

Who Has A Pure Heart?

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[0 : 00] One of the saddest and most tragic and also sometimes the most comedic is when you see someone or you meet someone who is dangerously deluded about who they are.

My girls introduced me to this little video of these two teenage girls singing and they produced this little video and they thought they were really good and they were really, really bad.

Millions of people saw their production and after all the criticism came in, that's when they're like, oh, that was a joke. It's sad, it's tragic, it's comedic when people don't see themselves accurately, when people don't understand who they really are, what's really going on.

And the book of Proverbs is very interested in making us wise and helping us to avoid that kind of situation where we've dangerously overestimated ourselves.

Where we've dangerously underestimated our weaknesses or, just in the case of these two girls, of overestimating their singing ability, overestimating what people would think of them.

[1 : 34] If we're ever going to be wise, we have to develop a healthy, realistic view of ourselves, an accurate, clear view of ourselves. And that's what the book of Proverbs, one part of making us wise is making us to see who we really are, where we really stand.

It's been very helpful for me in my own thinking, in my own life, in my own counseling, to look at people through three lenses. Not one at a time, but all at the same time, people are sufferers.

To be born into a fallen and a cursed world means that you are going to suffer in some way. No one, no matter how good someone's life is, they aren't whole.

No matter what pictures or whatever picture they're portraying, they aren't whole. To live in a fallen world is to live under the curse.

And so we need to be careful that when we're looking at other people, we're seeing that. We're not deluded about what's going on in their lives. And it's also just helpful for us because suffering is not nearly the lonely thing that sometimes it seems to be.

[2 : 57] We are all in this together to some degree or other. People are sufferers. People are sinners. Original sin, the sin and the sinfulness we've inherited from Adam touches every single one of us.

Young and old. We are sinners and we sin. And people, we're going to talk more about that in a minute.

If you're a Christian, though, you're not just a sufferer and you're not just a sinner. You are a saint. That's an essential part of your identity. You are a holy one.

You are a righteous one. You're called out of sin. You're called to belong to God. You're born again into this living hope. Romans 6 says you've died to sin and now you're alive to God and you're to live to righteousness.

That is who you are. That is part of your identity. So, if you're a Christian, not only are you a sufferer and you're still a sinner to some degree, but thank the Lord, this third part of our identity that we are saints will have the last word.

[4 : 11] Because Christ is going to have the last word. And because he's the resurrection and the life, we are going to participate in that.

And so, we need to look at each other through these three lenses. We need to look at ourselves through these three lenses. Everyone here is a sufferer, a sinner.

And if you are a believer in Jesus Christ and you're joined to Jesus, then thankfully that's not all you are, but you're a saint. That's who you are. Well, if you think with those three lenses, I think you're going to find that you're going to have a pretty accurate view and understanding of what is going on in people's lives.

And you're also going to understand yourself. You're not going to be surprised if you suffer. You're not going to be surprised if you sin. And Christian, you're not going to be surprised if you persevere in righteousness because you are a saint.

Well, this afternoon, we're going to look at a proverb that shines a light on that second S of sinner. It's Proverbs chapter 20, verse 9. So, if you have your Bibles, please turn there.

[5 : 25] Proverbs chapter 20, verse 9. And this is an operating room light, so to speak. It's a bright light shining on a problem place. It's a bright light shining on a problem place.

But when you're in an operating room, you want it to be as light as possible so that you can see the problem clearly. You don't want a dark, dingy, gloomy operating room.

You want a bright light. And so this is what this Proverbs 20, verse 9 is. It's a bright light on this problem area, this second S of sin. Who can say?

It's a question. Who can say? I have kept my heart pure. I am clean and without sin. It's a rare proverb because it is a question. I can't think of off the top of my head of any more just questions like that.

It's a question. Now, I love questions. I love asking questions because questions have a way of you want people want to answer them. It draws them out.

[6 : 30] If I want to get to know someone, I'm going to line up a whole bunch of questions. Because people like to answer. We even like to answer those kind of questions where we're not even looking for an answer.

Rhetorical questions. We like to even answer those. So you have this question here. And a question demands an answer. Maybe even when you already know the answer. So who can say? Who can say? Can I say that I have kept my heart pure? I am clean and without sin. Can you say? Can you say that?

I could say a lot of things. And you can say a lot of things. But we can't say that, can we? We can't. If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves.

We're not deceiving anyone else. If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves. And the truth is not in us. Remember what Paul says in Romans chapter 3. There's no one on earth.

[7 : 40] There's no one who is righteous. No one who does what is right and never sins. No one. So no one can say this. On the day of the dedication of the temple in the Old Testament, 2 Chronicles, Solomon, who dedicates the temple, he's praying to the Lord.

