

Wonder

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Matthew 5:8

Love is not a feeling; it is an action. And like most actions, it can be faked. Those who claim to be doing good for others often have motivations that are actually harmful to those they claim to serve. Homelessness is a good example of this. How is allowing people to sleep on filthy streets in dangerous settings compassionate? How is helping people use drugs “safely” loving? Or in more ethically challenging examples, is it more loving to allow women with unwanted pregnancies to terminate them or to require them to carry them to term? Is it okay to promote Christians remaining in homosexuality to make them feel “welcome” in the church?

What these have in common is a failure to recognize the true motivations at work. They are clothed in the language of compassion, but at heart they are hateful. Love does not seek harm to another; it seeks their best interest. And when we dig down to the core issues at heart in these actions, we do not see those promoting them seeking the best interest of those caught in these conundrums. Mostly what we see is a motivation of greed and power. Those who promote these solutions often use them as a source of funding that allows them to stay in power. Even those who have promoted such ideas in the church have been exposed for their acceptance of funds from those with political agendas. (See *Shepherds for Sale: How Evangelical Leaders Traded the Truth for a Leftist Agenda* by Megan Basham.)

Love requires purity of heart. In the Greek this word means *clean* and is used with the meaning of free from impurity or evil desire. As explained by Bible Hub, “A pure heart is reflected in a life of integrity, where our actions align with our professed beliefs. This integrity is a powerful testimony to the world of God's transformative power.”¹

Thus, the question that is posed to us here by Jesus is, what is motivating your actions towards others? Why do you do the things you do? Foundationally our love for others should spring from our love for God. But practically, our actions towards others should spring from a desire to see the best done for them. We must love with a heart of sincerity.

What makes this difficult is that it often requires behavior that is outside of our comfort zone. It requires that we forgive, that we hold our tongue, that we control our reactions when we are angered, that we judge ourselves before we judge others. These are actions that desire the best for others, above ourselves. It requires that we not justify our own sin.

This requires spiritual introspection. Proverbs 4:23 says, “*Keep your heart with all diligence, For out of it spring the issues of life.*” Our personal blind spots keep us bound in our own hypocrisy if we do not seek the Spirit's guidance in showing us the wrong motivations of our heart. Jesus described this in the parable in Luke 18:9-14, of the Pharisee and the Publican where the Pharisee's fake sense of spirituality was directly tied to his spiritual blind spots.

A lack of purity leads to a lack of joy. Not only in the problems that ensue in our relationships due to hypocrisy, but also because of the distance it places in our relationship with God. Instead, Jesus tells us, that joy is found in a heart that seeks to rid itself of every shadow of sin through the cleansing sunlight of God's Spirit.



The Joy of Holiness

The real thing, not a cheap substitute.

Perfectly Clean

Embedded in the definition of pure is the concept of perfection. *“Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect,” Matthew 5:48.* Pure silver, for instance, is silver that has no impurities. In **Psalm 66:10**, what is necessary to achieve purity? *For You, O God, have tested us; You have refined us as silver is refined. We have to be refined and proved—our sin must be removed.*

According to **Hebrews 9:22, 27-28**, what did God require in order for something to be spiritually purified? How did Christ fulfill this requirement? *all things are purified with blood, so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many.*

How does **1 Peter 1:22** say our hearts are purified? (See also **1 John 2:3**.) *“Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit...” We have been saved through our acceptance of the truth of the Gospel through the revealing work of the Holy Spirit. Remember we do not work for our salvation, the Spirit reveals and convicts us, drawing us to God. 1 John 2:3 further explains that our obedience to God’s command to be saved results in our assurance that we know Him. Our continued desire to obey God also results in a sign of our salvation.*

Beyond salvation, what does **1 Peter 1:22** say changes in us? (See also **1 John 3:16-18**.) *We love our brothers. As 1 John tells us, “My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.”*

In Jesus’ call to perfection, He is stating an aspirational goal for Christians, not a promised reality in this life. The process whereby we become more perfect as we grow spiritually is known as *sanctification*. Paul describes this process in **Romans 12:1-2**. What steps are required?

1. Dedication to change
2. Rejection of worldly patterns – *models, fashions, customs, values*
3. Transformation – *fill and change your mind with God’s truth—true inward change (metamorphosis)*

Inherent in this process is a rejection of outward assimilation, the patterns of behavior the world around us unthinkingly adopts. The power of the sanctification process is an inward metamorphosis. Just as a caterpillar’s body is broken down in the cocoon into liquid and completely rebuilt into a butterfly,ⁱⁱ so sanctification should be a process that completely rebuilds us into something new. A holy life that is beautiful before God. Resisting the world and renewing our minds is not easy work. It takes a lifetime. What suggestion does Paul give in **Philippians 4:8** to help us train our minds?

...meditate on these things. Focus on truth, on pure ideas, on the positive and the good in life and other people. Celebrate God’s joy in life. As we have seen before, meditating—or ruminating over God’s Word is a necessary process to help us fully digest the truths of Scripture. Just simply hearing Biblical teaching is not enough, it is equivalent to thinking that smelling food will fill us up.



