

GOSPEL-DRIVEN GODLINESS AND CHURCH LEADERSHIP  
PART 8

TEXT: TITUS 1:5-16

March 25, 2013

**INTRODUCTION/REVIEW:**

“The life and ministry of the local church needs to be self-consciously gospel-centered if it is to maintain any kind of effectiveness for the kingdom of God,” (*Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture*, Graeme Goldsworthy, p. 129). The need to be self-consciously gospel-centered is exactly what was being threatened in the Cretan churches. Paul says there are many false teachers (1:10) in Crete turning people away from the centrality of the gospel. This is why Paul exhorts Titus to appoint godly leadership (1:6-9) as well as to oppose ungodly leadership (1:10-16).

- A. APPOINT GODLY LEADERSHIP IN THE CHURCH (1:6-9)
- B. OPPOSE UNGODLY LEADERSHIP IN THE CHURCH (1:10-16)

Just as Paul helped Titus and the churches recognize and appoint godly leadership, so Paul helps Titus and the churches recognize and oppose ungodly leadership. In 1:10-16, Paul gives 12 characteristics of false teachers and 2 action steps to take in order to prevent false teachers from harming the church. In 1:10-16, Paul explains why Titus' appointment of qualified leadership in the Cretan churches is so important.

**LESSON:**

- I. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF FALSE TEACHERS
  - A. FALSE TEACHERS ARE INSUBORDINATE. V. 10
  - B. FALSE TEACHERS ARE EMPTY TALKERS. V. 10
  - C. FALSE TEACHERS ARE DECEIVERS. V. 10
  - D. FALSE TEACHERS ARE DESTRUCTIVE. V. 11

False teachers turn people away from the centrality of the gospel and the sufficiency of Christ for salvation and godliness.

- E. FALSE TEACHERS ARE GREEDY. V. 11

False teachers seek to exploit God's people rather than serve and protect them.

F. FALSE TEACHERS ARE A REFLECTION OF FALLEN CULTURE. VV. 12-13A

We previously learned how the false teachers' character and conduct epitomized the worst of Cretan society. Rather than being shaped by the gospel they were shaped by the fallen culture of Crete. This leads us to a seventh characteristic of the false teachers in vv. 13a-14.

**LESSON:**

G. FALSE TEACHERS ARE DEVOTED TO MAN-MADE LAWS. VV. 13B-14

Paul writes, "13 ...Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith, 14 not devoting themselves to Jewish myths and the commandments of men who turn away from the truth."

In vv. 13b-16, Paul exposes the fundamental error of the false teachers who were espousing a Judaizing Christianity. At the heart of their error is a rejection of both God's law and gospel. In vv. 13b-14, Paul shows that instead of being devoted to God's law and gospel, the false teachers were devoting themselves to Jewish myths and commandments of men, which they claimed to be derived from God's law. But, in reality their rules and regulations obscured the real intent and meaning of the God's law and thus led believers away from the gospel.

1. DEVOTION TO JEWISH MYTHS

First, Paul says they were devoting themselves to "Jewish myths." By calling them, "Jewish myths," Paul draws attention to the fact that the false teachers were Judaizing Christians who were devoted to fanciful rabbinical exegesis to the detriment of the gospel (cf. Kelly, *The Pastoral Epistles*, p. 45). "Jewish myths" refer to fictitious, legendary tales based on rabbinic interpretations of the OT. These fictitious tales centered on the genealogies of the patriarchs (Adam, Moses, Elijah, etc..., cf. 3:9; see Knight, p. 300; Kelly, pp. 44-45; Hendriksen, p. 351).

In 1 Timothy 1:4, Paul says such myths "promote speculations rather than the stewardship (i.e., the outworking of God's plan of salvation) from God that is by faith." In 1 Timothy 4:7, Paul calls these "myths" "irreverent" and "silly." In 2 Timothy 4:3-4, Paul warns Timothy that, "3 ...the time is coming when people will not endure sound (healthy) teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, 4 and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths."

Because the teaching of the false teachers is fictitious, it lacks divine authority. Paul says the false teachers are devoted to "commandments of men," (laws of merely human origin).