And he's speaking in reference to anyone and everyone who would ever come into that temple. And he said, When they sin against you, for there's no one who does not sin.

That's the given. This is the given situation. So this proverb slips past all of our defenses. Who can say?

Who can say this? That you're pure and without sin. Adam and Eve could have said this in the garden before they fell.

The saints in heaven can say that now. But no one here, no one here can say that.

[8 : 52] And it hits home. It gets through all of our defenses. That's the power of a question. Because a question has a way of getting past all those defenses. Now, I think the greatest temptation we have here is to say, Of course.

And I know you're tired. And we've had a full day. And I'm sort of packing in the edges now. But the greatest temptation is for us to say, Of course.

And then do nothing about it. Yeah, I know I'm a sinner. That's true. And then nothing. And I want to say, What a shame.

What a shame if we take this proverb and say, I already know that. I don't need that. That would be such a shame. Because the Lord is coming as our teacher. He's coming to make us wise.

And we're saying, Well, that's elementary. I don't need that. I'm too far ahead for that. Well, yes, you know. But I wonder, Has this truth, Has this question woven itself into your thinking?

[9 : 59] And so that you are now actually living out wisdom. And so you know, But is it making you wise? And so what I want to do, Just in our few minutes together here, Is just to weave this into your thinking.

Three ways to use this proverb to become wiser. The first is this. This reality that you are a sinner Should give you a healthy sense of humility.

A healthy sense of humility. Of self-awareness. Now, Proverbs is completely full Of people that are called wise.

People that are called righteous. The book of Psalms are full of people saying, I am righteous. There's a psalm I just read yesterday where he says, I am godly. Those are definite categories that we can fit into. So that's the reality. The Proverbs calls people wise and righteous. And many of you are that.

[10:57] If you're a saint, you are those things. But that easily, and I know this from my own life, and that easily becomes self-righteousness. Even the wise have to be aware and reminded and continually remind themselves that they aren't perfect.

They aren't perfect. Sin is still your biggest problem. So if you're ready to say, Yeah, I already know this. Well, just remember, you still, this is your biggest problem.

Sin is your biggest problem. Your greatest disease. Even Job, who God himself called blameless and righteous, knew he had faults.

And so when he's arguing, or when he's talking about what he should do, he asks this question, How can mere mortals prove their innocence before God?

Job knew he couldn't just come and say, I'm absolutely perfect. Perfect. So am I clean of outward sins? I'm not clean of inward sins.

[12:11] Paul says, as far as legalistic righteousness, as far as righteousness to the externals of the law, he said, Perfect. I'm faultless. There was no way that you could put something on me.

But then he says, then the tenth commandment came to him. Do not covet. And Paul knew the guilt within.

As much as, and as far as his external righteousness in Judaism had taken him, he hadn't kept his harp here. He had wanted things that he shouldn't want.

God's law doesn't just talk about the outside, it talks about the inside. So am I clean of outward sins? That doesn't mean I'm clean of inward sins. Am I clean of public sins? That doesn't mean I'm clean of private or in-home sins.

So maybe no one here could say anything about you, but your family surely can. Am I clean of sins of commission?

[13:15] Well, I'm surely not clean of sins of omission. So I have to say with the hymn writer, Alas, the duties left undone.

Here's a realistic view of the battle that you're still in. That I'm still in. I'm never done fighting it in this world. That's what we saw in Sunday school. And this is our sin.

This is our shame. This is our grief. Psalm 119, he's a righteous man. He loves God's law. He's being persecuted for loving it. And yet he's saying, I'm going to hold on.

He has to say with deep, honest humility, Oh, that my ways were steadfast. And then I would not be put to shame when I consider all your commands.

So, growing in this brokenhearted humility is growing in wisdom. It's growing in a clearer view of who you are.

[14:25] It's avoiding what I was talking about at the very beginning, of having a delusional view of yourself and walking in folly towards yourself and towards others and towards God. It's growing in wisdom and clarity.

And so, yes, we are more holy. We, saints, we should be going from glory to glory. I think we sang that this morning. Until in heaven we appear. But as we grow more holy, we should be growing more sensitive and more clear thinking.

And as we go up in holiness, we should be going down in humility. One old preacher in the 1800s said, it is characteristic of God's children that they see, as they advance heavenward, more and more reason for self-abasement.

Not that they sin more, for they become holier, but their views at the same time of the purity of God become fuller and stronger, and the glass which they're looking at themselves becomes clearer and more faithful.

Little sins, hear this? Little sins to minds growing in holiness become more loathsome, more detestable.