Perfectly Authentic

What is the opposite of being real? While it might be easier to afford cheap knockoffs, we generally find that they are too good to be true. Fakeness is not a quality that satisfies, particularly when it comes to people. Nothing is more despised than those who are inauthentic, who pretend to be something they are not. In our journey of sanctification, hypocrisy is a stumbling block because it seems like an easier path. Rather than open ourselves to the work of God in changing our hearts, we rely on our own strength to outwardly appear like we are truly spiritual. Is this possible according to **Proverbs 20:9, 11**? *“Who can say, “I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin””? No.*

What happens when we aren't authentic in our spirituality? (v. 11) *We may be able to fake it for a while, but just like a fake designer purse, our fakeness will not hold up to scrutiny. Eventually, people will be able to see through us and will know we are hypocrites.*

How does fake spirituality prevent spiritual growth according to **Proverbs 16:2**? *It causes us to justify our sin rather than be convicted of it. This keeps us from properly evaluating ourselves and our behavior. Our failure to acknowledge our sin places distance in our relationship with God and weakens the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives.*

What effect does fake spirituality have on our relationships with others according to **Proverbs 27:14-17**? *It places distance in our relationships with others in two ways. 1. We treat others in unloving ways because we justify our bad behavior. 2. We fear completely opening ourselves up to their scrutiny so hold people at a distance. In both cases, we fail to grow spiritually through our social interactions with others as we should according to Proverbs 27:17.*

In our Love for God

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus contrasted fake spiritual behavior with true spiritual behavior. Note down the characteristics of each:

Spiritual Activity	Inauthentic Behavior	Authentic Behavior
Giving Matthew 6:1-4	<i>Turned into a spectacle Praised by other people Selfish and self-promoting</i>	<i>Done discreetly, even anonymously Relies on God for a reward Shows true love and a servanthood</i>
Prayer Matthew 6:5-8	<i>Scripted and staged Showcases the speaker's words Dependent on manipulation and mantras. Motivated by a need for approval of others.</i>	<i>Not rehearsed, a natural action Uses real thoughts and words Done in private illustrating a desire to communicate with God, not others Illustrates faith in believing that God is listening and will respond</i>
Fasting Matthew 6:16-18	<i>Acting sad and dramatic to show others that you are fasting.</i>	<i>Done without the drama or even letting other people know.</i>



What stands out in each of these areas about the problems of inauthenticity in our lives?

Charity: *It seeks its own ends rather than the other. It's not really doing it out of love for the one who needs help, it's using them as a prop, doing it for good PR. This often results in poor consequences in the life of the one offered the charity. It is using other's needs for your own advantage. In politics we see that this results in there always being an underprivileged class to act as these kinds of props. Example of Saudia Arabia importing beggars.*

Prayer: *the point is not the spiritual activity of seeking God's presence, instead it is to appear extra-spiritual to others through fancy prayers. It is performance and meaningless. It feeds the pride instead of the spirit. It is an attempt to manipulate God – seeing Him as a genie – rather than trusting that He wants to meet your needs. Example of the Orthodox prayers.*

Fasting: *It is done out of duty. The Pharisees mandated regular fasting. It was not motivated by a dependence on God to meet their needs. Nor by a desire to focus on God at the expense of physical needs. In the end, it was a physical activity of subjecting the body to deprivation rather than a spiritual activity. Reminds us of the Catholic doctrine of penance.*

How does a motivation of duty rather than love for God hurt our Christian service? *We should serve God out of a heart of gratitude rather than of duty. When we focus on duty, we get tired and overwhelmed, burnt out. Our service for God gives us no satisfaction after a while because it is not feeding our relationship with God, it is simply feeding our pride.*

In our Love for Others

In **Matthew 7:1-5**, Jesus highlights judging others. This verse is frequently quoted out of context, especially by those seeking to use it against Christians who point out egregious sin in society. How does the context of verse 5, challenge this usage? *Jesus is speaking of the need to be authentic in our criticism of the sins of others, not forbidding us to challenge sin.*

Jesus is calling for us to be authentic in our use of constructive criticism. Note the differences:

Constructive Criticism	Inauthentic Behavior	Authentic Behavior
Characteristics	<i>Critical and judgmental of others. Constantly looking for the bad in others and quickly willing to point it out. Poor self-awareness – does not ever consider ways that they may display</i>	<i>Is introspective and reflects upon their own inadequacies and failures. This is their preset – to consider their own faults and to look on others through that lens resulting in a less critical outlook.</i>



	<i>the same or even worse behaviors that they quickly accuse others of.</i>	<i>When faced with a need to deal with others, does so only after a time of prayer and personal reflection.</i>
Underlying Motivations	<i>Motivated by envy, anger, or selfishness. Focuses on pet peeves and personal preferences. "Getting something off my chest."</i>	<i>Motivated by love of the other. A desire to help someone overcome a besetting sin in their life. Seen as a difficult, unpleasant, yet necessary task rather than."</i>
Outward Attitude	<i>The underlying point is that any kind of hyperfocus on other people is itself a sin that obstructs and distorts our view of them, making our judgement poor and our criticism unloving and unkind.</i>	<i>Humble and merciful. Recognizes that no one is perfect and everyone has blind spots. Seeks to treat others as you want to be treated.</i>
Response to Criticism	<i>Become angry when they receive the same level of criticism and judgmentalness that they dish out to others.</i>	<i>Reflects upon the merits of it and the spirit in which it is given. Makes changes if they are warranted. Learns from feedback.</i>

How does Jesus' description of hypercritical people help us understand how we should react to their criticism? *We should take it with a grain of salt. Obviously, the person's judgement is poor, so we should not allow it to overwhelm us. Consider it prayerfully. Sift through the criticisms; accepting what is true and ignoring what is not.*

Perfectly Transparent

In Psalm 139, David reminds us that we are completely known by God. There is nothing we can hide from Him. God looks into our life as if we were clear glass—He sees every flaw, every sin, every poor motivation. What does this lead David to pray in **Psalm 139:23-24**? *Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, and know my anxieties; And see if there is any wicked way in me, And lead me in the way everlasting.*

Spiritual reflection and self-reflection are necessary in order to be authentic. As we reflect upon our personal motives, what are some signs we should be aware of that indicate we are veering off track?

Endnotes



ⁱ <https://biblehub.com/matthew/5-8.htm>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.floridamuseum.ufl.edu/educators/resource/butterfly-life-cycle/>

