

THE PURITY PURSUIT

By
Andrew Roberts

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The Purity Pursuit

Table of Contents Page

Lesson 1	A Plea for Purity	5
Lesson 2	Purity of Heart	11
Lesson 3	Purity of Speech	17
Lesson 4	Purity of Body	24
Lesson 5	Purity in Attire	32
Lesson 6	Purity in Friendships	38
Lesson 7	Purity in Your Work	44
Lesson 8	Purity in the Home	52
Lesson 9	Purity in Dating, part 1: Intentions	61
Lesson 10	Purity in Dating, part 2: Dating Behavior ..	68
Lesson 11	Purity in Worship	76
Lesson 12	Purity through Christ	84
Lesson 13	Personalizing <i>The Purity Pursuit</i> (review)	89

Author's Note

This work is dedicated to the 2004 Jackson Heights church of Christ high school Bible class. They were a special group of young Christians who made a difference for the Lord in their circle of friends and the local church. It was my privilege to develop this material and spend a quarter working through it with them. Their maturity, zeal for the Lord, and love for each other encouraged me about the next generation of Christians. May their example be as pure in the future as it has been in the past. May they continue the pursuit!

I want to thank my brother Jonathan for his collaboration.

And I want to thank my brilliant wife Julie. She has given me so much, including our daughter, Erin Elizabeth. There's nothing purer than a newborn child. I love you both.

Andrew Roberts
November 2005

A Plea for Purity

Question: What's your idea of the perfect life?

Have you ever dreamt of having the perfect life? Our imaginations might picture the perfect existence as simply doing nothing, soaking up rays on a beautiful tropical beach, or freely spending our endless supply of money on whatever our heart desires. Sounds like paradise, right? Not exactly. Adam and Eve are the only two people on earth who have ever truly lived in a paradise, Eden. In fact, Eden was what God intended for man's existence, a perfect existence where man is free from sin. Genesis 2 is God's ideal for mankind, and God always wants what is best for His people. However, consider the aspects of God's ideal existence.

7 Aspects of God's Ideal Life for Man (Genesis 2)

- *God's Provision for Man – the Garden for shelter and food (2:8-14).*
- *God commanded Labor – tend the Garden (2:15).*
- *God gave Law – just one rule to keep (2:16-17).*
- *God gave a Helper – a comparable companion, unique to all of creation (2:18).*
- *God gave Domain – authority and accountability over the earth (2:19-20).*
- *God instituted Marriage – one man and one woman joined together for a lifetime as a single family unit for procreation, companionship, and fulfillment (2:21-24).*
- *Unbroken Fellowship with God – Man was innocent, pure, and holy before God and each other. Thus, God walked among them (2:25; 3:8).*

Working, following rules, and maintaining relationships may not sound like your idea of the perfect life, but this is God's ideal. This is the best way, the pure life. Following the Bible will always lead people back to the lifestyle of Eden. God wants His people to be pure and enjoy untainted blessings and fellowship with Him. Throughout His word, instruction is given to lead His people down a path of purity.

God's intention is for us to know and enjoy all the things listed above. That's the ideal life, and you can have it. But not by accident. You enjoy that life by committing to follow God's word. By your seeking God's will and obedience to the Bible, you will embark on *The Purity Pursuit*. Only by consciously seeking God's ideal in every situation will you realize the pure life God intended for mankind from the beginning.

A Pure God

The Purity Pursuit starts with God. Mankind was created sinless and pure. They were made in the image of God, Genesis 1:26-27. But unlike the wicked and easily swayed personalities of men, God's nature has always been the same, and always will be. God does not change, Malachi 3:6; Hebrews 13:8.

Read 1 John 3:3. It says that God is _____.

Thayer's Greek Lexicon gives the following definition for "pure" from the Greek word HAGNOS¹: "Pure a) pure from carnality, chaste, modest: Titus 2:5; b) pure from every fault, immaculate: 2 Corinthians 7:11; Philippians 4:8; 1 Timothy 5:22; 1 Peter 3:2; 1 John 3:3."

Some Unchangeable Attributes of God

God is love, 1 John 4:8.

God is just, Isaiah 45:21.

God is jealous, Exodus 34:14.

God is gracious, Psalm 145:8.

I like how Joshua Harris defined purity.

"True purity... is a direction, a persistent, determined pursuit of righteousness. This direction starts in the heart, and we express it in a lifestyle that flees opportunities for compromise."

– I Kissed Dating Goodbye by Joshua Harris (Multnomah, 1997, p.88)

Typically, we think of purity in terms of chastity, but it actually applies to every aspect of life.

Read 1 Peter 1:14-16. It says that God is _____
_____.