2. DEVOTED TO COMMANDMENTS OF MEN

“The great characteristic of the Jewish faith was its thousands of rules and regulations,” (William Barclay, *The Letters to Timothy, Titus and Philemon*, p. 244). The man-made laws—rule and regulations—of the false teachers are in distinction from what God forbids and requires in His law. Claiming to be devoted to God’s law, the false teachers were in reality only devoted to the commandments of men. They were insisting that the young Cretan believers devote themselves to human rules imposed by men but not authorized by God.

The phrase, “commandments of men” finds its OT roots in Isaiah 29:13, where the LORD rebukes Israel for replacing God’s law with commandments taught by men, thus obscuring the truth. Jesus quotes Isaiah 29:13 in Mark 7 (cf. Matt. 15:1-20) when He confronts the Pharisees on the issue of moral purity. Jesus rebukes the Pharisees and Scribes (experts in the law) who trusted in man-made rites of purification and thus nullified the real intent of God’s law, which requires inward, moral purity from the heart.

In Mark 7:6-9, Jesus says to the Pharisees and Scribes,

<sup>6</sup> ...“Isaiah prophesied correctly about you hypocrites, as it is written: ‘This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. <sup>7</sup> They worship me in vain, teaching as doctrine the commandments of men.’ <sup>8</sup> Having no regard for the command of God, you hold fast to human tradition.”  
<sup>9</sup> He also said to them, “You neatly reject the commandment of God in order to set up your tradition.

Jesus continues in vv. 10-13,

<sup>10</sup> For Moses said, ‘Honor your father and your mother,’ and, ‘Whoever insults his father or mother must be put to death.’ <sup>11</sup> But you say that if anyone tells his father or mother, ‘Whatever help you would have received from me is corban’ (that is, a gift for God), <sup>12</sup> then you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or mother. <sup>13</sup> Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like this.

The Mosaic Law required loving and honoring one’s father and mother, which involved caring for them, both financially and personally, in their old age. However, Jewish tradition allowed money originally dedicated to the care of one’s parents to be declared corban (i.e., “dedicated to God”). Such an unloving and dishonoring man-made commandment meant that that a person would no longer be required to do anything for his father or mother, who were truly in need of good works. Thus, Jesus says to the Pharisees and Scribes, “You nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down,” (Mk. 7:13).

Legalism leads to self-serving works that focus on oneself rather than neighbor-loving good works that benefit others. This is why Martin Luther exhorts, “If you want good works, do them for the benefit of your neighbor,” (Luther’s Works, vol.

29, p. 41). Like the Pharisees, the point Paul is making is that by devoting themselves to human commandments, the false teachers in Crete reject the commandment of God in order to set up their man-made laws. Fictitious, legendary, non-authoritative, human-derived tales are deceptive and full of meaningless talk (gospelless content), which turn people away from the “truth” (i.e., gospel, 1:14b).

“Truth” in the Pastoral Letters is a technical term for the gospel (cf. 1 Tim. 2:4; Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, p. 401). It is precisely because the false teachers misunderstand God’s law that they turn away from the gospel. The destructive deception of legalism is this: By rejecting the commandment of God in order to set up man-made laws, legalism reduces God’s law to the level of fallen man’s own ability and then gives the so-called “law-keeper” a false sense of justification.

Legalism masks the sinner’s serious condition before God as a lawbreaker as well as his or her need of Christ. Legalism gives the appearance of godliness but denies it power—the gospel, which produces godliness (2 Tim. 3:5). The fundamental error then of the false teachers was this: by being devoted to the commandments of men, they were rejecting the gospel of God and leading others to do the same.

What were these untrustworthy, non-authoritative commandments of human origin that the false teachers were devoted to? The “commandments of men” are ascetic practices, which Paul discusses in v. 15 (i.e., abstaining from certain foods and perhaps forbidding marriage (see Knight, p. 301; Mounce, p. 401; Fee, p. 180). This brings us to an eighth characteristic of false teachers.

#### H. FALSE TEACHERS ARE DEFILED. V. 15

The Jewish faith had numerous rules and regulations concerning what was clean and unclean. The Jewish false teachers were pushing a type of Judaizing Christianity that sought to supplement the gospel with ascetic purification ceremonies (see Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, pp. 706, 710). However, a supplemented gospel is no gospel! Those who deny Christ in one thing deny Him in everything (cf. Gal. 2:21; 3:18).

