

# Character Matters: Purity

*Genuine moral excellence from the inside out*

## Is Your Character Sincere?

What picture comes to mind when you think of the word 'purity'? Perhaps you see a blazing-hot cauldron of melted gold, or the dazzling white light of a star, or think of the innocence of a small child. All these pictures help us to "put our hands on" the abstract concept of purity - to be all-one-thing-and-nothing-else, to be unsullied and unspoiled.



Anyone can "honor" an authority to whom he is looking for a promotion or a raise. "Obeying" the speed limit suddenly becomes much easier when you see the policeman by the side of the road. You may be able to keep from being physically adulterous, but can you keep from thinking lustful thoughts?

The ancient Romans expressed this same metaphorical idea in their word, *sine cere* (sincere). Dishonest Roman potters cheated their customers by plugging cracks in their wares with wax. The wax looked the same as the potter's clay, until it was used over a cook fire. The heat melted the wax and the pot became useless. Literally, the words *sine cere* mean "without wax."

Often when we use the word 'purity' in the moral realm, we refer to sexual innocence and faithfulness. But the concept of moral purity involves much more than that. It reaches deep into the heart and encompasses not just our outward actions, but our inward thoughts and motivations. If we are pure, our goodness is real, not fake. We are "the real thing," and not a scam. We are "the genuine article." We are sincere - not hypocrites.



Purity is by far the most difficult of all character qualities, because it is the essential quality that makes all the others genuine. Many people give "generously" to charity, but how many do so from 'pure goodness'? Is there not some mixture of pride, self-glorying, or desire for praise?

Just as pure gold consists of nothing but gold, purity demands that our entire being consist of nothing but goodness. When we understand that, we may begin to despair of ever developing "true" goodness in ourselves. And that is exactly what we should do.

Only one person has ever been perfectly pure - entirely unsullied in his actions, thoughts, and motivations: the Son of God, Jesus Christ. The case of Christianity is that God Himself entered the human race to live the spotless life we never could, and to pay the penalty for our hypocritical pretensions at goodness. When we come to a humble reliance on His mercy, then (and only then!) can He begin to change us into the sort of people who are capable of true through-and-through goodness.

Even then, purification is a process. Like gold in the refiner's fire, the "heat" of life brings the "dross" in our hearts to the surface. Ultimately, just as gold cannot refine itself, we can't achieve purity of heart for ourselves. As we strive to do right, consistently, with right motivations, we must remember that it is in God's power alone that we will be successful.

Purity matters - because without it, all of our goodness is nothing but melting wax.

# Purity Matters at Home

The purity of childhood has been the subject of many a poem and painting, and the phrase “coming of age” has come to imply a loss of innocence. The task of raising pure children is a solemn responsibility, and it is of utmost importance to prepare them to identify and cling to what is right, and to steer clear of what is false.

Compare this preparation time to the training a person must undergo to recognize counterfeit money. The first prerequisite to recognizing a fake bill is to see and handle plenty of genuine ones. When a person becomes intimately familiar with the look and feel of real notes, he will be able, at a moment’s glance or touch, to identify a false one.

In the same way, it is essential to expose children primarily to what is good and true. Their exposure to the harsh elements of the world will come soon enough. But first, to be able to distinguish between right and wrong, between truth and falsehood, they must be intimately familiar with that which is wholesome, honest, and good.



After becoming habitually accustomed to handling real money, a person should then learn the differences

## A Checklist for Purity

Do I...

- ✓ Examine myself regularly and seek to recognize and fight any selfish or prideful motives that drive my actions?
- ✓ Recognize that I will always have mixed motives and rely on Jesus Christ to redeem me from guilt?
- ✓ Boldly speak the truth in a gentle, loving way?
- ✓ Practice what I preach?
- ✓ Put on a facade of friendliness around others, while secretly disliking them?
- ✓ Do “good deeds” to be thought well of, rewarded, or for fear of punishment?

between genuine and counterfeit bills. In the same way, when children are well-grounded in truth, parents should begin to teach them about falsehood - not in an open-ended, decide-for-yourself way - but showing the clear distinctions between the two.



A catch-phrase of today’s parenting gurus is ‘autonomy.’ Some parents feel they must present all options equally to their children and let them decide. But this thinking stems from the belief that there is no real truth. Just as a person’s belief in the authenticity of a bill has no bearing on its actual value, a person’s decision about his beliefs has no bearing on actual truth. Obviously, every person must (and will!) ultimately decide what he or she will believe. That fact should lead us, not to shy away from teaching our children, but to make an even more concerted effort to instill in our children the hallmarks that will help them distinguish right from wrong, and truth from error.

Purity matters - because counterfeit truth is everywhere.

---

Or do I...

- ✓ Try to rationalize my actions by developing complicated explanations for what I know to be wrong behavior?
- ✓ Try to perfect myself to earn “brownie points” with God?
- ✓ Hide my true convictions behind a cloud of soothing words?
- ✓ See others’ faults more readily than I do my own?
- ✓ Pray for grace to deal with others in genuine love?
- ✓ Humbly seek to obey God out of simple love for Christ?