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Seven Highly Hypocritical Habits of Ritually Religious People Matthew 5:8

Writer Ken Chafin surveyed a group of Seminary students with this question. "What does it take to be a good Christian?" He got five different answers.

- 1) A good Christian attends Sunday school and training times
- 2) A good Christian goes to he worship services of the church
- 3) A good Christian goes to prayer meeting
- 4) A good Christian tithes and gives to the church
- 5) A good Christian wins other people to Jesus

If you look at this list at least 4 out of the 5 have to do with the organization. They have more to do with the ritual, the ceremony. There's not anything necessarily wrong with that, but you could do all of these things and only be a Christian for a week. That's the problem with religions, sometimes it just doesn't get down to the core, the heart of the matter. People come to the organization hoping to see each other, but don't necessarily hope to see God. Jesus in his Sermon on the mount is a whole lot more about a heart righteousness to pursue than giving a list of rules to follow. So much of what we see in religion involves the outward show of purity without any real changing of the heart.

Turn with me in your Bibles to the 5th chapter in Matthew. In the 8th verse we read the next value of the kingdom that Jesus gives to all those who desire to be a part of God's kingdom. To all those who desire a happy, genuinely fulfilled and satisfied life. To all those who desire to live a life that is blessed. Matthew 5:8 "Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God." Jesus make a solid shot here at the Pharisees when he says blessed are the pure in heart. Jesus calls us, calls all people to a purity that is just not on the outside. Jesus is most interested in a purity on the heart, the inside. The Pharisees looked about as pure as anyone could look on the outside, but Jesus saw right through that and exposed their hypocritical religious ritual that was dead and lifeless. Jesus is still

interested in exposing our own propensity for the religious ritual that fails to bring spiritual life and renewal.

Matthew 15 the Pharisees go on a road trip. All the way from Jerusalem to Galilee just to ask Jesus this question. "Why do your disciples go against the tradition of the elders and not wash their hands when they eat bread?" They weren't asking a question about the personal hygiene of the disciples, but about a purification ritual. They thought they were especially pure if they washed their hands in a certain way before eating. They believed that in order to be right before God you had to go through the proper rituals and ceremonies. One Jewish rabbi during early new Testament times was arrested by the Romans and given only a cup of water and some bread crumbs. He used the water for ritual purification instead of drinking saying he would rather die than go against tradition.

I remember some of my Catholic friends in high school would go to confession in anticipation of a wild weekend confessing not only their sins of the past, but also the sins they were planning to commit. I'm sure their church didn't teach them to do that and their priest would not have approved but for them it was all externals, simply looking good on the outside...no matter what they did, they thought they were covered. Catholics do it. So do Protestants... have their list of highly hypocritical habits.

Lets take a look at such a list. Maybe its time to evaluate your own life. Am I truly pure...in heart? Here's a list of seven highly hypocritical habits of ritually religious people.

- 1) Ritually religious people care only about how things appear, not how things really are. As long as they dress up and look like they have everything together and their family and marriage is getting along well. As long as they attend every service and people all assume they are doing well spiritually. As long as they say all the right and expected greetings and trite answers to "so how is it going". As long as it appears good, they assume they are good. And they will work very hard to cover up the cracks and chinks in their appearance. Are you more worried about looking good then being good and living genuine and real before God and other people?

2) Ritually religious people will be quick to evaluate other peoples performance. These are the church critics that are rarely involved in ministry but always involved in opinion. Its like that Pharisee in Matt 18 who prays long and loud in the temple. Oh, God I am so thankful I'm not like that bunch of adulterers over there. I'm so glad I'm not like that swindler who is ripping people off. I'm glad I'm not like... They base their own spirituality on appearances so its quite natural for them to judge others on the same basis.

3) # 3 of highly hypocritical habits of ritually religious people is a close companion of number 2. Here people will compare themselves spiritually with others. As long as we feel we are outperforming others then it makes us feel pretty good. These people live on a moral ladder always looking down on the ones we feel are below us. The Osama Bin ladan's of our workplace, neighborhood, church or family, can encourage us because we can say we are at least better then him or her. We compare ourselves spiritually with others. God calls that self-righteous.

