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PURITY: Looking Good On The Inside

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~ Scriptures: I John 1:7 & II Corinthians 7:1 ~

INTRODUCTION

The judge looked down from his bench and, in a somber voice, declared: “*Mr. Wilson*, this is your day of reckoning!” Then he sentenced him to 7½ years in federal prison.

Wilson was one of four California men convicted of financial fraud and sentenced to prison in that particular case. *Five* men were originally investigated. But the fifth, *Mark Jacobs*, was not arrested and charged.

Jacobs had been invited to join the financial scheme by four friends—the men sent to jail—in a weekly Bible study. They had assured him their plan was totally legal. Yet something inside him said it wasn’t right. While it was hard to say *no* to good friends, he chose to go with his conscience and tell them he wouldn’t participate.

The lawyers for the four convicted men pleaded with the judge that their clients had simply made mistakes of poor judgment. They were good men who loved their wives & children, gave to charities, and were active in their churches. Their crime involved a “gray” area, crossing a line that wasn’t clear.¹

But it was clear. Mark Jacobs saw where it should go and drew it. He knew what was right and what was wrong, and he didn’t equivocate. These days so many will walk up to the line and dabble with going over it. They find a way to justify it in their own mind. One executive said: “*I didn’t mean to hurt anyone or embarrass my family*” (i.e.: still thought it was OK).

There’s a moral and ethical crisis sweeping our nation. It involves public figures and everyday sorts. . . professional people, both secular and Christian. We live in a day in which:

- People aren’t sure where the line is between right & wrong;
- Many don’t even believe there is such a line. . .or, don’t care;
- Some know good and well where the line is, but choose to take the risk anyhow.

Back in 1966, an American professor named JOSEPH FLETCHER published an influential book called *Situation Ethics*. His basic premise was that there is nothing universally good or bad, right or wrong. . .no absolutes. An act that is right in one situation may be wrong in another.

What was a “philosophical discussion” in the mid-60’s is now the basis for morality in our society. Back then, few people questioned that:

- Chastity was a good thing
 - Hard work was the duty of every responsible person
 - It is never right to lie, cheat, steal, or commit adultery
- [These were just the 10 Commandment “minimums” – cf. last week]

Every day, we’re influenced by the philosophy and values of those around us.

ILLUSTRATION> There was a famous experiment in which some college students put a frog in a container of water and began to heat the water slowly. The water finally reached the boiling point, yet the frog never attempted to jump out. WHY? Because the changes in the environment were so subtle that the frog didn't notice them until it was too late.

Even as Bible-believing Christians, it's easier than you think to end up like the frog. Many a godly man or woman (including pastors, seminary professors, respected Christian leaders) have yielded to the world's values because they failed to discern the subtle changes occurring around and within them. Before they knew it, they were in hot water. They didn't want that. . .didn't intend to get there. . .didn't think it could happen to them. But it did!

If it is the desire of your heart to follow Jesus, then you need to think seriously about the connection between your faith and your integrity. There should be no disconnect between who we are (or, say we are) and what we do. The Bible commands us:

- To become *“holy and blameless”* (Ephesians 1:4)
- To *“live a life worthy of the calling you have received”* (Ephesians 4:1)
- To be *“imitators of God”* (Ephesians 5:1) ← THINK ABOUT THAT!

What do you think of when you hear the word **HOLY**?

- Something that's absolutely unattainable, impossible, out of reach. Don't even try.
 - “I'm not worthy” . . . “I'm too flawed”.
 - Or, “I don't even want to be associated with that crowd (cause they think of them-selves as better than everybody else)”.
- [All cop outs! The comparison is never between me and another person. It is always between me and God's standards.]

In the original Hebrew and Greek of the Bible, the word **HOLY** refers to something or someone separated and set apart for God. A major characteristic of a holy person is **PURITY**. Something that is pure is spotless, without stain, containing nothing that doesn't properly belong there. In other words, free from moral fault or guilt.

