

HOLINESS OF HEART

We've been talking about the possibility of transformation and the power to live a transformed life. As we begin to look at holiness of heart, affections or feelings we need to recognize first of all that because our affections have been distorted by sin it will take a lifetime for them to heal. Sanctification is the process of that healing. The prophet Isaiah (35:8) calls holiness a highway; "And a highway will be there; it will be called the Way of Holiness." It's the highway of the Christian march. Did you notice that it's not a byway or a bunny trail, it's a highway; clearly marked, and identified. By its very nature a highway indicates movement. There's no parking on the 401 or the Trans-Canada Highway and there's no parking on the highway of holiness. A highway also suggests multiple vehicles. No highway is built for just one person. We've made a great deal about personal holiness and rightly so because we must take personal responsibility under God for his demand that we must be holy. But let's not forget that we are not on the road alone. John Wesley said, "The gospel of Christ knows no religion but social religion; and no holiness but social holiness." We haven't done a great job in the Army of making and keeping ourselves accountable to one another, both to encourage and to confront each other in this matter of living the holy life. We retain our sanctification only as we grow in it. It's not a static experience. We need to watch and pray and we need one another to do this effectively. Lynette and I are thoroughly enjoying being Corps Officers again. Oshawa Temple is a great Corps. We are especially encouraged by the number of small group bible studies and our mid-week Bible Study where we take the matter of spiritual growth seriously. On Wednesday night we go back to the Sunday morning sermon and look for ways to go deeper especially into application. We recognize that we need one another as we journey down the highway of holiness.

Colossians 3:1, "Set your hearts on things above." Verse 2, "Set your minds on things above."

Timothy Keller said, "You can't have an informed mind without an engaged heart." Getting the heart and the mind together is no small challenge. As one writer says, "What the head identifies as shameful may appear as sheer beauty to the heart." It's also true that with our feelings we

may love God but with our reason stubbornly resist him. I Tim. 4:16 “Watch your life and doctrine closely.”

“Be ye holy as I am holy.” All holiness is God’s holiness and only God makes holiness possible. And yet being holy is what growing up spiritually in the full sense of the term means, according to Peter, anyway: *Grow up* means *be holy*. No matter how old we are, how much we've achieved or failed to achieve, we're not grown up until this extraordinary thing happens. Holiness is growing up spiritually.

Holiness of heart relates to the things we love. I Peter 1:22, “Love one another deeply from the heart.”

The central theme of holiness is spiritual formation which means that we are being formed into the image of Christ; we are becoming more and more like Jesus. That’s what holiness is all about. Our outward expression will look like Jesus when our inward formation begins to resemble Jesus. In Matthew 23: 25-26 Jesus says to the Pharisees, “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside will also be clean.” Holiness is all about purity of heart. When your heart is pure your everyday activity will also be pure because it will flow from a pure heart like water from a clean glass.

The inner expression of holiness that produces the outward walk and talk of the Christian of course is the fruit of the Spirit. It’s really the inner character of Jesus becoming a reality in us through spiritual formation; prayer, reading the Word of God, Bible Study, sharing in fellowship with other Christians, and the other disciplines you have been learning this weekend.

It’s the outward evidence of the inward reality. Jesus said, “By their fruit you shall know them.” Matt. 5-7 and Galatians 5:22-23 identifies the fruit that he was talking about. By its presence or its absence we can identify who are the children of God. It’s not about how high you jump or how well you dance on Sunday, or how good you look in your uniform. It’s about whether or not you walk in love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and

self-control on Monday and every day of the week. As Commissioner Ed Read used to say, "I don't care how high you jump on Sunday, as long as you come down straight on Monday." Where there is failure there can be forgiveness but there must be a sincere commitment and earnest effort to allowing the Spirit of God to produce the fruit of the Spirit in our lives every day.

To use a vineyard or orchard analogy holiness is about taking care of the tree of our lives thereby allowing God to produce the fruit of the Spirit within us. It's a matter of the heart. Purity of heart is the source the spring of right action. James talks a great deal about this and for James action is an indication of what is in the heart. He's very concerned about the source of our action. Right action flows from the wellspring of a right heart. That's what Jesus is teaching in Matthew 5-7.

