the Christian faith. We know this. Sin came into the world through one man and spread to all. That sin breeds death – the ultimate separation from God.

*For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God – Romans 3:23*

*For the wages of sin is death – Romans 6:23*

*Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned – Romans 5:12*

This means that man, because of his impurity, has been separated from God and is condemned to an eternal punishment. Yet, despite that impurity God has chosen for Himself a people.

### **Exodus 19:5-6**

*Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.*

### **Deuteronomy 7:6**

*For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.*

What we therefore conclude from this understanding is very simple, the “universal church” has a restored relationship with God, through some means of purification. Every single child of God, who calls on the name of the Lord, has been purified to once again enjoy a restored relationship with the Creator – a relationship which began before Genesis 1 and will last for all eternity.

#### **Ephesians 1:3-4**

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.*

**IF/THEN:** If the universal church has a restored relationship with the Creator Who does not tolerate impurity, **then** it must be at its core set apart from the impure world in which it dwells in. It is a picture of purity within impurity. God’s children have been set apart from the impure world so that they can worship a pure God and have a pure relationship with Him.

#### **1.) Understanding Purity**

Many times, I think we have the wrong perception of purity. We think of purity on our terms and in relevance to our lives. We commonly define purity by looking at the contrast (impurity) and we then make our own definitions for what is pure and what is not. As an example, we look at sexual promiscuity, thievery, cheating and murder as things which are impure. Therefore, based on those actions of impurity, we then define purity as **not** being sexually promiscuous, as **not** stealing, as **not** cheating, as **not** murdering. The problem is, our standards are not God’s.

#### **Isaiah 55:8-9**

*For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.*

Purity has to be defined by One Who is completely pure. Therefore, our standard to live as a people set apart and holy, is not based on our perception of purity but on God’s. This is why it is impossible for you and me and every other believer to make ourselves pure. The meter is off.

**Analogy:** Have you ever had this happen to you? Where you get into a family member’s car and you’re driving down the road. You want to check the gas meter to make sure you’re OK, but the car is unfamiliar and maybe you’re distracted by the car passing you that you accidentally look at the amp/voltage meter or maybe you get quick glimpse of the oil pressure meter on your dash. And the needle is about right in the middle and so you think you have half tank of gas when really you may be on empty. Or how about when you measure the temperature of the turkey roast and it is still way too low to be done, so you put it back to cook so more not remembering to check if your thermometer was set to Fahrenheit instead of Celsius.

The point is this, our meters are off. We tell ourselves what purity is, but we are so far from the truth. Purity is measured by God’s standards. The fact of the matter is that there may be someone who perfectly abstains from sexual promiscuity, stealing, cheating, murdering – along with other impure acts – and still does not meet the standard of purity in God’s eyes. So in order for us to truly understand purity, we must come face to face with the God of Creation and gaze upon His beauty. This may never happen in this life time. Meaning, you may never understand what real purity looks like while you are here on this earth, but His grace is sufficient for us to make us pure in the meantime.

#### **2.) The Purpose for Purity**

In the Old Testament time period, God commanded Israel to place all of the unclean people outside the camp. Passages like these cause a lot of discomfort because we quickly interpret this as God’s punishment on those poor people. How could a loving God force these poor unfortunate people outside the camp to endure the rain and the storms alone – unprotected from wild animals or enemies?

#### **Numbers 5:1-5**

*The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, “Command the people of Israel that they put out of the camp everyone who is leprous or has a discharge and everyone who is unclean through contact with the dead. You shall put out both male and female, putting them outside the camp, that they may not defile their camp, in the midst of which I dwell.” And the people of Israel did so, and put them outside the camp; as the Lord said to Moses, so the people of Israel did.*

I often wonder what our response would be if we were placed there in that time period. It doesn’t sound very loving of a God to cause the weak sick people to be put outside the camp where there was certain danger. What kind of god would do that? A God Who is zealously committed to purchasing, purifying and sanctifying a people for His own possession. In keeping disease and death

outside the camp, God was protecting the whole. At the sacrifice and expense of a few, the camp would be made clean. This points us to an even greater reality. At the expense of One, and only One, the church would be made clean.

God had commanded the Israelites over and over to not mix impurity with purity, but to remain righteous and committed to the Lord. This was why they were not to intermarry with the nations that already dwelt in Canaan. They were to be “set apart” as distinct from the rest of the world. Israel, God’s people, are not distinct because they are “set apart” in some way from the world. No, they were and are distinct because God’s presence goes with them. Moses understood this.

**Exodus 33:16**

*Is it not in your going with us, so that we are distinct, I and your people, from every other people on the face of the earth?*

God’s presence with His people sets them apart from the rest of the world so that He might show Himself might to the nations by working through His children. God, in all His power, could change the world in a second and make all things right, yet He chooses to work through the means of His people by purifying the world a little at a time. He draws more and more children to Himself and proclaims His glories through them.

**Ezekiel 36:22-23**

*It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came. And I will vindicate the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them. And the nations will know that I am the Lord, declares the Lord God, when through you I vindicate my holiness before their eyes.*

The purpose for our purity is so that God can work through us for His glory in both calling others to Himself as well as proclaiming to all the nations His power in restoring a people for His own possession.

**3.) Embracing Purity**

For the universal church, embracing this privilege to be pure has a two-fold nature. One aspect of our purity is not of us and yet second aspect is required of us. Our purity before the eyes of God could never be from our hands. In Numbers 19, it speaks of the laws of purification. In order for one to be purified, it was necessary for one (who was clean) to gather up the ashes of the heifer and mix the water for impurity. However, according to Romans 3, “None are righteous” (CLEAN). Therefore, this first aspect of our purity must come from One Who is perfectly clean. One Who never sinned. One was the perfect substitute and would be slaughtered as the propitiation for our Sins. If we cannot find anyone, then man is doomed forever because without being pure before God, no act of purity will amount to anything.

But this is why we preach Jesus. He is the perfect substitute. He went to those not only inside the camp, but to those outside as well and became the undeserved outcast. He was taken outside the camp and crucified so that blood of His sacrifice would cleanse all impurity once and for all for anyone who puts their faith in Christ.

As God’s people, we are set apart. Peter proclaims the Words of God from Saini and calls the church a treasured possession.

**I Peter 2:9-10**

*But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him Who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.*

So now we live for the glory of God to proclaim Him among the nations.

Titus 2:11-14

I Timothy 2:19-22