[15:46] So our conscience has become more and more sensitive. And what was just no big deal before, now we see it, it's a heinous thing.

He goes on, Yet the path of the just is as the shining light that shines more and more into perfect day. So, proud thoughts do fall away from us.

And self-righteousness and any slowness to confess falls away. And so, put your practical wisdom to the test with this verse.

Are you finding it easier to confess your sins? Are you finding it easier to confess your sins to the people in your life?

Are you finding it easier to be real? Where the masks are off? And you are what you are.

[16:46] Paul could say, in some places, I'm the least of the saints. In other places, he could say, I'm the worst of sinners. And he meant it. And he was real.

And so, as we grow down, as we grow down in humility, we go up. As we mourn, we progress. That's what this wisdom looks like. It's not proud self-justification. It's not putting a big X on this proverb. It's this humble self-realization. I know who I am.

I can't answer that question and say, I've kept myself clean and without sin. So, secondly, the second way this makes me wise, it shows me my clear need for the gospel.

And I'm talking to everyone here. My clear need for the gospel. My need as a pastor. Your need as the people. Your need as an unbeliever.

[17:45] Your need as a believer. It shows me the clear need for the gospel. So, I am heavy laden. I am guilty. My garments are not white and clean.

And so, then we say, oh, Jesus, wash me. Lord Jesus, give me that righteousness. I've told you in the past of Mormon elders, these 20, 22-year-old men that come to the door.

And Jehovah Witnesses are generally middle-aged women coming to my door. And me trying to talk to them. And I found, as the years have gone by, that they all came to the same point.

I asked them, why should God let you into heaven? And they all answered, regardless of all their different strange and contradictory beliefs, why should God let me into heaven?

Because I've done as good as I can. I've done as good as I can. First of all, that's insanity. You would have to be completely deceived to honestly, to say before God, I've done as good as I can.

[18:51] I could not have done better than what I did. But you know what? As long as you are holding on to that, as long as you're holding on to that kind of righteousness, that becomes an armor for you.

That becomes camouflage. So, the gospel, like, can't get to you. You don't need the gospel of the Bible. But, when Proverbs 20, verse 9 levels me, and that question comes home to my heart, and I say, yeah, that's me, I'm a sinner, then, then the story is completely different.

I'm not talking about I've done as good as I can. I say, I need a righteousness. What Martin Luther called an alien righteousness. That's not out of this world, from some other planet.

That's not from me. I need someone from the outside to give me a righteousness. Because I don't have a righteousness within me. Proverbs 20, verse 9 has worked its way through all my defenses, and laid me bare, and I see I don't have anything.

I don't have anything to offer to God. I cannot come to God, present myself to Him for judgment, and hope to pass. So, Romans 3.

[20:11] This is how Paul does it. He levels everybody. He uncovers the weakness of thinking that I'm doing as well as I can, or I don't have sin.

He says there's no one righteous, not even one. And once that comes home, now you're ready for the gospel. And he says, but now a righteousness from God.

So really, from out of this world. From God. Apart from the law. Apart from what I'm doing. Apart from whatever I could do. Apart from my righteousness, and my good deeds, and my church attendance.

From the law has been made known. The righteousness from God comes, this righteousness from God, comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There's no difference. And I think in that context, he's saying there's no difference between Jew or Gentile.

You're religious. You're irreligious. There's no difference. We're all in the same boat. We've all sinned. We've all fallen short of the glory of God. And now the gospel comes and gives us a righteousness that we don't have.

[21:15] Well, so the gospel isn't saying, I'm clean. I've kept myself clean. I've maintained it. I've created this thing of my righteousness.

It's not saying that. It's saying my righteousness is from Jesus Christ, from first to last. He's my hope. His life that he lived, the death he died in obedience.

And so, what do I do? Again, this is practical. Put your practical wisdom to the test. What do you do when your conscience is weighing you down?

When you have sinned, your sin is bearing you down and the guilt is too much and the accusation is relentless. Are you able to say, yes, that is true.

I am a great sinner. But Jesus is a greater Savior. He's my answer. He's my defense. Not me. Him. Well, do you have that wisdom?

[22 : 20] Do you have that wisdom? Timothy was made wise unto salvation. We all need to become wise unto salvation. And so, again, put your wisdom to the test. Are you growing in your appreciation of the gospel?

Are you growing in your appreciation of what Jesus did for you? Do you love him more than you loved him last year? Do you appreciate what his sacrifice means and his righteousness and his he's now my great high priest and he's praying and he's making a presentation of his sacrifice?

That's why I have righteousness. Are you appreciating it more? That's what wisdom looks like.

That's what looking on Proverbs 29 and having it work its way through your heart and then making you wise.

