

## A Searching Test

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"Unto the pure all things are pure, but unto them who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but even their mind and conscience are defiled." [Titus 1:15](#).

I SHALL not profess, this evening, to enter into a full exposition of this text, for there are many deep things in it, and many intricate questions are suggested by it. I shall only make some observations upon it intended to be of practical service.

This text has often been misused—made to mean what was never in the Apostle's mind. He does not mean that a wrong thing becomes right to a pure-minded man—that is the very opposite of what he does mean! He means that when men's minds are pure, other matters become pure to them, but when their minds are impure, then they use these things for impurity. We shall endeavor to pick out the meaning as we go along, but by no means does it mean that I may pretend that I am of a pure mind and that, therefore, will make impurity, itself, pure! That would be to prove, if I found any pleasure in impurity, that my mind was impure. The true solution of the conduct of a man who professes to be pure in mind and yet commits himself to an unholy course of life, is not that the man makes that unholy life, pure, but that his unholy living proves that his mind is not pure at all!

Our text has in it, tonight, two kinds of men—the pure and the defiled and unbelieving. And secondly, it has two kinds of effects produced upon these men by outward things—to the one, all things are pure—to the other, there is nothing pure. First, let us talk about these—

### I. TWO KINDS OF MEN.

First, the pure—where shall we find them? Where are they born? We answer, no men are born so! Who shall bring a clean thing out of an unclean? No one! Not one! As our parents have sinned, we, their children, are born with tendencies to sin—we are impure even from birth! There are none pure but those who are made so by a second creation! The first time they are marred upon the wheel. They must go under the Creator's hand a second time—they must feel the power of the purifying Spirit of God creating them anew before they can be called pure at all! And these are not absolutely pure. Even in those who are entitled to be called, "pure in heart," there remains impurity. If any man shall question that, let him remember the First Epistle of John, the first Chapter, at the 8th verse—"If any man says he has no sin, he is a liar, and the truth is not in him." There is sin in the best of men—and if they do not perceive it, it must be because they are blinded with a foolish self-conceit—for in the purest heart there still remains connected with it the old nature and the

impurity inherited from the first Adam. This makes life a perpetual conflict until life's close. Still, we name men by their predominant characteristics. The partial impurity of a good man does not entitle him to be called impure. If the master principle within him, the reigning principle, is purity, he is a pure man. A man may once in his life have spoken an untruth—he may have been surprised into saying a thing which is not—but if the general tenor of his life is stern integrity, we do not, therefore, condemn him and brand him as a liar! Otherwise where were the men living upon earth who would be worthy of a name implying praise? The godly are pure—have been made pure by regeneration, and they are pure, though not absolutely so.

They are pure in their affections. They love not that which is unchaste, unhallowed, untruthful, unlawful before God. Their soul loves that which God approves. They seek after that which God, Himself, commands. If they do not always keep God's statutes, yet they love them. And if they do not always walk in His ways without slipping, yet they love

His ways and desire to walk in them without a single turning aside to the right hand or to the left! The set of the current of their soul is towards purity. They mourn over those currents and eddies into which they are turned by temptation. They are the last men to excuse them—the rush and current of their soul, their deepest and truest life—is that they may be cleansed from all false ways and from sin. And as they are pure in their affections, they become pure in their actions. They, if they are, indeed, the people of God, cannot run with the multitude to do evil. The swine may find its pleasure in the mire, but God's sheep love clean pastures. The raven may feed upon its garbage and be at home, there, but not so the dove—it likes the clean garner and the clean roosting place. The child of God shuns not only the darker sins which defile so many, but even those which others think but a trifle. And what some would permit and rejoice in, the Christian mourns, abhors, laments and avoids. The actions of the Christian—I do not claim perfection for them, but I do claim that the true Christian strives after perfection in his actions, that he seeks after it, yes, and that, as a rule, he comes nearer to it than his enemies would allow, or than even his own reflections, when he is examining himself, would permit him to believe! God has a people who still walk uprightly in the world. There are still some that are as pillars in the House of God upon whom he has written the name of our God—some who have not defiled their garments—who shall walk with Him in white, for, by His Grace, they are made worthy.