The heart then is the control center of a person's life. Who we are and what we do is ultimately determined by the condition of our hearts. We're not robots mentally programmed to live holy lives. We're not mindless animals trained to live the holy life. We're not even humans having a spiritual experience. We're spiritual beings having a human experience. When you look at it that way it takes the focus off our humanity and places it on our spirituality, off the temporal and onto the eternal. But we are human beings and that means we also think, feel, and choose, and the place where our thoughts, emotions, and will intersect is right here, at the center of our being—the heart. God is very concerned about what's in our heart because in the end, our heart will reveal who we are and what we will do what we do in any given situation.

This is why Jesus says, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God." Like the other Beatitudes, this one raises questions like who are the pure in heart? Why will they see God, and how will they see God? And the most unsettling question of all: how pure is my heart?

Before we tackle that however we need to consider the question, what exactly do we mean by "my heart?" Obviously it's not referring to that ten ounce muscle behind my breastplate. We're also not talking about heart in an emotional sense. When the Bible wants to talk about our emotions or feelings, it uses the word "mind" not heart. Our mind is the place where both ideas

and emotions reside and are intertwined. Gerald May does a great job of unpacking that in his book "Care of Mind Care of Spirit." We never have a feeling that's not in some way shaped by our thoughts. When someone cuts me off at Tims, and I feel this emotional surge of anger, it's because there are all kinds of ideas wrapped up with that feeling: People are supposed to wait their turn. That guy's rude. I was here first. But the each thought is accompanied by some sort of feeling, rational or otherwise. We may be afraid all the donut holes will be gone.

But the heart is different. My heart can be influenced by my mind—by my thoughts and feelings—but most of the time it's the other way around; as Gerald May points out and as Dallas Willard agrees in "Renovation of the Heart." It's usually the condition of my heart that determines the thoughts I entertain and the feelings that get wrapped up and ignited by them. If my heart is basically oriented toward myself and getting what I want, then my thoughts and feelings are going to flow a certain way when I'm cut off at Tim's or when the donuts holes run out. But if my heart has an 'others' orientation then my thoughts and feelings are going to flow in that same direction. This is why Proverbs says: "Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life" (4:23).

The Proverb is telling us that it's the character and condition of our heart from which our life flows—how we think, feel, and act. In fact, as Dallas Willard points out, the Bible uses the words "heart," "will," and "spirit" interchangeably. That's why when we say, "His heart wasn't in it," or "he didn't have the will," or "he lost his spirit," we're saying the same thing. Your heart isn't just one, isolated aspect of you; rather, it is the central, motivating, reality-sorting, life-determining thing about you. As John Eldredge observes, this is why "the subject of the heart is addressed in the Bible more than any other topic—more than works or service, more than belief or obedience, more than money, and even more than worship." And Dallas Willard says: "Our life and how we find the world now and in the future is almost totally, a simple result of what we have become in the depths of our being From there we see our world and interpret reality. From there we make our choices, break forth into action, try to change our world. We live from our depths We live from our heart."

What does it mean to be pure in heart? We've said the heart is the seat of human personality. It's what makes us tick. Someone described it as "the hidden spring of a person's life."

1 Samuel 16:7 says, "Man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart." Prov. 3:5 says, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart" Ecclesiastes 3:11: "God has set eternity in the human heart." Jeremiah 29:13: "You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart." Romans 10:10 says, "For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified." The heart is more than our mind, more than our emotions, more than our choices—it is the place where all of these come together to shape our life and faith. If that's the case, we can understand why it's important for our hearts to be pure.

But what does it mean to be pure in heart? That word "pure" is used about two dozen times in the New Testament, and it suggests two things. First of all, when we say something is pure, it means that it's free from impurities. It has no contaminants, no germs, no dirt. It's clean. Secondly, when we say something is pure, we mean it's the same through and through. It is not a mixture of things; it is all one thing. Pure gold has no trace metals in it—it is all gold, and only gold. When something is pure it's all one thing.

The pure in heart are people who are free from impurities, and made of the same stuff through and through. There is only one thing that occupies their heart, mind and soul. They are in hot pursuit of only one goal. It is God who has their heart and it God's will they constantly pursue. No matter where they are, no matter what they're doing, no matter who they're with, their life revolves around God.

