

## How pure

*Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.  
Matthew 5:8*

This statement presents perhaps the most challenging statement of all of the beatitudes uttered by our Lord in this sermon. We might attempt to allow ourselves to contemplate our human state thoroughly enough to become truly poor in spirit (v. 3), such that we would be brought to mourning over the plight of our sin (v. 4), or to consider God's righteousness to a degree that would result in our hungering and thirsting after it (v. 6). Yet, when we honestly consider the purification of our hearts, and all that we can know within our hearts, a correct assessment of our human ability to attain a pure heart should erase all hope for this blessing. Instead, we could readily agree with Solomon's rhetorical question, "Who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin?" (Proverbs 20:9). We are all too familiar with the Lord's pronouncement through Jeremiah, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" (Jeremiah 17:9). The Lord would later describe what proceeds out of our hearts as "evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies" (Matthew 15:19).

However, we find a contrasting statement made by the Apostle Peter when he described God's work in the house of Cornelius, "And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us; and put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith" (Acts 15:8-9). How could Peter know what happened to the hearts of these Gentiles? He knew by comparison of the work done by the same Holy Spirit both outwardly and inwardly in these Gentiles and the Jewish disciples who initially believed the gospel. He would later indicate this in his exhortation to all believers: "Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently" (I Peter 1:22). Thus, we understand with Peter that the purification of the heart is the work of God's Holy Spirit. It is then His work that creates within us the desire and capacity for purity of heart and life. And it is this same work that makes us conscious of, and burdened with, the impurity that still indwells us in our current state, prompting us to purify ourselves, even as He is pure, based on our hope in Him who will make us like Him, when we see Him as He is (I John 3:2-3).