4) Ritually religious people will get extremely frustrated if one of their pet rituals is changed or canceled....even if it has largely lost its original purpose and significance. When I first came here we had a Sunday evening church. There were those who measured the spirituality of a church as to whether or not they met together on Sunday evening in a church service. When only a dozen or more people came here on Sunday evenings the deacons decided to meet in a different way. We now have met for several years in small groups on Sunday night in homes and have quite a few more people involved and studying God's word, building relationship and seeing how God's word intersect life. God seems to be blessing that tool of small groups. Will He always? Not necessarily. It may need a fresh change from God. Its not the method that is the key, the point is to minister to the heart of the matter. Certain songs, certain memorized prayers can lose their power if they only become a ritual mouthing of words. Sometimes they need to rest for a while and then revisited for us to powerfully encourage us anew. It would be great to hear the doxology be reborn again in our worship.

5) Ritually religious people tend to be very proud of their isolationism. They feel that being pure in heart involves separating themselves so far from the world that they have no interaction or contact. They are proud

of the fact that they have not even one friend who is not a believer in Jesus. They are proud of the fact that they never spend any time at all interacting with someone who doesn't share their same love of Christ. They are glad they are never "tainted" by the world. In fear of the world they have cloistered themselves as monks. Separating themselves from the world. Their self-cleaning efforts however are doomed to failure. Jesus called us to not be of the world, but did call us to be IN the world. Not as a survivor who hides and bunkers down hoping not to get shelled but as one who step out of the trenches and go on the offense. The reason God left us here on the earth and didn't simply blip us up to heaven when we came to belief was far more than survival. He wanted us to go in his power and impact and make a difference on the world around us.

6) Ritually religious people act one way at church and another way at home behind closed doors. They only care about praying and reading their bibles only when people are watching. They think little about mouthing off at school, cursing, bad jokes on the golf course. They flip through the satellite channels or surf the web for porn after the kids and wife have gone to bed. They act one way at church and another way at home. Don't think your kids don't notice. Kids don't think your parents don't take note. Your model of hypocrisy will be replicated by those who know you best.

7) The seventh hypocritical habit of ritually religious people is a tendency to blame other people and circumstances for your missed steps. Blame your upbringing, blame the environment, blame other people. But its interesting that even though you change a persons friends, situation, living situation..the problems seem to follow them around. They think Oh when I finally move out its all going to be different. It must be this church so I will change to another one. It must be this neighborhood. It must be this work environment. If I get out of this relationship it will all be better. But their problems continue to dog them around. Why? Because they can't leave themselves. There is no heart change. They have only changed the outside stuff and what is needed is heart surgery by the Great and Divine Physician. For only He is the One who can bring purity to a heart.

The Pharisee's beatitude might read, blessed are the outwardly pure for they shall see God. Jesus words in Matthew 5:8 say "Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God." Man looks on the outward appearance, but God looks on the heart.

So what does the Bible mean when it talks about a heart? Is it referring to the pump in the middle of our chest? No. The Greek word for heart *cardia*, where we get our words *cardiac* carries the meaning of the whole person. Its more than just emotions "I love that car with all my heart" It more than just a warm feeling. Its involves a persons mind, and will and choices. Its the heart that decides to choose good or evil. The heart left to itself is not good. Jer 17:9 says the heart is deceitful above all things who can know it. Russian poet Turgenev wrote "I do not know what the heart of a bad man is like. But I do know what the heart of a good man is like and it is terrible." The heart is all of who we are. Prov. 4:23 "Watch diligently over your heart for from it flow the springs of life." Romans 10:10 "For with the heart man believes resulting in righteousness". The Biblical heart is the core of the real me, its our ability to think, feel, will, act and choose.

Jesus calls us to be pure in heart. Pure means to be clean to have grain that is free of chaff, to have wine unmixed with water. Pure hearted people are those who don't have mixed motives. They have a focused single minded devotion of their heart to God. Have you ever been to a party and the person you are talking to is smiling and nodding her head, but keeps looking over your shoulder looking at other people or things. They aren't really interested in talking to you, they only see us as objects, a means to an end. They appear interested but their focus is elsewhere. That's an impure heart of focus. We love to drink pure water. American's spend over half a billion dollars a year on filtering water. We love to breathe pure air.

