

The Word of God Cleanses Us John 15:3; Psalm 119:9-11

From a very early age we have learned to ask questions, to be inquisitive. What parent hasn't had to answer the multitude of "why" questions from a probing toddler.

Questions have been the bedrock of discoveries in both science and philosophy. But perhaps one of the greatest questions is what the psalmist asks in the passage we will consider together this morning:

"Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?"

"How can a young man keep his way pure?"

I did a Google search on the question 'how do you make your way clean?' It led me to sites like
How to clean your kitchen
How to clean your bath
How to clean your computer
How to clean your epoxy stone floor
How to make cleaning fun

It gave no answer for how to make your way, your life, your conduct/lifestyle clean. When I changed the word from clean to pure, I got the following suggestion from the Thought Catalogue.

They suggest that to be pure a person must **"be respectful and put priorities ahead of personal interests. Focus on the future and making your life a full one. Set goals, have dreams, and push forward until you've reached your goal. To be pure is to be you, completely, but it takes commitment. To be pure means to be honest and truthful all throughout, from the core, to the surface."**

The question on how to become clean or pure has been on the minds of man since near the beginning of time. Man's conclusions have always driven him to consider what he must do to become clean. After their sin in the Garden of Eden, the solution for Adam and Eve's cleansing was to cover up with fig leaves. God offered a different solution that would show man that his attempts at getting clean fall far short and that only what He could offer could make a person clean.

But that hasn't stopped man from trying to achieve purity through personal endeavors like meditation, serving others, giving to charity, living in isolation, doing some benevolent act or any other self-guided deeds. If it were only that easy.

The question posed is a serious one to ponder. This question doesn't come from the student to the teacher, but from the teacher to the student. Instead of telling students what they needed to know Jewish teachers taught by asking their students questions. Jesus was masterful at asking questions to challenge the thinking or beliefs of the day about what the Old Testament Scriptures really taught.

The question the psalmist asks presupposes that there is a problem and the problem is a lack of purity. It's the problem of sin, a problem that reveals man's heart, which is deceitful above all else, that there is no one who is righteous, no one who does good, we are like sheep who have gone astray, we do what is right in our own eyes, that the intent of our heart is to do evil all the time, that we are all sinners. Whether we are willing to admit it or not, the simple fact that we have a sin problem is quite clear just from observing behavior. We don't need to look very hard or far to make that discovery. David speaks for us all when he says **"surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me." (Psalm 51:5)**

What, then, is man's hope to become pure in actions, attitudes and motives if that is our nature?

John 13 gives the account of Jesus washing the disciples' feet. After a meal Jesus took a basin and towel and washed each of the disciples' feet, a custom after walking all day on dusty roads. Peter objected when Jesus came to wash his feet. He didn't want the master performing such a menial task on him. Jesus said that unless He washed Peter's feet, he would have no part with Jesus. Peter then said to Jesus "if that's the case you better wash everything from head to toe." Jesus said he only needed to wash his feet and the whole body would be clean. Then He told Peter that he was clean but not all of them. He was referring of course to Judas who would betray Him in just a few hours.

Jesus didn't mean that He hadn't finished washing the feet of all the disciples, but that not all of the disciples believed in Him for salvation, that He was the prophesied Messiah who had come to seek and save the lost. Judas was a follower. He was not a believer. He was a disciple, but he was not a true disciple. He followed Jesus for what he thought he could get. He was an opportunist, only in it for the hope of personal glory and gain.

So a couple chapters later, when Jesus says in **15:3** that **"You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you"** isn't suggesting that Judas had become a true disciple through his conversion at the dinner table, but if we refer back to **chapter 13**, he had already left to set the stage for betrayal. The 11 remaining disciples all had a personal faith in Jesus so that He could make the statement that they were all converted. At one point or another during His ministry they had embraced the belief in what Peter stated that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God.

For us to answer the question from **Psalm 119:9**, we must first have experienced the cleansing, regenerating work of the Holy Spirit through salvation in Christ (**Titus 3:5**). Regeneration simply means being born again or born from above and speaks of being made new from the inside out. It can only be done through a supernatural act of God whereby He declares the sinner to be righteous and no longer in sin. Without this initial cleansing at salvation, we will never be able to answer the question about how to become pure. The initial cleansing power that occurs at salvation makes us a new creation where old things have passed away and the new has come (**II Corinthians 5:17**). When a believer is baptized, the waters are symbolic of the washing of being renewed that takes place when sins are washed away. Baptism doesn't do the washing, the Holy Spirit does and when we are born again we are made clean in the eyes of God.