And these men being thus pure in their affections and in their actions are most of all pure in their desires. Their greatest desire is towards purity. I am sure I speak the language of every renewed heart when I say that if the Lord were to appear by night to you, and say to you, as He did to Solomon, "What shall I give you?" there is no renewed heart here that would say, "Lord, give me riches!" There is no one that would say, "Give me health!" We may desire both of these things in a secondary degree, but our main desire would be this, "Lord, give me that holy character which would please You and bring honor to the religion

I profess." Holiness, holiness, holiness—it is a thing which every renewed heart longs after beyond everything else! I would have perfect orthodoxy in my head if I could, but I know even if I had that, an unhallowed life would render it of little service to me. But could I have a clean heart, other things would come with it and from it, for the pure in heart shall see God! And if they see God, what else is there that they shall not see, for the eyes which have glanced on God, Himself, will be able to perceive the difference between truth and error, and will not be liable to be deceived! The Christian is pure in his desires. Now if it is so, that in his affections within, and his actions without, and in the desires of his entire nature, he would be pure, he is entitled to this name and God has given it to him!

But there are some, on the other hand, who are defied and unbelieving. These two things appear to go together. Now it was denied some time since, that every unbeliever is unclean in his life, and I think there is some ground in the denial. I should not like to stand here and say that I believe every infidel, every rejecter of the religion of Christ is a man unfit for the social circle and a sinner against the laws of decency! I do not believe it. Honestly, I must say that there are some men who have rejected the Gospel—I grieve that they have—have denied God and yet somehow they have been a vast deal better than their creed, and they have managed to walk in a consistency of moral conduct towards man which has almost been worthy to be set up as an example to Christians! I believe such cases are not the rule, and that candor, when it has made the admission which I have made, is compelled to add that this is an extraordinary thing and cannot have been produced by the creed, for the creed, itself, of the godless is necessarily logically and properly the creed of the unbelieving, producing sin! Why should they obey a Law of God if they do not believe in a Law-Giver, or if they only believe in a law-giver who will not punish and who cannot reward? When men have denied God, they have surely given up the sanction which should lead them to anything like purity—and if they live as most of them do live—it cannot be said that they are inconsistent with their creed.

Yet, indeed, as a rule, and as a rule without exception—having said what I have said (and I do not contradict myself)—as a rule without an exception, the unbelieving heart is a defiled heart for all that. For what did we admit? That the man who rejects his God is not, therefore, a thief? Has he not robbed God? What did we say? That the man who rejects Christ is not, therefore, licentious? Is that purity which rejects perfection? Is that heart pure that cannot see loveliness in the Character and the Person of the Redeemer? What did we admit? That the unbeliever is not seditious? Yet is he a loyal subject of God who denies the Godhead, who rails against God, and who lives from day to day as if there were no God at all? Men, if they were called sinners, would not shudder at the word—they admit it! But call them criminals and at once they are angry and defend themselves—the reason being, I suppose, that with the mass of mankind it seems a trifle to offend God, but a very serious thing to have offended man! And here is the whole stress of the matter—the de-

filement of the unbeliever lies always God-ward, even when it is not apparent man-ward. And when the unbeliever, somehow or other, keeps his garments clean as before his fellow men, yet as before his God what is he? He is one who has cast off all obligations to his Maker, who denies all responsibilities to his King, who receives bounties from Jehovah's hands but is not grateful and will not even acknowledge that the mercies come from those hands at all! He lives in habitual contempt of the Adorable—destitute of all admiration for the infinitely Glorious—who does what angels must shudder to think of—lives without love to Christ, without trust in the promises of God! There is a defilement, there, which, I venture to say, is even greater if looked at in a right light, than any form of defilement which becomes perceptible by men as between themselves!