The false teachers were teaching the young, gullible Cretan believers that if they ate unclean foods they would be defiled but if they abstained they would be pure (see Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, p. 401; Paul may have in mind Haggai 2:13-14). “Abstinence for the sake of purity,” was their motto. Thus, these false teachers had a false understanding of purity. They were teaching man-made guidelines for purity before God. According to these false teachers, it was a sin (defiling) to eat certain foods. By eating unclean foods or by touching any unclean thing (Hag. 2:10-14), a morally pure person would become defiled whereas to abstain led to purity before God.

Paul attacks this false, legalistic notion head on and writes, “To the pure, all things are pure, but to the defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure; but both their minds

and their consciences are defiled.” To understand Paul’s argument in v. 15, it is necessary to understand that he is distinguishing between outward/ceremonial purity (legal purity) and inward/moral purity (gospel-purity). So, we might read Paul’s argument this way, “To the (morally) pure, all things are (ritually) pure, but to the (morally) defiled and unbelieving, nothing is (ritually) pure; but both their minds and their consciences are (morally) defiled” (see Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, p. 401).

Paul’s major point, like Jesus in Mark 7, is this: Food doesn’t defile. Rather, it is what resides in the heart that defiles (cf. Mk. 7:15-23- see below). From their self-righteous perspective, the false teachers, like the Pharisees and Scribes, saw themselves as morally pure because of their devotion to ceremonial (ascetic) observances. They emphasized that outward ceremonies were an essential part of one’s relationship with God. They taught that devotion to myths and commandments of men and observance of outward ceremonies were the gateway to salvation (see Mounce, p. 403).

The false teachers not only failed to realize that the ceremonial food laws of the Mosaic Covenant had been abrogated (abolished). But, they also failed to understand why they were given in the first place. The clean/unclean distinctions of food laws (cf. Lev. 11) were not given to teach Israel nutrition or hygiene but theology (i.e., the unclean and the holy must not meet, see Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture*, p. 161).

The food laws were given to show the Israelites how their sin had defiled them and separated them from God and thereby continually point them to their need of a Savior. They highlighted God’s absolute opposition of uncleanness to holiness; the utter separateness of God from a defiled/unclean fallen world.

The ultimate expression of this clean/unclean distinction was fulfilled at Calvary, where God the Father turned His back on His Son in utter abandonment. At this moment, Mark, in Mark 15:33-34, says “...there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice..., “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Total God-forsakenness while Jesus hung on the cross is the ultimate expression of God’s absolute opposition to all that is defiled and unclean because of sin. Paul expresses it like this, “For our sake He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God,” (2 Cor. 5:21).

God’s gave His law to serve as a strict disciplinarian that drives sinners to Christ (Gal. 3:24). God’s law gives us knowledge of our sin (impurity, defilement). Paul writes, “...through the law comes the knowledge of sin,” (Rom. 3:20).

In contrast man-made laws drive sinners deeper into themselves and away from Christ, who is the sole source of purity before God. Self is at the end of man’s laws

for unrighteousness to everyone who is unbelieving whereas Christ is the end of God's law for righteousness to everyone who believes (Rom. 10:4).

The gospel of God's saving grace stands in stark contrast to all forms of man-made rules and regulations. The essence of Christianity is not morality or ethics. What makes Christianity distinctive from every other religion is the gospel of grace. All other faiths command obedience to a set of rules, a system of ethical commands, in order to be in good standing with their "gods." In contrast, Christianity teaches that a person cannot be declared righteous by devotion to any set of rules or regulations. This is why Paul says in Titus 2:11 that the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people. Jesus came to live, die, and rise for sinners in order to do for them what they could never do for themselves.

Because of their false understanding of God's law, the false teachers valued external, ceremonial purity (legal) over internal, moral purity (gospel). They neglected God's law for the keeping of man-made laws. They possessed a false understanding of purity because their minds and consciences are defiled (2x, "μιάζω"; Note: "By saying that the defilement is in the false teachers' minds and consciences Paul signifies that it is internal and thus intrinsically moral and religious," (Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, p. 303).

#### 1. DEFILED MINDS

First, the minds of false teachers are defiled. "Mind" (νοῦς) refers to one's "way of thinking, mind, attitude...the sum total of the whole mental and moral state of being," (*BDAG*, 680). Because of the Fall, man's mind has become darkened and rendered incapable of understanding the things of the Spirit of God, which includes the gospel-way of purity.