Reading scripture, memorizing scripture, obeying scripture will not help us become clean until and unless you are first born again. Being moral will get you no closer to eternal life. You will be just like

the Pharisees who thought their religiosity was all they needed. So the question presupposes a problem. We are dirty and sinful. **How then do we become clean, especially if religion or rationalism or philosophy or self-improvement can't do it?** So while the questions presupposes a problem it also presupposes a solution. **Assuming you have taken the step to become born again, let's see how we can become clean or pure according to Psalm 119:9-11.**

As we have said it is a probing question to ponder.

I. A PROBING QUESTION TO PONDER – v. 9a

The question doesn't focus on hygiene as if we are asking the best brand of soap or body wash to use. It doesn't have to do with shampoo that leaves your hair silky looking while taking care of dandruff and split ends. In poetry, the word pure or clean always refers to the issue of morality. How do you get right

In his dialogue with Job, Eliphaz asks this question: **"What is man, that he could be pure, or one born of woman, that he could be righteous?" (Job 15:14)**

Bildad poses a similar question in **Job 25:4** **"How then can a man be righteous before God? How can one born of woman be pure?"**

The issue at hand is regarding man's depravity. **How can a person born a sinner become righteous?**

Solomon asks a rhetorical question in **Proverbs 20:9** that we all know the answer to: **"Who can say, 'I have kept my heart pure; I am clean and without sin?'"** The answer is that no one can – by himself.

The question asked by the psalmist is how can we be clean or pure in the sight of God in a moral sense? As we already know, cleansing implies that we are polluted so the question begs a response. It is not a question that can be left unanswered, because to address it is of benefit to us.

Charles Spurgeon has said **"Never was there a more important question for any man. Our way is already**

unclean – we are in need of cleansing – from the sins behind us and to keep us from temptations that are ahead of us. Though the way is hard, let us not shrink back from the journey.”

Every day occurrences demand we ask this question. And keep in mind that we can't reason our way into purity and neither can sheer will power keep us from avoiding or overcoming the problem and power of sin. So there has to be another way. The psalmist recognizes that no self effort can do it, so he asks God to clean up his heart. (**Psalm 51:10**)

So let's ask the question:

“How can a young man keep his way pure?”

Matthew Henry says “It is ours to ask the question, it is God's to give the answer and to carry it out.”

The psalmist doesn't leave us pondering an answer to the probing question. He gives it to us plainly with a practical action to pursue.

II. A PRACTICAL ACTION TO PURSUE – vv. 9b, 10a, 11a

The psalmist says that one way to be pure is to heed or live according to the Word. The term **“word”** generally refers to what God has spoken.

A. We Are to Heed God's Word – v. 9b

The word **“heed”** means to guard, keep, observe, or watch. It can mean to exercise great care over or diligence. It was used when speaking about keeping a garden or tending a flock referring to watching over them.

The word **“way”** refers to your conduct, path, course or life.

When I ran cross-country, the course was marked with flags. It's supposed to be simple. It rhymed, sort of. The color gave you the direction.

White go right.

Red go left.

Blue go through or go straight.

Sometimes there was more than one flag on a pole.

The top flag was what you did first. The next flag down told you what to do second.

One race in college I missed a flag and I went the wrong way.

How can we be clean? How can we be pure? What is the flag I am to follow in the race of life?

The psalmist tells us the flag to follow is God's Word. Live according to God's Word.

Psalm 27:11 “Teach me Your way, O Lord; lead me in a straight path.”

Proverbs 3:5-6 says that when we trust the Lord with our whole heart He will direct our path, which literally means He will make our paths straight. When we trust what God's Word says it will guide us on the right course. We'll never lose our way because His Word shows us how to be clean. His Word shows us the way we ought to take.

Psalm 1:1 tells us not to walk, stand or sit with the ungodly.

Proverbs 4:13-14 “Hold on to instruction, do not let it go; guard it well, for it is your life. Do not set foot on the path of the wicked or walk in the way of evil men.”

Jesus told the disciples on various occasions to be on their guard, to watch and pray so they wouldn't fall into temptation.

Peter wrote that we should be alert because our enemy is lurking about to devour.

To heed God's Word or to live according to God's Word presupposes that we are spending time in it regularly to know how God wants us to live, to act, to think, to speak. A holy God nor His holy Word will ever lead you to do something that is contrary to His holiness.

He'll never tell you to lie to get out of a bad spot.

