

Introduction:

We've all heard, "Start with the heart." We hear plenty of sermons and exhortations to work on our heart and not just the externals. In fact, that is exactly what we heard in our last lesson. The Pharisees cleaned the outside of the cup, but left the inside dirty, thus they were defiled and were defiling. Their external rituals and rule-keeping did not cleanse their rotten-to-the-core hearts. And so we learn that we must work on the heart. And that sounds all well and good. But what does that really mean? How do we actually work on our hearts, minds, and souls? How do we clean the inside of our cup and dish? Let's examine some practical ways we accomplish that.

Discussion:

- I. Ask God to cleanse your heart.
 - A. **Proverbs 20:9** presents the big problem for us. No matter how much we work on our heart, we can't purify it or make it clean. The first practical step we must take is recognizing that.
 - B. Therefore, we follow in the footsteps of our forefather David in **Psalms 51:10**. We ask God to work on our heart. We ask Him to purify and cleanse our hearts. We see this again in **Psalms 139:23-24**. David asks God to search his heart, find all the grievous ways and replace them by leading David in the everlasting way.
- II. Pray without ceasing.
 - A. Obviously, asking God to cleanse your heart is a prayer. I am not, however, just talking about that particular request. I'm talking about prayer in general. In **Philippians 4:6-7**, Paul explains that when we pray with thanksgiving, the peace of God will guard our hearts and minds.
 - B. **1 Thessalonians 5:16-18** demonstrates that prayer must be a consistent part of our lives. Whatever the situation, we need to take it to God in prayer. Sometimes it will be because we have an anxiety to cast on Him, sometimes because we have a request to make of Him, sometimes because we have a blessing for which to thank Him. Don't let prayer be a checklist item, simply doing the bare minimum each day to claim you have prayed. Let prayer be a way of life, making conversation with the Lord a highlight of your day.
- III. Become single-minded.
 - A. **James 4:8** says, "...purify your hearts, you double-minded" (ESV). Who has an impure heart? The double-minded. Thus, our hearts become pure when we make our minds single, that is, when we follow Jesus Christ with single-minded devotion.
 - B. In the Sermon on the Mount, when Jesus says we are not to be anxious for life, health, clothing, or food in **Matthew 6:25**, the word "anxious" refers to being divided. When our devotion is divided between Jesus and anything else, we have two masters and no one can serve two masters (**Matthew 6:24**). If you want to purify your heart, work on purifying your devotion. Let Jesus have precedence over every other potential master.
- IV. Set your mind on God's things.
 - A. If you want to become single-minded, you have to change what you think about. In **Matthew 16:23**, we hear Jesus rebuke Peter saying, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man" (ESV). Peter was not thinking like God, but like man. We remember what God said in **Isaiah 55:8-9**. He doesn't think like we think. We need to learn to think like God thinks, think about what God thinks about, think on God's things.
 - B. **Colossians 3:2** puts it this way: "Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth" (ESV). What things do you think about? Is your mind constantly wrapped up in earthly, fleshly things? Spend time meditating and thinking on heavenly and godly things. As **Philippians 6-8** says, we need to direct our minds to what is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, excellent, praiseworthy things. No doubt, stray thoughts will plague us, but we must work to direct and set our thoughts on God's things.
- V. Value what God values.
 - A. If you want to think what God thinks, you have to learn to value what God values. In **Matthew 6:21**, Jesus explains that our heart will be wherever our treasure is. If our treasure is earthly, our heart will be focused

on earthly things. If money, fame, power, popularity, pleasure are our treasures, our heart and mind will be focused on earth. However, if our treasure is heavenly, our heart and mind will be set on heavenly things.

- B. Sadly, too often the reason we value other things is because we have idolatry in our hearts. I hate to admit it, but we sometimes have idols above Jehovah God. Fill in the blank in this statement: "I would be happy if I just had _____." Whatever you put in that blank is taking a higher place than God. We need to have the same mindset as the psalmist in **Psalm 73:25**. It is the same message as **Hebrews 13:5**. We must learn contentment in having a relationship with God. When we value God and God's things above everything else, we'll think God's thoughts, and our hearts and minds will be pure.

VI. Be in God's Word.

- A. Just read **Psalm 119** sometime and see how the Word of God impacts the heart. For now, consider **Psalm 119:9-16**. We keep our way pure by keeping it according to God's Word. We seek God with our whole heart by walking in His commandments. We overcome sin by storing the Word in our hearts.
- B. Notice the psalmist takes this farther than merely studying and memorizing. He delighted in God's Word. Being in God's Word was not a "got to" but a "get to" prospect. It was joyful to him. But notice what happened as he delighted in and stayed in God's Word. "With my lips I declare all the rules of your mouth" (**Psalm 119:13**, ESV). When our heart is impure, sin comes out. We learned that in our previous lesson. But when God's Word is our study, meditation, and delight, it becomes our conversation. It scrubs the inside of our heart and the outside follows. Charles Spurgeon spoke about John Bunyan, author of *Pilgrim's Progress* in the 1600s: "Why, this man is a living Bible! Prick him anywhere; his blood is Bibling, the very essence of the Bible flows from him. He cannot speak without quoting a text, for his very soul is full of the Word of God."¹ I pray that someday this may be said of me and of all of us.

VII. Guard what goes into your heart.

- A. Certainly if God's Word and God's praises are going into our heart and mind, we are going a long way to getting our heart pure. But keep in mind that Satan will do what he can to keep it out of our heart or to minimize its impact. He'll do this by filling combative concepts, philosophies, and thoughts. If he can fill us with worldly thinking, he can minimize the impact of our time in God's Word.
- B. Jesus makes this point in **Mark 7:18-19**. He explained that foods won't make someone unclean because they go into the stomach, not the heart. What we have to be concerned about are the things that go into the heart. Thus, **Proverbs 4:23** tells us to guard our hearts. Protect your heart from worldly thinking. As kids we learn the song, "Oh be careful little eyes." We sing about what we see and what we hear. We need to be careful about those things. If we watch movies and tv shows, listen to songs, read books and magazines that fill our hearts with worldly, fleshly thinking we are going to become worldly, fleshly, unclean people. Guard what goes into your heart.

VIII. Give as alms what is within.

- A. In **Luke 11:39-41**, when Jesus actually rebuked the Pharisees for not cleaning the inside of the cup, He gave them some advice. He said to "Give as alms those things that are within, and behold, everything is clean for you" (ESV). I think this contrasts two issues for the Pharisees. First, it contrasts with the greed Jesus just claimed their hearts and minds were filled with. Instead of letting their hearts and minds focus on greed, that is on taking from others, they needed to let their hearts and minds focus on giving. They needed to think about service, love, sacrifice. If their hearts dwelt on how they could serve and help others rather than what they could get from others, all things would be clean to them. Second, it contrasts with their general approach of giving alms as described in **Matthew 6:2**. Even when they gave alms to those in need, they weren't doing so to serve others. They were doing so to receive recognition. They would give money to people if they could get recognition for it. But they didn't give themselves to God or anyone.
- B. This is an extension of **II Corinthians 8:5**. The Macedonians had given themselves first to God. Because of that, they gave themselves in service to others. What we learn from this is not that God wants us to give from the heart. He wants us to give our hearts. Give our hearts and minds to God and then we'll give them to others. Our insides will be clean and then our outsides will follow.

Conclusion:

Scrub the inside of the cup. The outside will follow. Don't be like the Pharisees; give your heart to God.

¹ John MacArthur, "Why I Still Preach the Bible after Forty Years of Ministry," [Preaching the Cross](#), Crossway Books, Wheaton, IL, 2007, p.150.