

MAN IN THE MIRROR BIBLE STUDY
BIBLICAL MANHOOD - A CLEAN HEART
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Good morning, men.

Ken Moar gave this to me. The subject is eating and drinking health facts????? The Chinese eat very little fat and suffer fewer heart attacks than the British or Americans. On the other hand, the French eat a lot of fat and also suffer fewer heart attacks than the British or Americans. The Japanese drink very little red wine and suffer fewer heart attacks than the British or Americans. The Italians drink excessive amounts of red wine and also suffer fewer heart attacks than the British or Americans. Conclusion: Eat and drink what you like; it's speaking English that kills you.

What I want to do this morning is talk about a subject that is even more confusing than that. You can use statistics to say almost anything you want as that little illustration shows, but you can also use the Bible to prove almost anything you want to if you take things out of context or take little bits and pieces of it and don't look at the total. I want to talk to you about a very important subject this morning, but I am going to start in a rather round about way.

Samuel Huntington, a Harvard scholar, has written a book that, as I understand it, is required reading in the State Department. It's called *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order*. In this book he talks about the moral decay of the west. He says, "Far more significant than economics and demography are problems of moral decline, cultural suicide and political disunity in the west." Then he goes on to give these various, often-noted points of moral decline. 1) Increases in anti-social behavior, such as crime, drug use and violence, generally; 2) Family decay including increased rates of divorce, illegitimacy, teen pregnancy, single-parent families; 3) At least in the United States, a decline in social capitals, the decrease of volunteerism; 4) A general weakening of the work ethic and the rise of a cult of personal indulgence; and 5) Decreasing commitment to learning and intellectual activity which manifests itself in lower scholastic achievement. Then he goes on, "The future health of the west and its influence on other societies depends on considerable measure upon its success in coping with these trends." That has a certain ring of truth to it, does it not that there would need to be some moral reformation, some moral turnaround of our society if our civilization is to make it?

I've been talking with a friend of mine about what can be done in our country about the moral decline, as are millions of other people talking about it obviously, and his vision has been to bring Christians together to address these moral problems. There are many groups who are already addressing these problems. But I asked him an interesting question, and I'll ask you. Do you think that a moral reformation will bring about a spiritual reformation or that a spiritual reformation will bring about a moral reformation? I'm not sure that it really is either/or, but I am sure that the priority would be for a spiritual reformation. I look to history to give you that conclusion. There are three great figures in the reformation and they were Calvin, Luther and can anybody guess who the third one was? Any history buffs? Swingley???? was the great reformer of Zurich. I'll tell you what, Fred has finally surprised me. Fred, everything else you've ever said has never surprised me, but this has truly surprised me, and I'm impressed.

Now, Luther was Calvin's hero. Did you know this? Calvin thought Luther was a true apostle and said, "Even if he curses me, I would still call him a saint." Luther and Swingley had two very different approaches to reformation. Swingley was interested in reforming morals - how people behaved. Luther was more interested in reforming the doctrine of what people believed. Eventually, Swingley adopted some of Luther's emphasis, but the reality is that Luther was shooting for theological reformation; Swingley was shooting for a moral reformation, and we all know, because of history, that Luther's reformation is the reformation that really captured the world.

This morning, when we look at things like the moral decline of the west, and so forth, we wonder should we be attacking the behavior problems or should we be looking at the way people believe?

John Owen, who came along a century or so later, one of the leading Puritan thinkers, said that we should preach to the heart, that we should preach to the sin beneath the sin. His idea was that the issue is not that you lie, you lie right? Everybody lies, right? The issue is not so much that you lie, it's not excluded that you lie, or that you cheat, or that you lust after women (you do lust after women, right, or you lust after something, so I hope it's women), or the issue is not so much that you are greedy or have been having an adulterous relationship, the issue is not so much the sin you do, but why you would do it at all. That is what Owens talks about when he talks about preaching to the sin beneath the sin.

Mary Crabb makes the distinction between the presenting problem which is at the level of what behavior? That's the lying, cheating, the greed, whatever it is. That is the presenting problem and the core problem. The core problem is the sin beneath the sin. It's what going on in the heart that would make a man want to sin at all in the first place. So, that brings us to a great focus of Scripture - the heart.