The term *“pure”* is the Greek word from which we get *“catharsis”* = a cleansing of the mind or emotions. It has two meanings:

1. **CLEANSSED FROM DIRT / FILTH / CONTAMINATION**. Like gold that has been refined by fire. . .clothes that have been washed clean. . .grain that has been carefully sifted. It doesn't happen overnight. **PETER** tells us that gold has to be heated and reheated several times for the alloys and impurities to be brought to the surface so that a goldsmith can remove them. [cf. I Peter 1:6-7] It's a process! Don't get discouraged.
2. **UNMIXED / NO DUPLICITY / SINGLENESSE OF HEART & MIND**. *“No one can serve two masters”*, Jesus said (in Matthew 6:33). *“A double-minded person is unstable in all his ways”*, writes James (1:8).

Putting them together, the one who is single-minded in his commitment to Christ will also be inwardly pure. Put simply, the way you are in public will be the way you are in private. That's integrity! As someone has said: *“Character is what you are when no one is looking.”*

Is that really possible? My message to you this morning is that it is not only possible. . .but it is the privilege of every believer + an expectation:

[I John 1;7] *“If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another,*

and the blood of Jesus, His Son, purifies us from all sin.” What a privilege!

[But it’s also a responsibility) *“Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.”* [II Corinthians 7:1]

But it’s not enough to “want” purity. . . .or have “good intentions”. You must have a game plan. Let me suggest FOUR STRAIGHTFORWARD ACTIONS that God can use in your life and mine to move us along the path to purity.

I. EVERY SPIRITUAL MOVE STARTS WITH A DECISION

When Babylon’s KING NEBUCHADNEZZAR conquered Judah, he ordered thousands of the best and brightest young men to be taken as captives to Babylon. His goal was to immerse them in the seductive culture of Babylon → remake their character → use them to assimilate the people of Israel into his kingdom.

DANIEL was one of those men. The king changed his name to BELTESHAZZAR (“a servant of the god Bel”). Then the king put these guys through three years of intense training, which included a certain diet. That’s where Daniel drew the line. According to Daniel 1:8, *“Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine”* because it had been offered to idols.

Daniel made a decision not to compromise or defile himself—to *sully / taint / contaminate / pollute / poison / smear / blot / blur / smudge / tarnish / profane / infect / dishonor / disgrace*. He chose to stand tall for what he knew to be right. Almost every day, you & I come to some kind of fork in the road. We face some tough choices. Will you take “the road less traveled”?

II. MAKE A FIRM COMMITMENT TO LIVE BY BIBLICAL STANDARDS

It’s not easy to be pure in a world that mocks purity and glorifies impurity. The cultural forces against “sexual purity”, for instance, are enormous. If the surveys are to be believed, over 1/3 of all men cheat on their spouses. Our culture’s rates of divorce, out-of-wedlock pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases (not to mention all the devastated relationships) bear witness to the prevailing sexual ethic. . . .ALSO to the consequences of abandoning God’s call to sexual purity.

Paul says in Romans 12:2 (NIV & NLT): *“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world. . . .Don’t copy the behavior and customs of this world. But be transformed by the renew-ing of your mind. . . .Let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is.”* And you will always find His will to be *“good, pleasing, and perfect”* (i.e.: the perfect plan for your life).

Our sexuality and desires are a wonderful gift from God. Because He made us and knows us inside out, He knows how this gift can best be enjoyed—and that is in the context of sexual purity. Sexual intimacy is *pure* in the truest sense when exercised as God intended—one man & one woman in the bonds of marriage. That’s what brings *real* joy / satisfaction.ⁱⁱ So:

- For those who are single == sexual purity means obeying Jesus’ command not to lust after that which is not ours (cf. Matthew 5:27-28).
- For those who are married == it means reflecting God’s absolute faithfulness to us in our faithfulness to one another.
- For all of us == it means determining where the line is, and staying a safe distance behind it. Not doing that is what gets us in trouble!

So I, along with the Apostle Paul in Romans 12:1 [NLT], *“plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all He has done for us. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind He will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship Him”*

Choosing the path of purity is difficult—it is certainly “the road less traveled”. But if you put in the hard

work and diligent prayer—and let Jesus be the Lord of this area of your life—you will reap huge blessings in the end.