He'll never tell you to cheat because someone cheated you so you can get even.

He'll never tell you to steal, even when it means meeting a real need for your family.

He will always guide you in doing what is right.

So read and listen to His Word, pay attention to it and then do it. Heeding God's Word means that you have heard it, understand it, and then act accordingly in response to the command given.

He will never tell you to be unkind or hateful.

He will never tell you to be untruthful.

He will never tell you to be unforgiving or bitter.

On the other hand, His Word does tell us the way we should walk to be pure.

Micah 6:8 “He has shown you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”

The path is not obscure.

The path is not hidden.

The path is knowable.

Psalm 16:11 “You made known to me the path of life; You will fill me with joy in Your presence, with eternal pleasures at Your right hand.”

Proverbs 12:28 “In the way of righteousness there is life; along that path is immortality.”

Proverbs 15:24 “The path of life leads upward for the wise to keep him from going down to the grave.”

Isaiah 30:21 “Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, ‘This is the way; walk in it.’”

The Word of God leads us on a path of integrity.

Psalm 27:11

The Word of God leads us on a path of uprightness.

Proverbs 2:13

The Word of God leads us on a path of justice.

Proverbs 2:8

Isaiah 26:7-8 “The path of the righteous is level; O upright One, You make the way of the righteous smooth. Yes, Lord, walking in the way of Your laws, we wait for You; Your name and renown are the desire of our hearts.”

The Word of God leads us on a path of righteousness. **Proverbs 8:20**

Conversely, when we follow the Word of God, we will shun evil.

Psalm 119:101 “I have kept my feet from every evil path so that I might obey Your word.”

Psalm 119:103-104 “How sweet are Your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth! I gain understanding from Your precepts;

therefore I hate every wrong path.”

Psalm 119:128 “And because I consider all Your precepts right, I hate every wrong path.”

No matter where we are going, when we follow the flags given to us in His Word, it will always lead us to do or say or think what is right. Heeding His Word is a practical action to pursue and helps us become pure because we know it will take us along the right course. To heed God’s Word is not out of duty or in compliance because we knew we should, like the Pharisees who obeyed in the letter of the law, but instead it means to keep it in the heart.

Matthew Henry says that “the heart would be kept by the Word because he kept the Word in his heart.”

A second practical action to pursue is to have a heart for God.

B. We Are to Have a Heart for God – v. 10a

We didn’t include this verse in your discussion during Adult Impact, but I want to include it in the ways the psalmist tells us on how we can be pure.

Let me put it plainly. If we don’t have a heart for God, we won’t really desire to live according to His Word. We’ll pick and choose what we want to obey out of convenience, not out of conviction.

The psalmist tells us that his pursuit of God is not some mediocre, half-hearted, feeble, leisurely endeavor, which he would get to when he had time. He’s all in, giving it his all. In sports you might hear an announcer say that a certain player left it all out on the court meaning he gave everything he had. He used up every ounce of energy. From the opening to the closing buzzer he gave his all.

Deut. 6:5-6 “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts.”

The psalmist seeks God with his whole heart. Heart in Scripture often refers to the core of one’s being – body, mind, spirit – will, intellect and emotions. To “seek” means to seek with care, be diligent in the

search. It's the idea of asking to get knowledge and advice when considering a particular problem. In this case, it's seeking after God to learn what He has to say about how to be pure or to keep from sin. Search out God and be ready to obey what He says.

Someone has rightly said that *when our heart seeks God, our feet won't stray from God*. The Word and regular communion with its author are essential in making our way pure.

With what effort are you seeking after God?

Let it be with your whole heart. That's a practical action to pursue.

The third action given by the psalmist is to hide God's Word in our heart.

C. We Are to Hide God's Word in Our Heart – v. 11a

That doesn't mean that we hide it so that it can't be found. It's not a game like hide and seek, where the object is to remain hidden till the very end. It means to treasure up or store it to be readily available when needed. It refers to hiding something for protection or because something bad might happen.

Moses's mother hid him in the bulrushes to protect him from the edict of Pharaoh to drown all the newborn boys in the Nile. He was protected for a purpose and to keep him from harm.

Hiding God's Word in your heart is more than just memorizing Scripture for a Bible drill or award in Bible club or to be a walking Bible encyclopedia. Memorizing God's Word will help keep your way pure. To treasure it is to recognize its worth to help at just the time needed.

