

# The Parchment

Volume 1, Issue 4

Pastor Howard Chang

August 30, 2009

## Keeping Out the Smoke

*Blessed are the pure in heart,  
for they will see God (Matthew 5:8)*

If you have visited my townhouse you know I live in an end unit of a four-unit building. That means we share one side of the house with our neighbor. I have few complaints sharing a wall with the family next door save one major annoyance—my neighbor smokes. I enjoy having my windows open on that side of the house, but as soon as I smell the smoke I quickly slam the windows shut. Next I turn on my air purifiers. Suffering from allergies and asthma makes cigarette smoke hazardous to my health. That's why I try to keep the smoke out of my house and lungs at all costs.

We naturally guard what is precious to us and try to keep out whatever might do harm. Our hearts and minds should be no different. Proverbs 4:23 speaks of protecting our heart—what we allow to come in: *Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.* Literally the author wrote “more than all guarding,” which idiomatically meant “keep vigilance over.” In other words, we must watch closely and alertly what enters our hearts and minds. The reason? Because out of the heart springs the course of life (Proverbs 16:9) and the good or evil that is in it (Matthew 12:35). If we want words and actions to come out pure, then it stands to reason that what goes in must be pure as well.

Unfortunately, no matter how vigilant or watchful we are, some negative influences are bound to penetrate. Just like the smoke from my neighbor, we may not know that something harmful has infiltrated until we feel its negative effects. For example, we may not know we harbor bitterness toward someone until we see them and feel great anger or outrage. That's when we need to be purified. If we consciously entertain sin we can confess to God what's happened and repent. If we inadvertently welcome something not pleasing to Him, then we can then choose to reject it. When we do we'll find that “He is faithful to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).