Thayer's Greek Lexicon gives the following definition for "holy" from the Greek word HAGIOS²: "1. properly reverend, worthy of veneration: Luke 1:49 ... b) of persons whose services God employs 2. set apart for God, to be, as it were, exclusively his; ... 4. in a moral sense, pure, sinless, upright, holy: 1 Peter 1:16."

God is pure, and God is holy. These words are closely related and communicate similar ideas. But please note:

Not everything that is pure is holy. However, everything that is holy is pure.

For example, snow may be pure (free from pollution, immaculate), but that does not make it holy (set apart for God). The same can be said physically for water, or morally/ spiritually for a newborn baby. Well, what was the key to maintaining purity and holiness before God? It was humbly keeping His law and pursuing the lifestyle He prescribed, provided, and blessed, Genesis 2:16-17. When Adam and Eve departed from God's ideal and broke His law, it was sin. From then on the world was tainted by the consequences of sin. Christians must be holy and pure (in a moral sense, sinless, upright), just like their God.

Read 1 Peter 1:15. What are Christians told to BE? _____

Read 1 John 3:3. What are Christians told to DO? _____

The Purity Pursuit is determination to make a righteous choice that glorifies God in every decision and situation. Go after what the Bible reveals to be right and pure. Obey God's commandments and seek to live the life consistent with His word, Psalm 1:1-3; 119:9-11; Ephesians 4:17-24. By seeking forgiveness from Jesus when we err, and determining not to flirt with temptation, we can be the holy vessels God intends for us to be, and ones which He can use for His honorable purposes, 2 Timothy 2:20-22.

Instead of living for our vision of the easy life, we should chase after God's vision – we should embark upon *The Purity Pursuit*.

A Preacher in Pursuit

Timothy was a younger man (probably in his 30s or so) when he received inspired writings from the apostle Paul. These epistles instructed him in his work as an evangelist, 1 Timothy; 2 Timothy. Though he was a young man – a mere “youth” in the eyes of many at Ephesus – he was to be a powerful example to them.

“Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity,” 1 Timothy 4:12.

Timothy’s youth was not a handicap in the eyes of the Holy Spirit. Nor was his age to be used as an excuse for poor judgment, filthy language, or experimentation with sin. To help Timothy harness the virtues of youth for God, Paul told him some things to run away from (flee), as well as some things to run toward (pursue). Read the following verses and fill in the chart.

What should Timothy flee? What should Timothy pursue?

1 Timothy 6:10-11

2 Timothy 2:22

1 Timothy 5:22

Timothy was told to pursue purity, 1 Timothy 5:22. You may be younger than Timothy, but if you’re a Christian, the Scriptures call you to the same pursuit. Youth shouldn’t be squandered on selfishness, drunkenness, and sin, Ecclesiastes 11:9-12:1; rather, young lights should shine bright as Christ-like examples to their families, friends, schoolmates, sweethearts, teachers, and employers, Philippians 2:15.

“If we truly want to pursue purity, then we need to point ourselves in God’s direction. We cannot simultaneously explore the boundaries of purity and pursue righteousness – they point us in opposite directions. True purity flees as fast and as far as it can from sin and compromise. . . The path you take with your feet should never contradict the conviction of your heart.”

– **I Kissed Dating Goodbye** by Joshua Harris
(Multnomah, 1997, p. 91-92)

Are you pursuing purity? Are you chasing God’s desire and will for your life? Are you fleeing from temptation and sin, or do you like to see how close you can get to unrighteousness? If you will strive for God’s ideal life, then you will be on *The Purity Pursuit*.

The Plea

I know that the teenage years are the most confusing times you’ve ever faced in your life. The decisions you make everyday are forming your future. There are the big decisions in front of you like “Should I become a Christian?” (If you haven’t already done that), “Where do I go to college?” or, “Who will I marry?” But then there are little decisions that you don’t think much about at the time. For instance, getting into a car when the driver has been drinking alcohol, or taking a hit off the joint your buddies are passing around, or going to bed with your boyfriend one time because all your friends say they’ve already had sex. Those decisions are often made quickly, and no one dreams about the far reaching consequences!

As we study the Bible together, I want to help you get on God’s page for your future. You don’t need somebody to make up a bunch of arbitrary rules – build a bunch of fences that God never built – to keep you out of trouble “for your own good.” What is needed is someone to show you God’s way: purity. You need to see a pure direction for living and everything that vision entails. Through this, purity can guide you in all your decisions! This study calls us to a life pursuit – *The Purity Pursuit*.