Hide God's Word for when you are anxious.
 Hide God's Word for when you are afraid.
 Hide God's Word for when you are sad.
 Hide God's Word for when you are discouraged.
 Hide God's Word for when you are tempted.
 Hide God's Word for when you want to give praise.
 Hide God's Word for any occasion.

Now I will need to admit that the past couple of months I have been slack in my memorizing of Scripture and it's something I will get back to. We

have a monthly passage in the bulletin to memorize that I encourage you to store up. If you would be pure, you would do well to hide God's Word in your heart. It cleanses you. There are any number of programs you can follow.

My memory work is done topically, meaning I have a topic and I learn some verses relating to that area. I have used the Navigator's topical memory system. If you Google topical memory system, it will take you to the Navigator website and you can print off the topics and verses to memorize.

Pastor Jim has done work by memorizing a chapter. The point is – hide God's Word in your heart.

In their commentary of the Old Testament, Keil and Delitzsch write "One is said to hide the Word in one's heart when one has it continually present with him, not merely an outward precept (like the Pharisees), but as an inward motive power in opposition to selfish action."

Job 23:11-12 "My feet have closely followed His steps; I have kept to His way without turning aside. I have not departed from the commands of His lips; I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my daily bread."

Solomon says that when we store up God's Word, we will understand what it is to reverence God (**Proverbs 2:1-5**).

Proverbs 7:1 says that storing up God's Word and obeying it brings life.

Alexander MacLaren states that "The Word hid in the heart will be manifest in the life."

If we would have a life that is pure, we would do well to hide God's Word in our heart. That is a practical action that we can pursue along with heeding God's Word and having a heart for God.

In January of this year, a "Faith in America" survey was conducted. Not surprisingly, it found that 72% of Americans say the nation's moral compass is pointed in the wrong direction. What is troubling is that 60% of all respondents admitted they don't make it to church even once a month. How can the moral compass point any differently if we avoid the

source of how to become pure?

What then is the result if we take God's Word seriously? What does the psalmist say is the path of danger we will pass by when we cherish the Word?

III. THE PATH OF DANGER TO PASS BY – vv. 10b, 11b

A. So We Won't Stray From God – v. 10b "I seek You with all my heart; do not let me stray from Your command."

Again, when our heart seeks God and His Word, we won't stray from God.

Matthew Henry writes "The more we have found of the pleasures there is in keeping God's commandments, the more afraid we shall be of wandering from them and the more earnest we shall be in prayer to God for His grace to prevent our wandering."

In other words, the more we love God, the more we delight in God, the more we delight in God's Word, the more likely we are to want to turn away from sin by obeying God's commands. We will desire to please Him in our actions, words, and thoughts. We cannot carelessly sing "I love to go a wandering" as we skip merrily along the path of life unconcerned about sin. Pursue God so we don't stray from Him.

Second, if we don't stray from God, then we won't sin against God.

B. So We Won't Sin Against God – v. 11b "I have hidden Your word in my heart that I might not sin against You."

Matthew Henry states "Good men are afraid to sin and hide God's Word in their heart so they won't."

Our culture should not be the standard by which we live our lives. It can never make us pure. That can only come from the Word of God.

Warren Wiersbe used to say that God's Word will keep you from sin, or sin will keep you from God's Word. **Which is the case in your life?**

If we don't want the convicting power of God's Word to penetrate our heart to change our desire for sin challenging us to repent, we won't want to spend time in it. If I don't want to face my health issues, I'll avoid the doctor. If I don't want to see how dirty I am from playing in the mud all day, I won't look in a mirror. If I don't want to hear about my sin, I'll avoid His Word.

Years ago in my early Sunday school days I learned a simple song based on this passage.

Thy Word is a lamp to my feet,
A light to my path always,
To guide and to save me from sin,
And show me the heavenly way.

Thy Word have I hid in my heart,
That I might not sin against Thee.
That I might not sin,
That I might not sin,
Thy Word have I hid in my heart.

On April 13, 2022, the medical examiner's office in Charles County, Maryland released their conclusion on the cause of death for a man found dead in his home in January. The accidental cause of death was 'snake envenomation.' When the unidentified man was found, there were 124 snakes in his house including rattlesnakes, cobras and black mambas. This sad story paints a grim picture of what happens when we get to comfortable with deadly snakes. **That goes for sin, too.**

If we don't want to get bit by sin –
Heed Gods Word
Have a heart for God and His Word.
Hide God's Word in your heart.
It's the way to become pure.

How about you? Do you desire to be pure or are you comfortable with sin? Our passage tells us that the Word of God cleanses us.