But notice in this text that it seems to correct a good deal of the mental philosophy we have heard of. For instance, I have heard it asserted that conscience is God's vice regent among men. I have often heard expressions from the pulpit and read them in books which led me to infer that every fallen man has got not only something good in him, but some strong principle almost akin to the Divine! I believe in the fall of man and I believe that to be total—and that conscience is a power which has fallen with all the rest, and that there does not exist in the world a pure conscience—except so far as God has purified it by the work of His Spirit. Conscience, itself, is a defiled thing! And so far from being a representative of God, I could not think for a moment of comparing it with that Ever-Blessed and Pure Being! The fact is that conscience, although it must be to man practically his guide, is not ever a safe one, for the true guide of every man is the Bible, the revealed will of God. That is true, pure and right, but my conscience may often be a dark conscience, an ignorant conscience, a perverted conscience—and so my business is not to follow my conscience as I find it, but to go to God and ask Him to enlighten my conscience and guide it! Neither is it an excuse for a man for doing wrong when he says he was conscientious in doing it. It is an excuse as far as men are concerned, but not before God! God's Law is not of variable quantity or quality depending upon the quantity or quality of the conscience—it is fixed and definite! Just as if a man were to take prussic acid, believing that it would benefit him—he would die, despite his conscience—or as if a person were to walk northward, expecting to reach his home in the south! He would not do anything of the kind! Or as if a man were to go to sea in a leaky vessel and a storm came on—his conscience would not save him—so it is with you! If you are astray, you are astray. Your business was to have waited upon God to have had that conscience corrected! Your business was to have laid that conscience at the foot of the Cross and ask the Master to purify it—to have waited upon the Holy Spirit for His teaching and consulted the Infallible Oracles of God's Book to know what was the will of the Most High! It is not, therefore, for every man to be crying up his conscience. I believe in the conscience, by all means, among men, but there is none perfect before God! Their conscience should be bowed to God's Law, to God's Gospel, to believe His teachings and to

obey His precepts. Conscience, no more than any other power, is irresponsible! It is under law in Him. He created man and put the conscience within him, which conscience has been spoiled and injured by the Fall.

Now there are men in the world with defiled understandings and defiled consciences. They cannot judge rightly. Their understanding is defiled. They put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter. "A man cannot do that," says one. He does do it. There are thousands in this world who deliberately judge amiss, and who, when they sit down, even to think of a question (which, alas, we cannot often bring them to do), naturally come to a wrong conclusion because the scales which they weigh are out of gear. The measure which they use is not the measure of the sanctuary! Their understanding is defiled. And even when they bring their moral sense to bear upon some question, they are inevitably mistaken because their conscience, itself has become defiled also. A sad state for men to be in, but into this state each man, according to his degree, is brought until his will turns to God and is rectified by the great Spirit. We are all impure—impure in every part. "The whole head is sick, and the whole heart is faint." We are all fallen. In manhood's vast temple there stands not a solitary pillar that is quite erect. Here and there, there are masses that seem as though they stood as once they were, to let us know how grand a thing human nature might have been—but there is enough upon the whole to let us see that it is all in ruin, and in such ruin that unless He who built it at the first shall put forth His Omnipotent Power and use again the old fiat which created the world, it will still be a ruin and desolation—a den of all manner of unclean things!

Thus have I spoken upon the two sorts of men, the pure and the defiled. But now, secondly, here is the main point that we have to speak of—

## II. THE TWO AFFECTS PRODUCED ON THESE TWO KINDS OF MEN.

To those who are pure, all things are pure. To those who are impure and unbelieving, everything becomes impure. Only a few things by way of specimen.

First, let us think of the attributes of God. To the Believer in Christ, whose heart is pure, how glorious is God! And every time we think of Him, adore Him and have fellowship with Him, we grow purer for it. The true Believer cannot think of God and draw nearer to Him without becoming more like his God. But look at the unbeliever. Oft-times his very thoughts of God have been, themselves, defiled by the defilement of his understanding, irritating him, filling him with wrath and abhorrence. He does not delight in the holiness of God—he says it is severity. "How can a man be happy with such laws to bind him?" He does not delight in the wisdom of God in Providence—he thinks things are ordered very much amiss, seeing they do not all conduce to his pleasure in the ways of sin! And, especially, if you set before him God's mercy, that most blessed of all attributes which, to the Believer, is purifying to the highest degree, you will find the unbeliever saying, "God is Merciful," and making that an excuse for his continuing in sin! How sad it is that when we preach the Gospel and give