The last time we were together, we did Psalm 73, and we asked the question, "When I see the prosperity of the wicked, those fat cats who strut about wearing pride like a necklace, and given all of my own troubles and my own pain and the envy that this gives me over to, was it for nothing that I kept my heart pure?" The issue of the heart.

I have a great dad. My dad's probably not very much longer for this world, as it stands today, and my dad has a clean heart. He is a morally, pure person. He's always been that way. That's the one thing that I admire most about my dad is his integrity. He just has a clean heart. He's always had that. So when I began to pray for the young man that would one day marry my daughter, the thing I've been praying now for 26 years and 7 months, (she turns 26 today, and we found out that my wife was pregnant at about two months), the prayer we have prayed every day is that our daughter would marry a young man with a clean heart. Doesn't that pretty much say it all? Why, do we pray that way? She's my daughter that why we pray that way. I don't want someone to marry my daughter who is not pure of heart; he's not seeking after God.

Well, the Bible puts a great deal of emphasis on the heart. I mentioned a book a few weeks ago by Thomas Watson, *The Godly Man's Picture*, and in the preface the first thing he says when he quotes Psalm 24, Verses 3 and 4. "Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? The answer is he that has clean hands and a pure heart. To describe such a person is the work of this book. Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew its steadfast spirit within me. Surely God is good to Israel to those who appear in heart. He who loves a pure heart and whose speech is gracious shall have the King for his friend." That's my verse this year and last year. I didn't get it right last year so I'm repeating it this year. "He who loves a pure heart and whose speech is gracious will have a King for his friend." Proverbs 22:11.

From the Sermon on the Mount, "Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God. The goal of this command is love which comes from the pure heart. Flee the evil desires of youth and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart."

A great deal of emphasis is placed in the Bible on this subject of a man's heart. Why? Why does the Bible put so much emphasis on the heart especially over against your behavior? Well, there are two things I want to cover briefly this morning. First of all, so much emphasis is put on our heart because of the centralities of the heart and because of the vulnerability of the heart. I want to talk to you briefly about each of those then we're going to have a special treat this morning. Scott Alexander is going to close our time together, and he's going to be singing a song that I'm going to ask to be our closing prayer. I am going to thank Scott right now for singing because when he's done, Scott, I'm going to ask you to say "Amen" then we will be done and, secondly, because the last time you sang, I forgot to say "thank you" to you, so I want to be sure and get it in.

The centrality of the heart - The Bible says that David was a man after God's own heart. When David was being selected to be anointed as King, Samuel went through all of Jesse's sons, but didn't take David until the very last. In 2 Samuel it says that God's _____ from the outward appearance, but God looks on from the heart." 2 Chronicles: Chapter 16 says, "The eyes of the Lord range to and fro throughout the earth looking to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to the Lord.

Sometime ago, I read a piece in here, and some things are worth reviewing because they're so seminal. This is out of the *Philosophy of and Theology of Ministry for Man in the Mirror* and it's two short paragraphs on the centrality of the heart. Paul said, "For me to live as Christ, to help a man change the core affections of his heart is easily the greatest contribution we can make to Christ's work. We will encourage men to let Jesus be their highest and best thought in every situation. It is an error to deal with the outward and not deal with the inward motivational structure of the heart. The focal point of our message must be a man's heart. The deeper issues are not merely the sins that a man commits, but the unbelief that would make a man sin at all." Back to the point that John Owen is making preaching to the sin beneath the sin. "Idols make promises they cannot keep which is why you can be on a winning streak and still feel empty. We will help men understand that the battleground is the heart. The issue is looking to anything except Jesus for what we need. An idol is anything of which I say, 'I need this to be happy.'" The centrality of the heart in Scripture, then, secondly, the vulnerability of the heart.

I am going to read to you, and you may want to jot down the address, from Jeremiah: Chapter 17, Verses 9 and 10. It says, "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond fear. Who can understand it? That's the heart. Have the Lord to search the heart and examine the mind to reward a man according to his conduct according to what his deeds deserve." That's very interesting. So the Lord searches the heart to reward a man according to his deeds. Well, behavior is important, but behavior flows out of our heart, so the heart is the issue more so than the resulting behavior although it is also important. Does anybody hear me saying that what you do is not important, that your behavior is not important? Of course, it's important, but what's even more important is the heart that it flows from. The Scriptures tell us that, "Out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks."

