

A Call to Purity

Background

In May 2011 I felt that God was wanting the Christian church to return to a culture of purity. I wasn't sure what this meant in practical terms but at the same time was convinced that it wasn't to be based on a set of do and don't rules, but the result of a deeper relationship with the Father. In the intervening time I've read, thought about and heard sermons and talks which have touched on the topic, although I must admit that it has been an off-on process rather than a time of intensive research. I think I am now in a position to commit something to writing, however before reading this paper, I suggest you take a look at my thoughts in "In My Name..." as they proved to play a key role in bringing this together.

My Thoughts

When we first think about purity, we may be inclined to think it's all about giving things up or confining our activities to good works and "spiritual" activities such as prayer and church attendance. If we do that, we will somehow achieve God's approval, or at least that of other Christians. This is a legalistic approach which can lead to feelings of guilt, failure and even depression when we slip. I'm sure that this is not what God is looking for.

So what is God's desire in this? Let's start by considering what is meant by "purity" and "impurity". Most of us probably think of a spectrum with purity at one end and impurity at the other. For example (you can complete your own lists):



Impurity

Immorality
Violence
Greed
etc.

Purity

Worship
Compassion
Generosity
etc.

This spectrum could also be labelled Evil \leftrightarrow Good as often we will use Impurity and Evil or Purity and Good as interchangeable, absolute terms.

As I thought about this, I realised that there is also a middle level to this scale where there are things which of themselves are not evil but can, if our attitude is wrong, be a barrier to a deep relationship with the Father. For want of a better term, I'm calling this level "Neutral Purity" so the revised diagram will look something like this:



<u>Impurity</u>	<u>Neutral Purity</u>	<u>Purity</u>
Immorality	Comfort	Worship
Violence	Money	Compassion
Greed	Possessions	Generosity
etc.	etc.	etc.

However, even this understanding falls short of a true understanding of what purity is about. Just looking at behaviour is inadequate. We can worship enthusiastically, give to charity, and be caring towards others but not be demonstrating purity.

What do I mean? The notion of purity that I've outlined so far defines the scale in terms of activity and behaviour. It implies a solution of changing behaviour to gain approval. In *"In My Name..."* I describe this as a slavery or legalistic culture: be obedient and be accepted.

I believe God wants something different. He doesn't see purity as something that comes from our behaviour but rather something that stems from a close relationship with him. He doesn't merely observe purity, but he initiates it and grows it in us by ministering into our lives. We need to change from trying to impress him with our efforts and simply draw into his presence to allow him to change us. We can only work on symptoms; he can get to the root of any problem and deal with it.

Let's look at a human father or husband. If he truly loves his child or wife, they will want to please him. As they get to know him more, they will better understand what this means and make fewer mistakes. This is what God wants of us, to draw ever closer to him and spend more time with him, not out of duty but out of love and joy. This is what will make the difference. A purity that comes out of an intimate relationship with him. It's not the route to approval but the result of a special closeness.

I believe that if we accept this and allow our fellowship with the Father to transform our lives, not just as individuals but as the body of Christians, the world will see that we truly have something (i.e. someone) in our lives which is different and highly desirable. Something which they will also want. In other words, we will not be just good, respectable, clean-living people but beacons for Christ.

Are we going to answer the call to purity? Father's waiting.