

to be spiritual “high-achievers”. This blessing of seeing God is only possible to “the poor in spirit”, the folk who know they can’t make it by themselves. It becomes possible as we allow God’s grace to work real changes in us – from the inside out!

**Reflect:**

- How can the “poor in spirit” become the “pure in heart”?
- To what extent is our Christian life motivated by a desire and confident expectation of “seeing God”?

Oswald Chambers wrote, “Whosoever is born of God does not commit sin; for his seed remains in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. (1 John 3:9)

“...The Apostle is not teaching sinless perfection; he is teaching perfect sinlessness, which is a different matter. If as sanctified souls we ‘walk in the light’, as God is in the light, the revelation is that through the atonement ‘the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin’. That does not mean cleansing from all sin in our consciousness; if it did, it would produce hypocrisy. Any number of people are not conscious of sin, but it does not follow that they are cleansed from all sin. It is not our consciousness that is referred to, but the consciousness God has of us; what we are conscious of is walking in the light with nothing to hide.

“The outcome of following our Lord is a holiness of character so that God sees nothing to censure because the life of his Son is working out in every particular. Our main idea is to keep steadfastly in the blazing light of God so that he can exhibit the virtues of Jesus through us unhindered. ‘If you love me, you will keep my commandments’. How many of them? All of them. Then, says Jesus, ‘We will come unto him, and make our abode with him’ – in heaven? No, here” (*If thou wilt be perfect...* 1939).

**Reflect:**

- In what new directions has the Lord been speaking to us through this study? What are we going to do about it?

**Study 8 – ... the Peacemakers. Reading: 2 Cor. 5.11-21; Eph. 2.11-22.**

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Ten Studies on the Beatitudes

by Peter J Blackburn

**7. ... the Pure in Heart**

**Reading: Psalm 24; Matthew 15.1-20**

If there is one thing we can’t stand today, it’s holiness. We laugh at some “holy Joe”, caricature people as having a “holier-than-thou” attitude.

In Christian circles, we prefer to speak about “the Spirit” rather than “the Holy Spirit”. Even the modern pentecostal movement which began as an off-shoot of the “holiness” movement has been tarnished by the unholiness of a few of its leaders.

Perhaps we have thought of holiness as a kind of spiritual glow or gloss that a “good” Christian ought to have. I remember one speaker saying that, when he was at university, he was aware that some of the Christian young men would rub brilliantine on their forehead to make them appear more “holy”.

It seems rather bizarre to us, and yet... isn’t it only the outside that counts, what people see? Shades of Hyacinth Bucket (pronounced “bouquet”) and *Keeping up Appearances!*

Of course, society sees right through that kind of humbug. There’s a sneaking suspicion abroad that all Christians are like that, and that the church is “full of hypocrites”. There’s a real sense of satisfaction when the news reveals yet one more paedophile priest or another abusive teacher at a Christian school.

We are inclined to react that it’s a case of the pot calling the kettle black. Our society is riddled with “keeping up appearances”, or so it seems. The worst “sin” is “being found out”. But what about the Church and the Christian? Isn’t society right in expecting something more from us?

**Reflect:**

- “If there is one thing we can’t stand today, it’s holiness”. Is this true? Why?
- “Isn’t society right in expecting something more from us?” What do we think about that?

Our society has many superficial values, so that many think, “Happy are those who know the latest ideas – others will think highly of them!”

In a world which exalts happiness but not holiness, which endorses the appearance of right action without reference to motive, and which tends to see the greatest evil in “being caught”, the Master Teacher says, “Blessed (happy) are the pure in heart, for they will see God” (Mt. 5.8).

### **Clean Hands and a Pure Heart**

**Read: Psalm 24.**

We still speak of “heart” in a figurative sense as the seat of the emotions. In Biblical thought, it has a broader reference, including also the understanding and the will and the centre in which the religious life is rooted and which determines moral conduct.

The Psalmist wrote, “Who may ascend the hill of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol or swear by what is false” (Ps. 24.3,4).

The condition for fellowship with God is a righteousness which will be evident in a person’s deeds, desires, ambitions and words – such righteousness springs from a “pure heart”.

#### **Reflect:**

- The media and so much of our modern way of life militate against having “a pure heart”. In what ways do we find this to be so?
- “... a righteousness which will be evident in a person’s deeds, desires, ambitions and words”. Reflect on some of the people we have known for whom this has been true.

**Read: Matthew 15.1-20**

So often in times both past and present, people have sought to have “clean hands” without a “pure heart”. We find a striking example of this in Jesus’ encounter with the scribes and Pharisees recorded in Matthew 15. They were criticising the disciples of Jesus for not ceremonially washing their hands – a requirement not in the law but added by a long-established tradition.

Jesus rebuked them, because in their attention to the observance of their traditions they often missed (or even deliberately evaded) the true point of the law. Their religion was so much aimed at “clean hands” and so little at “a pure heart”. Further, it was not a real change of life – merely the ceremonial cleansing of the outside, while the life remained unchanged at the centre, the “heart” from which the rest of the life will be polluted.

At this point we note again Jesus’ statement, “I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven” (Mt. 5.20). Jesus went on to illustrate his point with several examples from the law.

What God requires is not merely that we refrain from wrong actions but that our actions should arise from right desires and motives, and, above all, from love. In other words, God wants not just “pure hands” but “a pure heart” also.

### **Seeing God**

The blessing awaiting the pure in heart is the experience of the presence and reality of God. This was expressed by the Psalmist – “Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek your face, O God of Jacob” (Ps. 24.6).

We recall also Heb. 12.14, “Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord”. It was also the great hope of Paul as expressed in 1 Cor. 13.12, “Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known”.

Already in our experience of Christ we begin to see God, for the Father has made himself known through the Son (Jn 1.18; 12.45; 14.9). But the Christian looks forward in hope to a total experience of the presence and reality of God – “Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.” (1 Jn 3.2).

Yet even now the degree to which we are conscious of God’s presence is matched by our own feelings of unworthiness. So John, in his letter, continues, “Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure” (v. 3).

This is a point where we need to remind ourselves where we have come to this beatitude. We can get rather over-awed by people we imagine