the invitations of Infinite Mercy, there are many who will say, "Ah, then, I can turn to God just when I like, and He is very gracious, and He will forgive me! Therefore I will continue in my rebellion against Him." And when we have been pathetic, and our soul has poured over from our eyes as we have spoken of those saved at the eleventh hour, while there have been some minds that have been led to Christ, thereby, there are some who have drawn the horrible inference that they, too, might wait until the eleventh hour and venture their eternal interests upon the mercy of God at the last! Brothers, I believe you cannot preach of God without some men making mischief of it, even of just so simple a Truth as His Mercy. But when you come to His Sovereignty—a deep that can never be fathomed—how many have been drowned in it! I believe we ought to speak about it. I am not of those who say we should be silent upon it, but how many have been drowned in those deeps, willfully, because they have said, "Who has resisted His will? Why does He find fault? If it is to be, it is to be. If it will be, it will be." They have even dared to make God the Author of their sin and drawn an apology for their unrighteousness from the thrice holy King of Kings! To the pure in heart, all things are so pure that we, ourselves, sink into nothing in humility and penitence before Him! But to the ungodly, even God, Himself, becomes an argument for continuance in sin!

Now take another. It is so with God, but it is equally so with the Gospel The Doctrines of the Gospel are, to the Believer, very pure. There is not one of them but what has a practical effect upon his life. I take the Doctrine of Election. Then if He has chosen us, He has chosen us to be a peculiar people zealous of good works, and special love we feel binds us to special service. We often sing—

"Loved of my God, for Him again With love intense I burn!  
Chosen of Him before time began, We choose Him in return!"

So with the Doctrine of Redemption that He has redeemed us by His precious blood. The inference from it is, "You are not your own, you are bought with a price—therefore, glorify God in your bodies and in your spirits, which are His." Take the sweet Doctrine of Final Perseverance, "The righteous shall hold on his way." Now the godly man feels that he must so live as to prove that he is a godly man by persevering, and he looks for daily Grace to hold him on and to keep him to the end. He blesses that Infinite Affection that does not turn aside from him and he feels drawn to it by constant watchfulness. I might mention all the Doctrines, but every Christian will admit at once that he that has this hope in him purifies himself. But take the effect of these Truths of God upon the unbelieving and the impure. Why, you know how they will pervert Divine Election! How often men have made that a coverlet for the grossest licentiousness! As for the redeeming blood, alas, how many have made the Cross, which is the Tree of Life, to be the tree of death to them! It has become a savor of death unto death to them. We have known some whose damnation is just—who have said, "We are the children of God, and we will live as we like," and they have, therefore,

given themselves over to uncleanness. Surely of all blasphemers, they must bear the palm—they stand among the worst. But when men thus turn the Gospel into licentiousness, are we to say it is the Gospel's fault? Are we to keep back some of these Doctrines? By no means, for, "unto the pure all things are pure." Unto the unclean and unbelieving, these holy things will always be impure. You might as well forbid the sun to shine because when its beams fall upon a dunghill, it brings forth unwholesome odors! Yes, but that same sun, when it falls upon the flowers, makes them shed their aromatic perfume on every hand! It is doing incalculable good.

It is not the sun, but the dunghill that must be blamed. And when the Truth of God is perverted, you must not blame the Truth, but blame the unclean, unbelieving heart that turns it into sin!

Now the same thing is true of the ordinances of the Gospel, and dreadfully true, here, too! When you come to the ordinances of the Gospel, such, for instance, as the preaching of the Word—the true Believer, every time he hears the Word is purged by the Word. "Now you are clean, you are purged through the Word which I have spoken to you." The Truth of God shows him his own sinfulness. He sees his face in a mirror and endeavors to remove the spots which the Word of God reveals to him. But an ungodly man hearing the Word of God, grows the worse, perhaps, not only openly, but in his heart! Oh, there are some that sit in this very place—have done so for years! I thank God they are getting to be very, very few, now. I hope there will be none such, soon. May Grace grant there may not be one! But you will notice that the very Truth of God which once made them tremble, does not now—and whereas some years ago the preaching of the Gospel often brought tears to their eyes and sent them on their knees, it does not now—and sins which they were gladly to give up at one time, and which pricked their conscience, are now indulged in without compunction, for the same Gospel which softens, hardens, as the sun, which shines on wax and melts it, shines on clay and hardens it! Even the blessed ordinance of preaching—the hearing of the Word—may make some men to become yet more and more unclean. Alas, that it should be so. But see how Baptism and the Lord's Supper, both of them (for I cannot now stay long to discriminate), have been misused. Whereas these are, both of them, ordinances to lead men to remember precious Truths of God—the death and burial of the Lord in the one case, and the soul's feeding in the other case, on the precious body and blood of Jesus, and rejoicing in Him as blessed spiritual meat, how is it that we have been told (and it is preached from thousands of pulpits in England) that Baptism washes away sin and absolutely regenerates the soul? And though I have been chided for putting too strong a sense upon the word, "regenerate," I have lived to see a stronger sense put upon it by some than I put upon it until it has become with some, simply a superstitious ordinance, and nothing more, full of mischief. And as to the Lord's Supper, they tell us that there is in it a power to forgive all sin, even the