Proverbs: Chapter 20, Verse 9 says, "I have kept my heart pure and clean without sin." David was a man after God's own heart. Yet, his heart was a vulnerable heart just like yours and mine. We all know that David was playing around with sin in his mind. You don't just one day walk down a street and fall into bed with another woman. You realize this doesn't happen. Those of you who are walking around as Christians and are afraid to look to the left and to the right because you are walking with Jesus, but you know you are afraid if you look at anything you are going to fall into this ditch of sin. That's not how it happens. David didn't just one day see a woman and hop into bed with her. He allowed himself to develop a private thought life or emotional attachment, and you have to turn these temptations over and over in your mind. Look, we've been doing this Bible Study for how long - 16 years? Some of you guys have been to jail. Some of you guys have been in adulterous relationships. Some of you men have been cohabitating with women. Some of you men have been cheating your customers, and some of you have moved in and out of this. Some of you are in victory right now, but some of you are in sin. How do you think that happens? How can you go to a Bible Study on Friday morning, go to your church on Sunday, then talk the talk around the table then go out and do these things? How does that happen? How does David sleep with a woman and then kill her husband to cover it up? How does this happen? There are some private thoughts going on in your heart, and the one thing that you could do this morning that would absolutely liberate you from this bondage, if you would have the courage to do it, would be to confess your private thoughts to the men at your table and invite them to hold you accountable. In fact, we're going to be handing out this morning the wallet-size Accountability Cards. Some of you are very, very high risk. You know what? Some of you in the next 12 months are going to ruin your life not because your behavior right now is not moral or pure or clean, because it is right now, but you're playing around in your heart with secret thoughts, thoughts which lead to beliefs and beliefs that lead to desires. If you don't put yourself in a position of being accountable for these private thoughts, you're going to fall.

Richard Baxter who, I guess with John Owen, some people consider to be the two best thinkers of the Puritans. He has a little guide in his book *The Puritan Pastor* for men like me who talk to men like you. He says this. "We must study," speaking to me, "to build up those who are already truly converted." That's you. Look, I believe you are truly converted - most of you. Some of you are here as inquirers, and we welcome that as well. Most of you, though, are truly converted. All are welcome here. But here's what Baxter tells me that I should tell those of you who are truly converted. He says, "There are four groups of you. The first group of you - there are many of our flock who are young and weak though they are of long standing are yet of small proficiency or strength. This indeed is the most common condition of the Godly. Most of them content themselves with low degrees of grace, and it is not easy to get them higher." Some of you it's not easy to help you. This is probably overstating a case to make a point, but sometimes I feel like I want to be successful more than you want to be successful. Some of you. I tend to believe that way about some of you. It is a very sad thing for Christians to be weak. So that's the weak.

"The second group - another class of converts that need our special help are those who labor under some particular corruption which keeps under their graces and makes them a trouble to others and a burden to themselves. Some are especially addicted to pride." Some of you men are especially addicted to pride. Me, too, and others are worldly minded. Some of you are especially addicted to worldliness. In fact, some of you are very much addicted to sexual desires and others to disobedience or other evil passions.

"Another class who demand special help are declining Christians that are either falling into some scandalous sin or a diligence and show they have lost their former love as a case of backsliders is very sad. So our diligence must be very great for their recovery." That's why I'm talking to you about the heart this morning. Are you weak? Are you laboring under some particular corruption? Are you in decline?

"Fourth group - the last class I note here requires our attention are the strong for they also have need of our assistance probably to preserve the grace they have, partly to help them in making further progress and probably to direct them in improving their strength for the service of Christ and of others."

There are those four groups here this morning. Take heed. Take heed, and embrace the Lord, Jesus Christ. The big idea this morning comes right out of Psalm 51, Verse 10 when David prays out of his depth. David knew that he could not give himself a pure heart. He prayed, "Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit in me. Do not pass me from your presence or take Your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation and grant me a willing spirit to sustain this."

The big idea this morning is, quite simply, I will invite Jesus to create in me a clean heart.

Song following.....

The big idea this morning, I will invite Jesus in me to create a clean heart; the work of Jesus. Jesus does the ministry, right? Don't go out of here and try to behave Christianly. Invite Jesus to create in you a clean heart.

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