That's why the word "undivided" is appropriate to describe the pure in heart. When you have an undivided heart, you have a heart that is free of all foreign substances—nothing that's foreign to the nature of the God who owns and rules your heart. An undivided heart is not divided into compartments; one for God, one for your career and one for your family. An undivided heart has but one compartment, and God is the one who occupies it. If you have an undivided heart you have resolved the conflict between your thoughts, feelings and your will. The conflict was resolved when you aligned each of these aspects of your personality with God's

purposes for your life. When you have an undivided heart, you live one life—from the inside out—and you live it for God.

But what does purity of heart look like in everyday life—for ordinary people like you and me who want to be more like Christ? Let's go to Matthew 15 and look at an unsettling conversation Jesus had that makes purity of heart a bit more practical for all of us.

“Then some Pharisees and teachers of the law came to Jesus from Jerusalem and asked, ‘Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? They don’t wash their hands before they eat!’ Now, these religious leaders weren’t concerned about good hygiene or table manners. They were concerned about defilement. A person who was defiled was ceremonially unclean. They couldn’t enter the tabernacle. They couldn’t celebrate festivals with the rest of the congregation. Defilement could come by contact with a dead body or a diseased person, by eating unclean foods, or by contact with a Gentile.

To protect themselves against defilement, the religious leaders had developed an elaborate system of rules and regulations around hand washing—traditions that went far beyond what God had called for in the Scripture. They taught that a person should wash their hands not only before worship, but several times a day, and always before eating, just in case they had unknowingly become defiled in some way. But you couldn’t wash them just any old way; you had to do it in a ceremonial fashion—fingers outstretched and held up in the air, with water poured over them. So hand washing became a public display of spirituality: the more you washed, and the better you washed, the godlier you were. Clean hands and ceremonial washing had become the evidence of a person’s faith. Remember what we said about images? So when the leaders observed the disciples failing to wash their hands in the proper way before eating, they were scandalized and so complained to Jesus.

How did Jesus respond? “You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you: these people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.” Ouch. He accuses them of pretending to honor God, when in reality they were serving themselves and advancing their own status in the

community. The Message translates this verse well: “These people make a big show of saying the right thing, but their heart isn’t in it. They act like they are worshiping me, but they don’t mean it.”

This response was not very well received by the religious leaders and it seems that even the disciples were confused by it. They came to Jesus and said, “Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this?” I think most of us have forgotten just how radical Jesus’ teaching was for the Pharisees and the disciples. It would be like me standing up at Oshawa Temple next Sunday morning and saying, “You know, God is really not interested in your being here at the corps this morning. You might as well stay home on Sundays, because the songs you sing and the offering you put in the plate really don’t mean anything to him. And those of you read your Bible and pray every day might as well just sleep in an extra 20 minutes or watch TV before you go to bed, because it’s really not helping your relationship with God.” Jesus was calling into question one of the most fundamental and widely accepted spiritual practices of the day. Why? Because he knew the people’s hearts weren’t in it. There was a disconnect between their public lives and their private lives. Outwardly, they acted as if their lives were all about God; inwardly, their lives were about other things.

Then, as if he hadn’t upset them enough already, Jesus continued:

“Are you still so dull? Don’t you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body? But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man unclean. For out of the heart comes evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are what make a man unclean; but eating with unwashed hands does not make him unclean.”

These people had compartmentalized their lives. They had all their religious ducks in a row, but their inner world was a mess. They had clean hands but filthy hearts. Jesus sees a heart full of impurities—evil thoughts, ugly feelings, bad choices. Suppose we were to put your heart up on the screen this morning, would it reveal any of these impurities?

How about “murder”? Well that’s easy, I didn’t kill anyone this week. But Jesus said anyone who harbors anger against a brother or calls someone a fool is guilty of murder. Say any hurtful words this week? Nurse any anger or bitterness toward someone?

How about “adultery” or “sexual immorality?” Nope, didn’t chase anyone else’s spouse this week. But one of the words Jesus uses here is *porneia*, from which we get *pornography*. It refers to any sexual behavior or thought that exploits another person or perverts the beautiful gift of sexuality. Do you have anything like that in the secret places of your life?

“Theft.” Nope, got my shoplifting under control. But is it possible you’re stealing time from your boss or your clients, or holding onto money that properly belongs to the government, or to God?