A pure heart is more than just a sincere heart. We are told that everybody is OK and all people will get to see God as long as they are true to whatever God they believe in. We are told that all religions are about the same and will all lead to the same God, maybe just with a different name or two. We are told it doesn't matter what you believe just that you do believe and that you are sincere. So just be sincere...I'm afraid however that Jesus would disagree. A pure heart is more than just

sincere. One may have a sincere motive, but it may lead to worthless ends if the thing you are sincere in is worthless. Those Muslims who crashed airplanes into our buildings were about as sincere as you could get. But their sincerity led them to damaging results. The pagan priests in Elijah's day who beat themselves and stabbed their bodies with knives in order to call fire down from heaven on their altars. They were very sincere, but they were sincerely wrong. Their sincerity did not help them see their own sinfulness. Even people in sincerity doing good deeds are out of luck in seeing God. Even good deeds if they come from a spiritually blind heart are of no spiritual value. Thomas Watson said, "Morality can drown a man as fast as vice. A vessel will sink equally well filled with gold or manure."

Purity before God is not sinless perfection, otherwise we would get too discouraged. None of us could model even one of the Beatitudes perfectly. None can live out perfect mourning, none can live perfect humility, perfect hunger and thirst. None can live out perfect pure in hearts.

Purity comes from a cleaning that comes through the process of getting closer to God. This fits well with our progression of beatitudes. As we are poor in spirit we recognize how bankrupt and impoverished we are apart from Christ's righteousness given to us. We mourn our sin, we come in humility before him as we hunger and thirst for His righteousness. That allows us to show mercy toward others and as we are broken before him of our own pride and come in humble confession to God. We then begin to see the cleaning process. But it doesn't stop there but continues more and more like a cycle. The more pure we become the more God reveals himself to us. As we see more of him we see areas in us that need to be changed, so we continue to see greater and greater depth of our spiritual poverty and greater and greater depths of God's mercy and grace and His purity and truth. And we become so attracted to that it begins to become lived out in our lives and change begins to take place.

The impure heart can cause spiritual blindness, but God reveals himself to those who practice purity. Impure hearts can cause us to run to hypocritical habits and religious ritual. But God reveals himself to those who practice purity. Those are the ones who will see God. Those

who like in Psalm 51 "Desire truth in the inward parts." Psalm 24 asks Who can ascend into the hill of the Lord? Who may stand in His holy place. He who has clean hands and a pure heart. God welcomes those who are clean before the Lord, who pursue purity of heart, mind, thoughts, actions. God reveals himself to those who are pursuing purity. So who are you when no one is looking? James 4:8 calls us to purify our double minded hearts, get rid of mixed devotion. Get rid of our tainted affections. Get rid of the habits of highly hypocritically people.

When we pursue purity in the inside. Purity in the heart...we then begin to get rid of our hypocritical spiritual blindness and are better able to see God. For what we are determines what we see. Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God. One who can see is able to perceive, to understand. They sense the reality. In the process of becoming more and more pure we will be able to see more and more of God. While an impure heart, hypocrisy, causes spiritual blindness, pursuit of purity in heart reveals more and more of god and His work. around us. Because who we are determines what we see.

Two people go visit an art museum. One person says Wow! now that is art. The other says They call that art? The pure in heart perceive God and God at work and are easily able to recognize it. They are rarely stumped when asked the question. So what have you seen God doing lately? Where has God been at work in your life. The more pure in heart we become the better we are able to see God, for what we are determines what we see.

I remember a gas construction foreman who I worked with in downtown San Francisco. He was one of the more perverted people I've ever known with a mind that was bent on immorality. Impurity was all he would ever see because that who he was. An attractive woman would walk by and his commentary revealed who he was and what he saw. Conversely I love to spend time around people that expect to see God work every day in their lives, for they always have a story about how God is working. They expect it, so they see it. The heart that is pursuing purity will see God. C.S. Lewis said "It is safe to tell the pure in heart that they shall see God for only the pure in heart will want to."

