

## Blessed Are the Pure in Heart

Matthew 5:6

### Overview of the Beatitudes

Our study of the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-12) has shown us a three-fold structure. In each beatitude, there is . . . (1) a statement of **condition** (“blessed”), (2) a statement about the **character** (or actions leading from that character) of those in that condition, and (3) the **cause** for that condition

	Condition	Character (or the action springing from their character)	Cause (“because”)
5:3	Blessed are	the poor in spirit	because theirs is the kingdom of heaven
5:4	Blessed are	those who mourn	because they shall be comforted
5:5	Blessed are	the meek	because they shall inherit the earth
5:6	Blessed are	those who hunger and thirst for righteousness	because they shall be satisfied
5:7	Blessed are	the merciful	because they shall receive mercy
5:8	Blessed are	the pure in heart	because they shall see God
5:9	Blessed are	the peacemakers	because they shall be called sons of God
5:10	Blessed are	those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake	because theirs is the kingdom of heaven

### The Pure in Heart

In this sixth beatitude, Jesus exclaims that those who are “pure in heart” are “blessed” because “they will see God.” To understand the meaning of this beatitude, we should ask two questions: (1) Who are the pure in heart, and (2) Why are they blessed?

#### 1. Who are the pure in heart?

The answer to this question will become clear as we explore the meaning of *heart* and *pure*.

**Meaning of “heart.”** Throughout the Bible, the heart is the center of one’s being and the spring of one’s thoughts, affections, and actions. The heart is what trusts (Proverbs 3:5), imagines (6:18), lusts (6:25), understands (8:5), deceives (12:20), grieves (14:13), rejoices (15:30) and rages (19:3). In the context of the sermon on the mount, a person can, by a lustful look, even commit adultery in his heart (5:28)! No wonder Solomon urged his son, “Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life” (Proverbs 4:23).

Besides telling us what the heart *does*, the Bible also tells us what it is *for*—one’s heart is meant to be directed completely toward God, being filled with joy in God. “I give thanks to you, O Lord my God, with my whole heart, and I will glorify your name forever” (Psalm 86:12). Apart from God, the void in the human heart is limitless, for “he has put eternity into man’s heart” (Ecclesiastes 3:11). Clearly, hearts were made to be filled, not empty; *whole*, not broken or divided.

**Meaning of “pure.”** Pure, in its basic sense, means to be clean and free from defilement, like a window that has been meticulously polished. But it also means to be whole and undivided.

For example, to see clearly through binoculars, the lens must be *clean*—free from grit and grime. But they must also be *whole*—not cracked or broken. Whether cracked or cruddy, the lens will present a flawed image.

But what does it mean for a person to have a pure heart? It means that a person's most basic desires, the very spring of their actions are undefiled and undivided. Positively, it means that a person's affections are wholly fixed on God, resting in him alone for their satisfaction and joy. It is what the psalmist cries out for in Psalm 86:11, "Unite my heart to fear your name."

## 2. Why are they blessed?

Those with a pure heart are blessed because they will "see God."

But what does it mean to see God, and when will this happen? What it means to see God has been debated for centuries, and we must admit that we are now too limited to fully understand what this means. We can at least say that "seeing God" implies a personal experience of God's very being in all his glory. Moses begged for this (Exodus 33:18-23). David also longed for it (Psalm 27:4).

Now it becomes clear why having a pure heart is necessary to see God. For those whose hearts are *impure*, seeing God must be the greatest terror imaginable, and thus they will only "see" God in his wrath, as those spoken of in the book of Revelation who cried to the rocks: "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb" (Revelation 6:16). For the *pure* in heart, on the other hand, seeing God is their *summum bonum*—their highest good. "They will see his face," not in terror, but in exhilarating, eternal bliss: "Night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever" (Revelation 22:4-5).

So we must ask ourselves: how can our hearts be pure? Clearly all our attempts to purify ourselves are counterproductive (Jeremiah 17:9). A heart can be purified only by an act of God that we receive by faith. King David knew that if his heart would be whole and clean, God must "create" it in him (see Psalm 51:10). This is the very reason Jesus came to die on the cross, as Paul put it in Titus 3:4-5, "He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior."

## Questions for Discussion and Application

1. The writers of Scripture present seeing and experiencing God as humans' highest good. In our culture—and in our own hearts—why do we lose sight of (or fail to believe) this?
2. What evidence do you see that humans have a "God-shaped hole" in their hearts?
3. Consider two other times in which Jesus used the word "heart" in the Sermon on the Mount: Matthew 5:28 and 6:21. What do these passages reveal about how our hearts can be "divided" instead of "pure"?
4. Note how this beatitude, like the others, reveals the "already/not yet" aspect of the kingdom of God. Although we can truly say that we have seen God *already* (read 2 Corinthians 4:3-6), we also admit that we do *not yet* see him fully (read 1 Corinthians 13:12). Now read Hebrews 11:23-28 and explain how Moses sets an example for how we can "see" God in this "already/not yet" kind of way.