

As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby. - 1 Peter 2:2

THE SINCERE MILK OF GOD'S WORD

The word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword... - Hebrews 4:12

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The Inward Person

Matthew 23:27-28: *Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitened tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but inwardly are full of dead men's bones and of all uncleanness. Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.*

While the scribes and Pharisees of Jesus' day often appeared righteous outwardly, they failed to please God *inwardly*. Jesus stressed their need (and our need) to be righteous on both the outside *and* the inside (**verse 26**). Consider seven attributes of the "inward man" that are part of being inwardly clean.

Faith – In **2 Corinthians 5:7**, the inspired apostle Paul said, "*we walk by faith, not by sight.*" As this statement indicates, faith is the foundation of the Christian's life.

While walking by faith involves God-pleasing conduct, faith is, in its primary sense, part of the *inward* man. This is seen in the definition of faith in **Hebrews 11:1**: *Now faith is assurance of things hoped for, a conviction of things not seen.*

In addition to believing *in* God, faith involves believing *God*. Faith unwaveringly trusts all that God teaches through His inspired Word.

Such trust is not gained by accident. **Romans 10:17** teaches, "*faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.*" Feeding our souls with the spiritual nourishment God gives us, and doing so

with an honest heart that genuinely wants the truth, is a recipe for increasing our faith (cf. **Luke 8:11, 15**).

Sincerity – The honest heart needed when studying God's Word ties in with the attribute of sincerity. In Paul's prayer for the Philippian brethren, we see the need each of us has to "*be sincere*" (**Phil. 1:10**).

The scribes and Pharisees' hypocrisy exemplifies the *opposite* of sincerity. Jesus rebuked this group for doing "*all their works to be seen by men*" (**Matt. 23:5**). Their service to God was a mere pretense. Such impurity stands in contrast to the genuine aim we should have to please God in all we do (**2 Cor. 5:9**).

A heart that sincerely wants to do right, glorify God, and benefit others, is a must.

Spiritual-mindedness – Sincerity is helped by a third key attribute of the inward person, spiritual-mindedness.

Notice how the apostle Paul exemplified this. In **2 Corinthians 4:17**, he referred to the "*light affliction*" he endured as a servant of Christ's. In **2 Corinthians 11**, Paul elaborated on what his "*light affliction*" included. **Verses 24-25** say, "*Five times I received forty stripes minus one from the Jews. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I suffered shipwreck. I have been a night and a day in the deep.*" The remainder of the chapter continues Paul's description of his "*light affliction.*" Why would Paul consider such painful trials "*light*"? Notice what he says back in **2 Corinthians 4:17-18**: *For our light affliction, which is for the moment,*

works for us more and more exceedingly an eternal weight of glory, while we don't look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

These verses make clear that Paul was spiritually-minded. He saw beyond carnal, temporal things and set his affection on things above. This frame of mind is needed from each of us to be inwardly clean.

Zeal – A fourth attribute of the inward person that God demands is zeal for him.

While zeal can cause more harm than good if misdirected (**Rom. 10:1-3**), knowledge without zeal is no better than zeal without knowledge.

This is seen in the Lord's rebuke of the church in Laodicea. These Christians were "*lukewarm*" (**Rev. 3:16**) in their service to God. In exhorting them to repent of their spiritual apathy, the Lord commanded, "*Be zealous*" (**Rev. 3:19**). The fiery passion indicated in the word "*zealous*" must be directed toward God and all that He defines as good works (**Titus 2:14**).

Meekness – In addition to a spirit of zeal, submitting to what God defines as good works demands a spirit of meekness. This attitude accepts God's direction and right to rule our lives (cf. **James 1:21**).

A spirit of meekness is well-expressed in the hymns *Take My Life, and Let It Be, Have Thine Own Way, Lord, and Let Him Have His Way with Thee*. We must have a heart that reveres God (cf. **Heb. 12:28**), accepts Him as our Master, and willfully yields to *His* will.

Humility – Closely related to an attitude of meekness is a spirit of humility.

While humbling ourselves involves action, humility is, in many ways, an inward quality of the heart.

Philippians 2:3 commands, "*doing nothing through rivalry or through conceit, but in humility, each counting others better than himself.*" In the ASV and KJV, "*humility*" is translated "*lowliness of mind.*"

This helps us understand what humility is about. It involves a proper *mindset*...a proper view of self in relation to God and others. Humility is not about beating oneself up, but it properly understands God's superiority to us, and the fact that we each need God as much as anyone.

Beyond not *esteeming* self above measure, humility does not desire to *exalt* self above others. Instead, humility seeks to *serve* (cf. **Phil. 2:4; Matt. 23:11-12**).

Gratitude – In addition to an attitude of servitude, pleasing God requires an attitude of *gratitude*.

The end of **Colossians 3:15** commands, "*be thankful.*" Being thankful includes words of thanksgiving to God, but it also includes a *heart* of gratitude.

By humbly acknowledging our dependence on God and having the spiritual-mindedness exemplified by Paul, we can develop an attitude of gratitude. God blesses His children with unmerited blessings that far outweigh trials, and thus gives innumerable reasons to be thankful.

Just as God examined who the scribes and Pharisees were both outwardly *and* inwardly, He does the same with each of us (cf. **1 Sam. 16:7**). May we pursue all that God teaches is needful for us to be inwardly clean.

-Michael Hickox

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