most heinous. And this is not spoken now and then, accidentally—a slip of tongue—but is printed and scattered all over England as a true Doctrine of God!

Well, these men's minds are impure and, therefore, even those two precious ordinances are turned into superstition and into impurity—and I suppose it always will be so. But if the mind becomes pure, and becomes believing in Christ, it will never exalt mere bread and wine into the place of Deity, and water into the place of the Divine Spirit, Himself. God save us from having our minds rendered so impure as to fall into superstition by simple ordinances which are full of instruction! I do not doubt that there are many who are now depending for eternal life upon having gone to the "Sacrament of the Mass," and are expecting to enter Heaven because they have reposed their confidence in a man who was arrogant enough to call himself the exclusive priest of God! God save us from having our understanding defiled, for it must be before it can submit to the belief of such superstition as this!

But I must pass on. I have often noticed how the Church of God, itself becomes to pure minds one thing, and to impure minds another. You shall find a man a member of a Christian Church who will tell you that wherever he has gone in that Church he has met with Brothers and Sisters full of love, full of earnestness—and he has been delighted to associate with them. I have been at the bedside of a venerable Brother recently, whom nearly all of you know, and if you were to hear his opinion of the Church of which he is a member, he would speak of it in the most glowing terms. The reason is that he sees in his fellow Christians very much what there is in himself. The man who is loving comes to love the Brethren! The man who is chaste, pure and zealous, attributes to others a like spirit and believes they are pure, and they are to him so assuredly. But you shall meet with another, a carnal, worldly-minded professor, and he says, "Oh, there's no love!" He has not any. "There's no zeal" he says. There certainly would not be if all were like he! "Ah," he says, "I don't see any of the Apostolic living that I read of in the Scriptures." There is no Apostolic living in his own case! He didn't see it because he hasn't got it! To use an old illustration—if you send a buzzard flying over a tract of country, what will it see? Why, it will be looking out for all the dead carcasses and it will be sure to be able to tell you how much carrion there is about! But if you send a dove over that same space, it won't have an eye for it, for it has no taste for it—but it will tell you of everything that is fair and beautiful, like itself! So is it with the pure mind in the midst of God's people—it sees purity! It cannot shut its eyes to impurity, but it rejoices in the Truth and speaks of it, and speaks it as well as it can at all times with a charity that thinks no evil. But with the impure and the unbelieving, every place is defiled—and the man tars everything with the filth that is in his own bucket!

Now the events of Providence—I will not detain you much longer, but let me observe that all the events of Providence are, to some men, one thing, and to some men another! Is a man with a pure mind suddenly lifted up in the world in wealth? He uses that for the poor of the Church of Christ. If he is impure, then that wealth allows him to gratify his impure

taste and he sinks deeper in impurity! Does a pure man come to poverty? Then his poverty drives him nearer to God and he seeks to make himself useful among the poorer Brethren where he dwells. But if he is impure, he assumes the most groveling tastes and becomes the more wicked! Is a man a Christian? Then health is a delight to him—to consecrate it all to his Lord. Has a sinner health—then that health shall enable him to go farther into sin, or, at any rate, to indulge himself the more, for he will not consecrate it to his God. Anything that happens may be used two ways—and the pure shall see in every event something which he can turn to God's Glory! And the impure can see in everything a means by which he may indulge himself.

