

Introduction

I'm going to recite five of the best advertising slogans ever coined. Listen to each and then identify what company, product, or service it advertises: (1) "**Finger lickin' good**" (Kentucky Fried Chicken); (2) "**Melts in your mouth, not in your hand**" (M&M's); (3) "**You're in good hands**" (Allstate Insurance Company); (4) "**The quicker picker upper**" (Bounty paper towels); and (5) "**99 44/100% pure**" (Ivory Soap). Let's focus on the last of those. The Proctor and Gamble Company coined it after laboratory analysis showed that its Ivory Soap was just that, 99 44/100% pure. It replaced the old slogan, "**It Floats.**"

99 44/100% pure may accurately describe Ivory Soap, but it certainly doesn't accurately describe God. He isn't 99 44/100% pure. He's 100% pure and that's what I'm going to preach about today.

Pure

Let's begin by defining what "**pure**" means. All of us value purity in almost everything, especially food. That's why the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) establishes required guidelines for food like the following. Apple butter: If the mould count is 12% or more or if it averages 4 rodent hairs per 100 grams or if it averages 5 or more whole insects (not counting mites, aphids, or scale insects) per 100 grams, it cannot be sold. Mushrooms: If there is an average of 20 or more maggots of any size per 15 grams of dried mushrooms, it cannot be sold. Fig Paste: If there are more than 13 insect heads per 100 grams of fig paste in each of 2 or more subsamples, it cannot be sold. And finally hot dogs: You don't want to know or you'll never eat another one again. It's comforting isn't it? The FDA assures that we aren't eating too much mold and rodent hair or too many insects and maggots with our food.

Anyway, those guidelines assist us in defining "**pure.**" It means "**uncontaminated.**" It's food without mold, rodent hair, insects, and maggots, air without fumes, infields without stones, gardens without

weeds, soap without chemicals, and so on.

God Is Pure

That helps us understand one of the compelling attributes of God. In Leviticus 19:2, He declares about Himself, "**I the LORD (Yahweh) your God am holy.**" That's the compelling attribute. He's holy. The Hebrew word translated that means "**separated or cut off from.**" It conveys that God is separated from two things. The first is creation. He's different in kind than anything else that exists. The second is evil. The first of those refers to His transcendence and the second to His purity, both of which make up His holiness. I'm addressing His purity today. Purity refers to His moral condition or state and has two aspects.

One is that He's utterly separated from evil (moral wrong). There isn't even the slightest degree of evil in Him of any kind. Human holiness, by way of analogy, helps us grasp this. Imagine you or I murdering a baby in cold blood. We can't imagine that because we are, in our natures, 99.44% separated from murder. It isn't in us to kill like that. Now consider the "**tiniest**" evil you can think of, like telling a little white lie. God is less inclined to do that than we are inclined to murder a baby. He is in fact not inclined at all to do that. As Titus 1:2 says it, He "**cannot lie.**" He's incapable of doing that or any evil. He never thinks, feels, or does what is morally wrong because He can't.

God's purity has a second aspect. He's utterly good (morally right). There's only goodness in Him. Let's go back to human holiness. Imagine you or I being honest and paying for a Milky Way instead of shoplifting it. We can imagine that because we are, in our natures, 99.44% honest. It is in us not to shoplift. Now consider the highest good you can think of – like giving your life to save another. God is more inclined to do that than we are inclined to pay for the Milky Way. He is in fact fully inclined to do that and in Jesus did. He always thinks, feels, and does what is morally right because He cannot do otherwise.

I'd quickly say that the analogies I just used are inadequate. That's

because God's holiness isn't just human holiness bettered or perfected. It's so different in nature than human holiness in fact that we know nothing that's even remotely like it. But we understand the best we can and I hope the analogies help you do that. I'd sum it up this way. That God is holy means that He's morally pure. He isn't 50% pure like the air in Beijing or 99.44% pure like Ivory Soap. He's uncontaminated and thus 100% pure – all good and no evil, all right and no wrong.

Holy Is Healthy

Now, as all of His attributes do, God's holiness has profound implications to us. The English word "**holy**" reveals one of those. It's derived from an Anglo-Saxon word, "**halig**," which means "**well**" or "**whole**." That derivation teaches us a defining fact of our existence. Whatever is holy is healthy. And whatever is unholy is unhealthy. Moral purity makes us spiritually, psychologically, relationally, and materially well. Moral impurity makes us ill in those same respects.

The reason for that is the very nature of our universe itself. When God created it, all of His attributes were naturally expressed in the realities that make it up. Since He's holy, therefore, our holiness is consistent with the realities of the universe and our unholiness inconsistent. So, being and doing what is right makes things go well for others and us. But being and doing what is wrong makes things go poorly for others and us. Examples abound.

Take sex, for instance. Since God invented it, it reflects attributes of His, including His triune nature. Two basic realities underlie it as a result. One is psychological. As Paul teaches in 1 Corinthians 6:16, sexual intercourse is a life-uniting act. We cannot touch a person's body in sex without touching his or her soul as well. The other basic reality is microbiological. Microorganisms that can injure or kill us are passed by illicit sexual contact. Holiness, therefore, makes things go well for us. Sex in marriage is fulfilling and safe. But unholiness makes things go poorly for us. Sex outside of marriage is unfulfilling and dangerous.