Your sweetheart is pleading for you to make pure choices, choices that won’t result in STDs, unwanted pregnancies, or emotional scars. Your parents are pleading for you to make pure choices in regards to your friends, work ethic, and in everything which affects your future. The Holy Spirit is pleading for you to make pure choices. Thus the Scriptures contain the

following precepts and admonitions:

“Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity,” 1 Timothy 4:12.

“...Keep yourself pure,” 1 Timothy 5:22.

“Pursue peace with all people and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord,” Hebrews 12:14.

“To the pure all things are pure, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure; but even their mind and conscience are defiled,” Titus 1:15.

“Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart,” 1 Peter 1:22.

We see that *The Purity Pursuit* is a biblical mandate for all who follow Christ. Purity is what God intended and what His word commands. So I plead with you, give yourself to studying the Scriptures and the following lessons with an open mind. Make purity the pursuit of your life.

In Your Pursuit of Purity...

- Seek God’s ideal life.
- Consider God’s instructions in any situation or decision.
- Direct your life toward righteousness.
Don’t see how close you can get to sin.
- Don’t use “youth” as an excuse to sin;

(Footnotes)

¹ Strong’s NT #53

² Strong’s NT #40

Purity of Heart

Question: How does your spiritual health compare to your physical health?

You wouldn't intentionally put poison into your body. We are all conscientious of our physical health, and many of us are working to improve it. Some of us are trying to build muscle; others are trying to maintain healthy eating habits. We know that certain substances are harmful to us, and we would never consider putting them into our body.

That being said, how is your spiritual health? Are you making a daily, conscious effort to improve your relationship with God? Are you disciplining yourself to run the race of life with Heaven as the goal, 1 Corinthians 9:24-27? If so, it begins with pursuing purity of the heart.

You see, whatever goes into your heart will come out in your life. God has charged you with keeping your heart. According to Paul, the goal of gospel teaching was to create Christians who *"love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith,"* 1 Timothy 1:5. Christians that pursue purity are stewards of their hearts. If impurity, wickedness, and sin are invited into your heart and entertained in your mind, eventually they will spill out through your attitudes and actions. Thus we need to pursue purity of heart. The pure in heart will see God, Matthew 5:8.

Read Acts 5:1-11 and answer the following questions.

What were Ananias and Sapphira attempting to get away with? _____

Where had this plan been conceived? _____

What can God know about us that no one else can ever know? _____

Ananias and Sapphira had a heart problem that led to their lie. Clearly their hearts were full of pride (they wanted the praise that a large donation

would bring) and greed (they wanted to keep money back while appearing selfless). Impure hearts cost them their lives. In similar fashion, impure hearts will cost many their souls.

Usually the Bible does not use the word “heart” to speak of an organ. Instead, “heart” incorporates the person’s mind, emotions, and will.

“Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life,” Proverbs 4:23.

“For as he thinks in his heart, so is he,” Proverbs 23:7.

“As in water face reflects face, so a man’s heart reveals the man,” Proverbs 27:19.

Seeds in the Heart

There is a principle taught throughout the Bible that we must respect: we reap what we sow, Galatians 6:7-8; Job 4:8; Hosea 10:12; 2 Corinthians 9:6; Romans 2:6-11. The seed planted in the heart will bear fruit in the course of life.

In the following passages, can you identify the seed in the heart and the fruit it produced?

Matthew 5:21-22. Seed: _____

Fruit: _____

Matthew 5:27-30. Seed: _____

Fruit: _____

Luke 6:45. Seed: _____

Fruit: _____

Think of your heart as a sponge in a bucket of water. It is constantly soaking up images, messages, and suggestions from whatever surrounds it. Once a moment of temptation arrives (James 1:13-15), pressure is applied. Your heart (the sponge) is squeezed. Whatever is in it comes pouring out in attitude, speech, and behavior. Will you resist the temptation or fall? It depends on what you have in your heart. Do not deceive yourself into thinking that you can poison your heart and have a healthy, pure, God-pleasing life. You reap what you sow!

Read Mark 7:20-23. Write down all the negative things that pour out of a wicked heart. _____

An Unguarded Heart

Many of us need to wake up and guard our hearts! It is too easy for the evil one to access our hearts and plant wicked thoughts and suggestions! To pursue purity of heart we must guard our heart vigilantly and proactively, Proverbs 4:23. We cannot afford to be lazy or indifferent about what goes into our hearts!

Brainstorm several ways that materials/ideas/images penetrate your heart.

Read Psalm 101:3-4. Explain David’s strategy to keep his heart pure. _____

Gateways to the Heart

The Bible shows us that material enters our hearts through our eyes and ears.

Our eyes are a gateway to the heart, 1 John 2:16.