That's what it ends up looking like. So the gospel wasn't good news 10 years ago. Or it was good news 10 years ago, but now it's not so much.

It's good news right now. It's good news right now for me. That's the second thing. The third is a clear, humble view of our sin gives us or should give us a compassionate disposition, a compassionate attitude towards others.

[23 : 39] Are you surprised by the sin and the sinfulness of others? Are you surprised at what your children do?

Are you surprised at what your spouse does? Are you surprised by the sin of others? You know, on my clear thinking gospel saturated days, I'm not surprised because I know I'm a sinner saved by grace.

My sins, they are many. His mercy is more. So I understand. I'm not surprised nor shocked when I see other people sinning. And so I pray with a clear eye. Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner.

And now I'm ready to see. Oh, yeah, there's mercy for them and their sinners, too. Their sin doesn't surprise me. But there are days when the sin of others does surprise me.

And maybe one of the reasons that that happens, suddenly I can't understand and suddenly I don't understand why they do it. And suddenly I don't get it and I'm shocked and I'm offended is Proverbs 29 isn't there.

[24 : 52] Suddenly I'm not such a great sinner. Suddenly I can somehow say I've kept my heart. And so then my prayer is not, Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner.

My prayer is the prayer of the Pharisee that says, Lord, thank you that I'm not like other men, like this tax collector over here. Maybe I would never pray that.

But maybe I would just be shocked and hurt and resentful. But sinners.

Those are the only people on earth. The only people here on earth. And they all have that snake bite of original sin.

And so when you're raising children, you're raising sinners. You're raising people set on going their own way. They aren't the dreams that we make them out to be.

[25 : 57] They don't need just the right situation and they'll grow up great. They don't need just the right parenting input and then they'll be righteous. They won't and they can't live up to your hopes of perfection.

And they will disappoint you and they will defy you and defy your dreams. And it does hurt. But in that moment, we as parents need to remember Proverbs 20, verse 9.

And just realize that our children aren't made of anything different than us. Whatever we are, that's what they are. And so here, your pastors are sinners.

At church, your pastors are sinners. Not fake ones, but real ones. And your brothers and sisters are sinners. And we know that and we accept it in theory.

But it becomes a lot harder to accept it when we're talking about it in person. But Proverbs just levels all that kind of proud surprise.

[27 : 02] And says, but can you say? Who can say this? No one. So part of wisdom is accepting it.

Accepting that this is the truth. And when you accept it and when you come to terms with it, it becomes a lot easier to deal with biblically. You get over that hump of the shock and the surprise.

And now you can get on with, okay, what does the Lord say? How should we act towards one another? Colossians 3.12. So clothe yourself with compassion. Well, I can't be compassionate if I'm all right and they're all wrong.

Clothe yourself with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Bear with each other. Bear with each other.

Bear with each other. And forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. So I'm a sinner.

[28 : 02] Not a fake one. Not an untheory one. But a real one. And you're a sinner. And God has forgiven us. And now I'm ready to live in mercy.

Now I'm ready because I've received mercy. Now I'm ready to give you mercy. And so, again, the biggest temptation is going to be for you to walk out of here and say, I know that already.

But take these things to heart. If you think about it hard enough, and I'm going to leave you to think about it hard enough, you'll realize that our church life is going to depend on us understanding these things.

And personally, our sanity and our spiritual safety are going to depend on us understanding that I'm a sinner.

And I've been saved by grace. And that's who those people are too. Well, let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word.

[29 : 05] We thank you that it shines a bright light upon us. And it doesn't do it in such a way, and Holy Spirit, you don't do this in such a way that it crushes us beyond all repair or redemption.

But you do it in order to show us and point us to our need of Jesus Christ. You do it to humble our proud minds. You do it to disabuse us of our delusions.

You do it to disabuse us of our delusions of ourselves, our delusions of what others might or could be. But you do it in order that we could actually get on with living together in joy and peace and patience and kindness.

And so, Holy Spirit, come and uncover our sins. We do pray that you would search us and try us and see if there's any wicked way in us and lead us in the way of everlasting life.

Lead us in paths of righteousness. Lead us towards you. Make us to be the kind of people that reflect you in this world. There are lots of proud people, and there's lots of people who don't see themselves at fault at all.

[30 : 18] Oh, let us shine with a kind of holiness that admits our sinfulness, that's real with you and with one another. Father, and I pray that as we live these kind of lives, that we would be winsome to others, that our humility and our reality would be inviting to them, and that you would be honored by the way that we live.

I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, we're going to close with number seven in your grace hymns. It's Debt or to Mercy Alone. Number seven in your grace hymns.

Let's stand as we sing. Amen.