In Ephesians 4:18, Paul writes, "They are darkened in their understanding, being alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardness of their hearts." Again, Paul writes, "A natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned," (1 Cor. 2:14).

The unbelieving mind does not have the spiritual ability to understand the things of God because he or she does not have the Holy Spirit. As a result of the Fall, man's mind is in total rebellion against God and His truth. Man's fallen mind is futile in his thinking in regard to the knowledge of God and His Word (Rom. 1:21). The natural man's mind is hostile to God and His Law. He thinks the gospel to be utter foolishness (Rom. 8:5-8; 1 Cor. 1:18).

Speaking of the false teachers in Ephesus, Paul writes,

<sup>3</sup> If someone spreads false teachings and does not agree with sound words (that is, those of our Lord Jesus Christ) and with the teaching that accords

with godliness, <sup>4</sup> he is conceited and understands nothing, but has an unhealthy interest in controversies and verbal disputes. This gives rise to envy, dissension, slanders, evil suspicions, <sup>5</sup> and constant bickering by people corrupted in their minds and deprived of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a way of making a profit.

Such a defiled mind stands in need of transformation/renewal (Eph. 4:23) in order to begin thinking in new and accurate ways about God, His Word and the world.

## 2. DEFILED CONSCIENCES

The “conscience” (συνείδησις) refers to man’s “inward faculty of distinguishing right and wrong, moral consciousness,” (BDAG, 967). Because man’s mind is darkened and hostile to God, His Law and gospel, the natural man’s conscience is unable to distinguish between right and wrong, what is morally pure and impure.

An unclean mind leads a man to see all things through the lens of uncleanness. These false teachers lacked the ability to truly discern what is morally pure and defiled. Warren Wiersbe writes, “...when they look at these innocent foods, they see sin, because sin has defiled their vision...It is not the foods which are defiling the teachers; it is the teachers who are defiling the foods,” (*The Bible Exposition commentary*, “Titus,” vol. 2, p. 263).

As previously noted, Paul’s point is that defilement and purity come from within. All foods are ritually clean and have nothing to do with one’s purity before God. In Acts 10:9-16, Jesus declared to Peter all food to be ritually clean (Acts 10:9-16). In 1 Timothy 4:1-5, Paul teaches that all things are clean because God created them good (cf. Gen. 1:31). But, when the false teachers looked at certain foods, they saw sin rather than goodness because sin defiled their minds and consciences. Consequently, the false teachers in Crete, like the false teachers in Ephesus, reject what God created to be gratefully received and deny the Creator’s goodness.

All of God’s gifts (e.g., food and marriage) are good and pure. But, to the one who is not morally pure, nothing is pure, as Paul says, “to the defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure...” These Jewish legalists had the “Midas touch.” But instead of everything they touched turned to gold, they defile everything they touch because both their minds and their consciences are defiled by unbelief.

In Mark 7:15-23, Jesus teaches that moral defilement runs much deeper than ceremonial impurity. He says,

<sup>15</sup> There is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him, but the things that come out of a person are what defile him.” <sup>17</sup> And when he had entered the house and left the people, his disciples asked him about the parable. <sup>18</sup> And he said to them, “Then are you also without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile

him, <sup>19</sup> since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled?" (Thus he declared all foods clean.) <sup>20</sup> And he said, "What comes out of a person is what defiles him. <sup>21</sup> For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, <sup>22</sup> coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. <sup>23</sup> All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.

Jesus says the fundamental problem of defilement is what resides in man's heart (what comes out (v. 21)...come from within (v. 23), not whatever goes into a person from the outside (i.e., food, v. 15). The "heart" in Scripture refers to the core of one's being, including the mind, will and emotions. Man's problem is a "heart" problem (internal defilement) rather than external, ritual defilement through food laws.

Paul is simply repeating what Jesus taught. The minds and consciences of these false teachers are "defiled" because they are "unbelieving" (1:15). "Unbelieving," means one who does not believe in Christ (Knight, p. 302). Moral purity means to be "cleansed of sin" and "made inwardly clean," (Knight, p. 302). Defilement is due to unbelief whereas purity comes by grace through faith in Christ alone. "The most basic aspect of their defilement is that they have not believed and therefore have not been cleansed by God from the defilement of sin," (Knight, p. 302). Those who seek moral purity before God by outward observance of rituals and human rules and commandments are not among the believing (God's people) but among the unbelieving.