In 1982 the Los Angeles Times carried the story of a 62 year old woman named Anna Mae Pennica who had been blind from birth. A age

47 she married a man she met in Braille class and for first 15 years of their marriage, he did most of the seeing for both of them until he lost his vision completely to retinitis pigmentosa. Anna had a very supportive and loving family, never resented her handicap, but she had never seen the deep blue of a summer sky or enjoyed the marvelous greening of spring. Then in 1981 Dr. Thomas Pettit of the Jules Stein Eye Institute of UCLA performed a surgery to remove the rare congenital cataracts from the lens of her eyes. For the first time Mrs. Pennica could see. She was amazed at how much brighter and bigger things were than she had imagined. Since that day she has gotten up early each morning, splash her eyes with water, put on her glasses and enjoy the morning sun take over the dark night. How incredible it must have been for her to walk through the canopy of forest and moss and ferns. What a sight to see the powerful ocean waves crashing against the sandy beaches.

Yet...Mrs. Pennica's "miracle" fades in comparison to an even far greater sight. To see God. Those who are pure in heart get 20/20 spiritual vision. To see Him work in our lives. To enjoy His creation. To see His church body of believers as they used their gifts together for His glory. To see God bring people together for hope and healing. To see God arrange circumstances just right so that His name would be glorified. To see how God provides in just the right time in just the right way so that those who are looking can see God. And that promise is not just for right now, but one day face to face. I John 3:2 "We are children of God and is has not appeared as yet what we shall be but when He appears we shall be like him for we shall see him as he is. And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself just as He is pure."

The irony of Mrs. Pennica's story is that the surgical techniques that could have corrected her eyesight problem were available as far back as the 1940's. She lived 40 of her 62 sightless years needlessly blind. 40 years of blindness that she didn't have to live. There may be some here who have lived in spiritual blindness for 40 years. The cure is right under your nose and you have missed it until now. Don't miss out. Folks there has been available to the world for 2000 years a cure for spiritual blindness that is 100 percent effective. There has been a cure for people addicted to hypocritical religious ritual with God acting as a divine heart surgeon. He wants to take our heart of stone and replace it with a heart

of flesh. Jesus did not misspeak his words when he pointed the way. Jesus did not condone a popular thought that all religions eventually end up at the same place. He was extremely clear when He said "I am the way the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." Jesus stated clearly you must be born again. You need a new heart that only God can give. If you are not a believer in Jesus. If you have not yet confessed your sin to God and affirmed your belief in Jesus as one who conquered the power of sin at the cross. That is your first step to removing spiritual blindness and seeing God. If anyone be in Christ he is a new creation old things are passed away behold new things come. A new heart begins to see and look for new things.

If you are a believer today and know your heart is not as pure as it should be we need to begin by asking ourselves. Is my heart clean? Is there something getting in the way of a single hearted devotion to God? Do we need a radical cleaning by God? Does our heart, our mind, our beliefs, our actions, our desires do they need to be radically renewed by God. Have we been playing the religious game, habitually addicted to religious rituals without the heart of relationship with God? Maybe there is a ritual that is holding you back. Be absolutely honest with God about your heart condition. Acknowledge to God that he is the one that will do the work of cleaning. We are not going to be passive Phil 2 we will work out with what he has worked in as we work together. But that too comes from God. The biblical balance is "I must do everything I can and still realize its not enough trusting God to purify my heart." Am I continually filling myself with God's word. Am I allowing God's word to wash its cleansing stream over my soul? Am I fixing my eyes not on this world and its stuff but on the hope of heaven. I John 3:2 "everyone who fixes himself on the hope purifies himself." Only the pure in heart will be able to handle the dazzling brilliance of truth and light of God's presence. Don't wait 40 years for a cure. Its right here in God's word. Spiritual sight is available for all who believe. When God looks at the Christian it is amazing that he says " you are absolutely pure, in Christ." He looks at us and sees the righteousness of Christ. Romans 3 We are justified because of what Christ has done . II Corinthians 5:21 "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" Don't miss out folks.