Now it is so if you mingle with the sons of men and see their sins. We are grieved at them. But when the Christian sees sin, he thinks, "This is what I would be but for the Grace of God." So he praises God for His Grace. "This is what I shall be," he says, "if I am not watchful." So he becomes the more watchful and out of the very sin of his fellow men, he extracts some reasons for greater holiness and grows more pure because he observes the loathsomeness of impurity and turns from it the more earnestly. But the ungodly man is carried away by the evil example—his conscience is more deadened by it—and he becomes bolder in sin in consequence of what he sees in others! I am sure you will have observed it so, that where the good man gathers grapes, another finds nothing but poisoned apples—and where the Christian turns over this man's depravity and finds in it a reason for greater holiness in his own person, the ungodly man only sees more excuses for himself for the past—and the greater license for himself in the future! Take another list of things, namely, the treatment of men to us. Suppose men praise us? The Christian says, "I must be watchful, for the praise of man is often inconsistent with the favor of God." The ungodly man says, "Everybody praises me! What a silly fellow I must be!" There is a foulness of pride which comes upon him. The man who lives near to God, if he is sneered at by the sons of men, says, "It comes upon me for God's sake. By His Grace, I will bear it." But the other says he will not have any more of that and turns aside from a path which becomes rough, even though he knows that path to be right! How often has unjust treatment driven the ungodly man to anger, and in some cases to malice and to resolutions of revenge! To the impure an injustice makes him more impure. But see the Christian who is like his Master. Every injustice makes him cry for Grace to forgive—and when yet more injustice is heaped upon him, he forgives the more and tries to heap yet more coals of fire upon the head of his enemy by doing him the greater kindness, if by any means he may win his soul! So out of the worst of things the Christian extracts the best, while from the very best of things an unhallowed mind may extract the worst!

Let us close—though there are many, many illustrations that might be given of this. Here you have, tonight, means afforded for judging yourselves. Do you find in God's Book that which makes you angry with God? Do you find in the Gospel that which makes you

complaisant with yourself while you are unregenerate? Do you find in Providence that which irritates you, or which seems to excuse you in sin? Then your mind is impure, for these things are with you according to what you are. "It is dark," you say. It is your eyes that are dark—the Light of God is light and bright. "It is bitter," you say, when we bring you the honey of the Gospel. It is not the honey that is bitter—it is your mouth—it is your mouth that is out of order. How often ought people to recollect this when they hear a true Gospel sermon! George Herbert says, "Judge not the preacher—he is your judge." And very often when a man has condemned the sermon, he had far better condemn himself! He has not agreed with it? No, if he had, it would not have been true! When sometimes we have heard some man of low life railing at us, we have said, "Thank God! Supposing that wretch had praised us, we would have known there was something amiss about us! There are public papers which, if they praised a man, you would know at once that the man deserved hanging, or something near approaching to it! Their censure is the only homage they can give to that which is right. So when any soul kicks against Christ—the precious blood of Christ, the Gospel of God, the purity of God—do we condemn God because this man condemns Him? No, but God is glorified by the unrighteous nature of this man rebelling against Him! If God were other than He is, an unrighteous man might love Him, but being hated and despised, and forgotten of ungodly men, it does but prove that God is not such as they are, but infinitely superior to them! Let us judge ourselves, then, by this.

But provided we are obliged to come to the conclusion that our minds are not pure, we need not end there, for there are means by which they may be made so! Glory be to God, if my mind and conscience are defiled, they need not always be so. There is cleansing. I cannot effect it for myself, nor can any outward forms do it—

"No outward form can make me clean, The leprosy lies deep within"

But God has set forth Christ to be a Savior—and He shall save His people from their sins—from their sinfulness, too, and whoever believes in Christ Jesus, that is, trusts in Him, there is already in him the beginning of purity! God the Holy Spirit will give him more and more of the likeness of Christ, for he that believes shall be saved from sin, from indwelling sin, from all sin, from the power as well as from the guilt of it! Faith will cleanse him, applying to him the precious blood and the water which flows from the side of Christ! Faith will, by the Holy Spirit's power, become a cleansing as well as a saving Grace! God grant it to us, and may we all be among the pure, unto whom all things shall be pure. We ask it for Christ's sake! Amen.