Let us remember that rejection ("unbelieving") of the gospel leads to moral defilement before God. Ironically, the condition of defilement that the false teachers hoped to avoid by devotion to outward ceremonies is exactly the condition they are in. No amount of devotion to religious rules, rituals and regulations can lead to moral purity before God. Proverbs 30:12 says, "There are those who are clean in their own eyes but are not washed of their filth." The author in Hebrews 13:9 exhorts, "Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings, for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, which have not benefited those devoted to them." Devotion to human laws and regulation do not benefit the devotee. Grace, not self-righteous works, strengthens the heart (i.e., produces, nurtures moral purity).

From God's divine perspective, He sees the false teachers as defiled in their intellect and moral nature. The commandments of men say, "Do this and be pure," or, "You cannot be pure unless you abstain from this or do this." In contrast, the gospel of God says, "Believe in Christ who gave Himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession who are zealous for good works," (Titus 2:14).

Only the purifying power of the gospel can cleanse a defiled heart and make an impure heart clean. In Titus 3:5-6, Paul writes, "<sup>5</sup> He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness (e.g., abstaining from food and marriage-J.F.), but



according to His own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, <sup>6</sup> whom He poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior..."

There is an infinite difference between legal purity and gospel purity, which comes from the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom the Father poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ (Titus 3:5-6). Purity is possible only by the Spirit of regeneration, who washes away all our moral defilement before God.

#### **REFLECTION:**

As we reflect on these two characteristics of false teachers, there are two important lessons we learn.

##### 1. GOD'S LAW IS THE BELIEVER'S ONLY RULE OF PURITY.

Human rules and regulations have no authority to direct the believer in the pursuit of purity. Commandments of men are not binding on the Christian. No law of human origin has any authority or right to bind the conscience of a believer in the matter of purity before God. Believers in the church are under no obligation to obey false teachers who insist on devotion to human rules and regulations. Instead, such teachers are to be silenced, rebuked and if need be removed from the church (Titus 1:11, 13; 3:10).

Human rules and regulations are not only binding but they are also destructive to the believer's conscience and freedom. Whenever extra-biblical rules and regulations are demanded for purity this wickedly takes away from believers the freedom that God has given them (cf. *Calvin's Commentaries*, vol. 21, p. 306).

The believer's conscience is only to be held captive to what God requires and forbids in His law. As soon as extra-biblical commands of human origin are demanded, the believer loses his assurance and peace, "I do not know whether I am pleasing to God?" Thus, Paul condemns all commandments of men because by them man's conscience loses assurance that he is pleasing to God.

Man-made religious rules and regulations only bind and enslave the consciences of men. In contrast, the gospel, which is of divine origin and is fully trustworthy (i.e., trustworthy word deserving of full acceptance), frees burdened and enslaved consciences. The author of Hebrews writes, "how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God," (Heb. 9:14). This leads us to a second important lesson.

##### 2. GOD'S GOSPEL IS THE BELIEVER'S ONLY SOURCE FOR PURITY.

Human rules and regulations are futile for dealing with man's sin and the flesh. All forms of ascetic rules that people try to add to the gospel of grace undermine any hope of purity before God. In Colossians 2:20b-23, Paul asks the Colossian believers,

<sup>20</sup>...why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations— 21 “Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch” <sup>22</sup> (referring to things that all perish as they are used)—according to human precepts and teachings? <sup>23</sup> These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.” Asceticism teaches withdrawal/abstaining from the world as a means to holiness and that as a means to justification or righteousness before God. On the surface, ascetic practices have the appearance of godliness (e.g., popping one’s wrist with a rubber band every time one has an impure thought). Yet, such practices are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh. This is why Martin Luther counsels, “It is good to cast off the monastic life.” The error of asceticism has plagued the church for two thousand years.

Gospel purity—holiness—doesn’t come through abstinence (what we do) but rather through union with Christ (what Christ has done for us). No man has the ability to purify his heart. Moral cleansing from sin comes only through faith in Christ’s finished work on the cross (Titus 2:14). Purity of mind and peace of conscience are only found in Christ, who is our righteousness (1 Cor. 10:30). The gospel frees sin-weary Christians who labor under guilt and shame for their sin (past or present). The gospel-truth is that all who trust in Christ alone are pure before God. Isaiah, speaking to the people of Israel, says, “Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool.” David, in Psalm 51:7, prays, “Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.”