John warns us about the lust of the eyes. This should immediately alert us to what we are viewing. What do you look at when you’re watching T.V. and movies, or reading websites, books, or magazines? Let’s take honest inventory of the content!

Choose a television show that you regularly watch. Put an “X” by the behaviors you have seen portrayed in it. Mark all that apply.

T.V. Show Name: _____

Profanity (even if “bleeped”) _____

Rude, Crude, or Crass Humor _____

Pre-marital or Extra-marital sex _____

Homosexuality _____

Nudity (even if blurred) _____

Alcohol use _____

Drug Use _____

What are you watching? This is a question for all of us who own a television. I want us to think about the gateway of the eyes! I'm not saying if someone sees homosexuality (or any of the rest of the list) on television, they will practice homosexuality. But when we see these things again and again, we can become desensitized, tolerant, and eventually accepting of impurity and immorality. Once the seeds are planted, they will grow.

Read Ephesians 4:29; 5:4, 18; Hebrews 13:4; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; 1 Timothy 2:9-10; 1 Peter 4:1-3.

If we follow the Scriptures and pursue purity, what should our attitude be toward the activities on the above list? _____

How many hours do you think you view questionable content each week? Compare that time to the number of hours spent in worship service, Bible class, prayer, or daily devotions – time that we receive the good seed of God's word, Luke 8:11! Do you see how our hearts can get polluted in a hurry?

Our eyes are a gateway to our heart. The more we view impurity and unrighteousness, the more normal it appears to us. The next thing we know we are thinking about impurity, talking about impurity, and perhaps finally acting impurely. Pursue purity of heart! Guard your eyes!

Read Job 31:1. What did Job do to protect the purity of his heart? _____

Our ears are a gateway to our heart, Proverbs 23:12.

Solomon links the ears and eyes as avenues to the heart which should be held sacred for wisdom and spiritual instruction, Proverbs 4:20-21. Just as with our eyes, let us consider the content placed before our ears. Are you listening to...

- Song lyrics celebrating drugs, violence, and opposing authority figures?
 - Song lyrics glorifying pre-marital sex, casual sex, and hooking up?
 - Music videos objectifying women while glamorizing drug/ alcohol abuse and partying?
 - Blasphemy and profanity during prime-time television shows?
 - Friends who gossip, speak vulgarities, or take the Lord's name in vain?
-
-

How often do we receive such messages during “drive-time” radio alone? We can be so taken with a tune or a beat that we only half-listen to the lyrics. But we’re hearing those ideas. The more we hear and the longer we listen, the more acceptable immorality and impurity become to us. Guard your ears!

Controlling Our Thought Life

Our thought life nourishes the suggestions and ideas planted in our hearts. That’s why Christians are told to capture their thoughts, 2 Corinthians 10:3-5. We choose what we dwell upon. We can see an image flashed on the television screen for only a split second, but then we opt to replay it in our minds again and again (ex: beer commercial, erotic scene, lottery ad). We can obsess over it. But that is wrong. We are not slaves to fantasies. We’ve been given the power and the mandate to control our thought-life, Colossians 3:1-2. That means we can choose to think about something else.

You cannot recapture innocence. Whether or not you dwell on evil thoughts, remember this: once you’ve been exposed to ungodliness, it is there in the back of your mind. You can’t erase what you’ve seen or heard. The messages have an effect on you and can pop into your mind. You will either re-live unwanted experiences or develop a false reality of sin without consequences.

Read Romans 12:1-2. What does it teach about the Christian’s mind? _____

Read 2 Peter 3:1-2; James 3:17. What has God given so that the Christian’s mind may be pure? _____

So what should we think about? on the next page, listed on the left side of the chart, is the Holy Spirit’s answer to this question. On the right side, you’ll find the opposite.

<u>Philippians 4:8-9</u>	
Meditate on These...	Not These...
1. True	False
2. Noble	Selfish/
Cowardice	
3. Just	Unjust/
Injustice	
4. Pure	Polluted/
Defiled	
5. Lovely	Ugly

Are we usually interested in watching, listening, and meditating on the things listed in Philippians 4:8-9, or the opposites of those things? Explain your answer. _____

Read Philippians 4:8-9 again and know that this is the material that should pass before your eyes and speak to your ears. These are the things that Christians should dwell upon and pray to God about. These are the good seeds that will find precious soil in a pure heart, mature, and bear fruit a hundredfold for the glory of God!

In Your Pursuit of Purity...

- Control the gateways to your heart: Eyes and Ears.
 - Stop allowing garbage and wickedness in; it can only pollute your heart.
 - Take control of your thought life.
 - Bring good things (God's things) into your
-
-