It's true. Whatever is holy is healthy. Moral purity makes things go well for others and us. Conversely, whatever is unholy is unhealthy. Moral impurity makes things go poorly for others and us.

Be Holy

So, be holy! God called the Israelites to be holy in Leviticus 19:2. Then quoting that verse, He calls us to be holy in 1 Peter 1:15-16. He declares in both texts that He's holy and we should be too. That implies that we can be, which is a defining fact about us. We can be holy in our very nature and Peter tells us how in verse 13.

Look at the phrase **"the grace brought to you at the revelation of Jesus."** **"Grace"** refers to the Holy Spirit. **"At the revelation of Jesus"** refers to His first coming. **"Brought"** is a present participle that should be translated **"is being brought."** So the phrase means that Father God gave us the Holy Spirit when we decided to follow Jesus. Peter's point is this. Being holy is primarily the Holy Spirit's work not ours. He continually transforms the very core of our being so that we become increasingly holy.

But we have a part to play in that and Peter reveals it. Notice the word **"prepare"** in verse 13. The KJV translates it literally and correctly, **"Gird up the loins."** It's a metaphor here. First century men in the Middle East wore long gowns, which they pulled up whenever energetic effort required it. Our modern equivalent is **"roll up your sleeves."** The idea is pull up your gown or roll up your sleeves and get to work. Mean business in other words. That's the gist of the metaphor and what we have to do to be holy. We have to mean business - in two respects.

Mean Business in Our Minds

The first is found in the word **"minds"** in verse 13. We have to mean business in our minds. The word **"sober"** in verse 13 helps us define that. It connotes alertness or mindfulness. In the context of our

text, it connotes being mindful of what's holy and unholy.

Sadly, many Christians today aren't. They're unmindful instead. In his priceless book *The Knowledge of the Holy*, A.W. Tozer explains it this way, "**We have learned to live with unholiness and have come to look upon it as the natural and expected thing.**" Tozer wrote that 50 years ago but I can tell you this. It's truer today than it was then.

I knew a Friends pastor who was not only highly successful but prideful, angry, and malicious as well. He was incessantly at odds with people and routinely imposed his will on them to get his way. His behavior became so intolerable that he eventually was forced to resign. The Administrative Council then wrote a congregational letter explaining why he did and in it stressed this. He didn't resign because of "**moral failure,**" meaning, I assume, sexual sin. That an astonishing statement? Grasp what it implies. Pride, anger, and malice aren't moral failures.

That illustrates exactly what Tozer wrote. Many Christians have learned to live with things like pride, anger, malice, gossip, lying, and resentment to name a few. Those things aren't moral failures, they think. They're things all of us naturally do and thus, should be expected, even tolerated.

But they are moral failures, just as drunkenness, adultery, and theft are. And the first thing we must do to be holy is to perceive them that way. We must always be alert to and mindful of what's holy and unholy, in the world and in us. We must mean business in our minds.

Mean Business in Our Behavior

There's a second thing we have to do to be holy. It's found in the word "**behavior**" in verse 15. We have to mean business in our behavior. Verse 14 explains how we do that. On the positive side, we intend to "**obey,**" to do what is right. On the negative side, we intend not to "**conform to former lusts,**" not to do what is wrong. Notice I said "**intend.**" Meaning business in our behavior is a matter of intention.

Intention explains the holiness or unholiness in the lives of

Christians. In his book *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*, William Law observed that many Christians of his day used filthy language. He then explained why they did: **“For let a man but have so much piety as to intend to please God in all the actions of his life as the happiest and best thing in the world, and then he will never swear more. It will be as impossible for him to swear whilst he feels this intention within himself as it is impossible for a man that intends to please his prince to go up and abuse him to his face.”** He was right. Why do Christians gossip? They don’t intend not to. Why do Christians rejoice when others do better than they do? They intend to. Why do Christians give evil for evil? They don’t intend not to. Why do Christians wait patiently? They intend to. You get the idea. To be holy, we must intend holy behavior.

We intend it by doing two things. First, we study the Bible and learn it says is right and wrong. Second, we try and train the best we can to do the right and not to do the wrong. I once counseled a new convert who was still using filthy language. One of the issues in his mind was whether or not doing so was wrong. So I read Ephesians 5:4-5, which teaches that it is. Having learned it’s wrong, he then tried the best he could not to do it. But it was such a strong habit, he failed. So I told him to train by practicing spiritual disciplines like solitude, fasting, and silence, which he did. His efforts showed it. He intended to be holy.

And so should we. We study the Bible and learn what it says is right and wrong. We then try and train the best we can to do the right and not to do the wrong. We mean business in our behavior when we do.

Conclusion

I have a question in closing. How morally pure are you and I? Obviously, we, in our fallen state, can never be as pure as God is, 100%. But we can be purer than Beijing’s air is, 50%. Let’s mean business in our minds and behavior. Over time, the Holy Spirit will make us as pure morally as Ivory Soap is chemically if we do, 99.44% pure.