“False testimony.” Nope, didn’t tell any lies in court this week. But did you massage the truth to give someone a false impression? Have you lied on a resume or cheated on an exam? When someone asks, “How are you doing?” do you pretend to be doing better than you are?

“Slander.” Nope, didn’t write any scandal this week. But did you speak poorly about another person just to make yourself look better, or to be in with the right crowd? Did you share a bit of unsavory news under the guise of a prayer request, or pass judgment on a person’s spirituality because of the way they dressed or the way they worshiped?

What this passage reveals our propensity to live a double life—to be one thing on the outside and another on the inside—to act one way at church and another way at home or work. We convince ourselves that as long as we’re going to church and reading our Bibles and putting our 10% in the offering plate, then our abusive words, our ugly thoughts, and our selfish spending habits don’t matter. Jesus is reminding us that our outward behavior flows from an inner condition. We can fill our heads with Bible knowledge, we can behave like good church people, we can even profess faith in Christ as Savior and Lord, but until the hidden spring of our life flows clear and clean, we can never be the whole people God intends to be.

So what am I to do about all these impurities and this compartmentalization of my life? To begin with we should bring every thought, feeling, and decision to the foot of the cross. The cross of Christ should control our thought life, our feelings and our decisions. That's what it means to have an undivided heart: where no compartment is sealed off from the Lordship of Christ.

When you have an undivided heart, you don't think in terms of God's money and your money, or God's time and your time, because it's all God's money, and it's all God's time. You're not torn between doing God's will or your will because God's will becomes your will. When you have an undivided heart, you don't just pray on Sundays or before meals, you pray your way through the entire day. When you have an undivided heart, you live one life—from the inside out—and you live it for God

When Jesus says, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" he's telling us that the pure in heart will see God in the life to come. When our hearts have been cleansed and changed through faith in Christ, we know that we will spend eternity with him.

I think Jesus is also telling us that when our hearts are pure, we will begin to see God in this life not just during our spiritual highs on Sunday but in everyday life—in ordinary moments. When your life is about one thing, you see that one thing everywhere.

When your life is all about God, you see God everywhere. You see him when you look at this beautiful Island; the crashing waves, the splendid shorelines, the pine clad hills. You recognize his goodness every time you sit down to enjoy a meal of fish and brewis, or even homemade bread and black strap molasses. You see your job as an opportunity to glorify him by working hard and well. You see your paycheck as an opportunity to give to God's work. You see your marriage through the lens of Christ and the church. You see trials and hardships as opportunities to know him better. You see every human being as an individual created in the image of God and in need of a Savior. When you have an undivided heart, you see God in everything, because everything is about him.

The Message translation puts it this way: “You’re blessed when you get your inside world put right. Then you can see God in the outside world.” The pure in heart are people who live one life, from the inside out, and live it for God.

How do we get this kind of heart? We ask for it. We begin by asking God to cleanse our hearts. [John 1:9](#) tells us that “if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just will forgive us our sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” If you have never asked Christ to forgive your sins, to cleanse you from the inside out, you can do that today.

Secondly, we ask him to change our hearts. In [Ezekiel 11:19](#) we read, “I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone, and give them a heart of flesh.” Only God can give you that kind of heart—a heart that wants only what God wants.

God designed human nature and our world to work in sync with his heart. His heart was meant to move our hearts. His heart was meant to be the pacemaker that guides the rhythm of our hearts. Is it beating after God’s own heart?

How’s your heart? And how do you want it to be? Let the words of David be your prayer: “Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me ... See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” ([Psalm 139:24](#)). For that’s his desire: to give you a heart that beats just like his, forever.

Gerald May in *Addiction and Grace* talks about holiness as, “transformation of desire.” It means a radical change, through the power of the Spirit, in those attachments that form the desires of our hearts. It means dealing with our addictions; not to drugs and alcohol but to the thoughts, feelings and actions that bring us pleasure but may not be God glorifying. Holiness is an ongoing process of “transformation of desire” as we respond to God’s call to holiness.

Holiness is a demand of God, “Be ye holy for I am holy.” Without holiness no man shall see God.” But it is also a choice that we must make and it is a choice we make over and against

other things. “Choose you this day whom you will serve.” “You cannot serve both God and mammon.” We have to turn away before we can turn to home with dignity.