The false teacher’s devotion to external purity grew out of a failure to receive and rest in the sufficiency of the finished work of Christ. False teachers are not self-consciously gospel-centered. Rather, rather they turn away from the message of grace (Titus 1:14). Consequently, they are full of empty, useless, destructive, demonic, Christ-denying talk. They will talk about and emphasize any and everything for purity and holiness before God except Christ.

But, for genuine, qualified leaders who hold firm to the trustworthy word (1:9), Jesus is central, both for the believers and unbelievers. Godly leadership is self-consciously gospel-centered and therefore highly effective for the kingdom of God. Godly leaders emphasize that there is no purity in the sight of God but that of faith in Christ alone (Calvin’s Commentaries, vol. 21, p. 306).

Thus, “it follows,” writes Calvin, “that all unbelievers are unclean,” (Ibid, p. 306). Gospel-purity is not found in devotion to man-made rules and regulations. Gospel-purity comes through faith in the person and work of Christ alone as the author of Hebrews writes, “how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God,” (Heb. 9:14).

The real problem with man is what is on the inside and only the gospel has the power to transform a man from the inside out. Simply put no man can save himself. Devotion to external, man-made laws cut people off from the only One who can cleanse and empower them to live a life of godliness. None but Jesus can purify a fallen mind, cleanse a defiled conscience and empower a life of godliness.

The great Scottish preacher, Ralph Erskine, in a sermon entitled, "Self-Conceit to a Multitude of Professors; or, The Imaginary Pure Generation Found Not Washed From Their Pollution: The Nature and Excellency of Purity Opened: Self-Conceit Dissected (The Ninth Sermon on this Text), writes,

See what is the great tendency of true gospel-preaching; namely to discover and diminish all self-purity and self-righteousness, that Christ alone may be exalted: yea, the design of it is to level and dash down all that self-conceited purity, whereby people are pure in their own eyes, that it may advance gospel-purity, by which we may be pure in God's sight. Some make a vast noise about preaching up good works, and of their being friends to holiness and the law; while yet the tendency of their doctrine may be only to make people pure and holy in their own eyes, and in the eyes of men: but that which a gospel-minister especially aims at, is, to get people pure in the sight of God.

He cannot satisfy himself merely in preaching up good works, and charity, piety, devotion, mercy, tenderness, honesty, civility, morality, &c., which is very commendable; and would to God there were more of these; but he goes farther and labors principally to get the foundation of true holiness laid in the heart, self-purity mortified, the principles rectified, and Christ formed in the heart: otherwise, they build, without laying a foundation.

It may be observed, with regret, there never was less morality amongst persons of all ranks, than since so many ministers laid aside evangelical preaching, and made the inculcating moral duties their principal theme. And many who extol moral virtues, are themselves the most immoral persons. The Pharisees set up for great friends to the law, when Christ appeared on the stage; and they flouted at him, as if he had been an enemy to good works, when he was telling them that they were but hypocrites: "Think they (saith he), that I am come to destroy the law? Nay, Except your righteousness exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye cannot enter into the kingdom of God."

Why, they were pure in their own eyes; they verily imagined they were friends to holiness: yet they made clean but the outside, and were not internally washed from their filthiness. The doctrine of the Pharisees was much about *washings*, and legal purification: Yea, saith Christ; but I tell you, you must be pure in heart, otherwise you cannot see God. Why, say the

Pharisees, you must do good works, and bring forth good fruits: Yea, saith Christ; but make the tree good, otherwise the fruit cannot be good.

The principles must be changed, the nature renewed, and the soul implanted into Christ; then, and not till then, can any do what is spiritually good. Till there be both a spiritual habit of grace, wrought by the efficacious power of the Spirit of God; and a spiritual communication of heavenly influences, to excite that habit into exercise, there can be no pure act, no holy work acceptable to God: and whatever doctrine doth not aim at this, it comes so far short of pressing holiness, that it may indeed make hypocrites; but can never direct people how to go one step beyond hypocrisy and self-conceit: for, without this radical change, a man may well be pure in his own eyes, and in the eyes of others; but is not pure in God's eyes, nor washen from his filthiness (*The Works of Ralph Erskine*, vol. 1, pp. 375-376).

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