That doesn't mean we won't have to fight the urges and desires. Our desires are normal. God put them there. We just need to channel them in productive, God-honoring directions.

It doesn't mean we won't fail. But, there is always forgiveness and cleansing in Christ Jesus—cf. [I John 1:9](#). Don't let past mistakes be a reason to give up or give in. The God who can redeem and bless every other area of our lives can also take control of this area.

If you struggle in this area, a practical tip might be to make yourself personally accountable to another man (if you're a man) or another woman (if you're a woman).

Now you can breathe! I'm getting off that subject! ☺☺

III. PUT FIRST THINGS FIRST

A lot of folks think that you become holy by negation—by subtracting things out of your life. You can become a cultural ostrich and avoid all movies, listen only to Christian radio, read only Christian books & magazines—and still miss out on what God has in mind. Collectively we could spend millions cleaning up the moral landscape, getting the right public officials in office, controlling the media. Maybe we could even get Jerry Springer off the air! ☹ Believe me, I'd like to do all that. But the truth is, if the condition of our hearts remains the same, then it is all to no avail. A pollution-free environment doesn't make people pure.

If a farmer doesn't plant seed in the ground, he will never harvest a crop. It doesn't matter how weed-free his ground is; he must also plant and cultivate good seed. In the same way, we can only reap a harvest of purity and integrity by planting the good seed of God's Word into our lives. Truth must be planted in our hearts daily.

I'm talking about much more than merely reading a verse here & there once in awhile. I'm talking about allowing the Holy Spirit to plant the truths of Scripture deep into our hearts & minds through *consistent* Bible reading / study / meditation / prayer. We must become a people of the Word! That's why we encourage all members—new & old alike—to be involved in at least one “feeding activity” per week + your own personal quiet time. Our circumstances and schedules will vary in how we get it, but we all need that daily “breakthrough to God”.

IV. REMAIN SENSITIVE TO THE “SOFT PROMPTINGS” OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Refuse to justify or rationalize. Pay attention to the little dichotomy inside. You know, when your head says, “It isn't sin” but your heart says, “Don't do it”.

Guard your mind (thoughts) / your eyes. [Proverbs 4:23](#) says: “*Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.*” Remember that Jesus said it is “*what comes out of a man's heart that makes him 'unclean'*”. [cf. [Mark 7:20](#)]

I don't know about you, but frequently I have to monitor my own thought processes. I can get to dwelling on something and run little scenarios. Before I know it, I'm angry, anxious, fretful, fearful. I've worked up some pretty negative emotions and landed in a depression. So, one of my little internal prayers is the words of Paul in [II Corinthians 10:5](#) – “*Lord, please take captive my every thought and make it obedient to Christ.*”

If I don't do that, if I let the little distractions of life overpower me (which is one of Satan's most “devilish” ☹ tricks), I become numb to the “voice” of the Holy Spirit.

CONCLUSION

God wants us to live above the minimums. . . beyond what we can get by with. The pursuit of PURITY will take us up a notch spiritually. *Be imitators of Him* by making daily decisions to follow Him, even if that

takes you down a road less traveled (or one you travel alone). . .by determining to live by Biblical standards.
. . .by hungering & thirsting after His Word (which contains His Truth). . .by remaining responsive and sensitive to the Holy Spirit.

Remember: *“Blessed—happy, enviably fortunate, and spiritually prosperous—are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”* [Matthew 5:8, Amplified]

Isn't that reason enough?

ⁱ Story taken from *“Black and White Living in a Gray World”* by Gary J. Oliver, Chapter 3 in Seven Promises of a Promise Keeper, pp. 83-84.

ⁱⁱ For those who are of a different persuasion—or “orientation” as it is called these days—God’s love and the church’s love is in no way diminished. In this area, as in any other, when we meet Jesus he never leaves us the same. He is forever *“transforming us into His likeness with ever-increasing glory”* (II Corinthians 3:18).