

Parson to Person

2 Corinthians 7 – Part 2 (Perfecting Holiness?)

~Repeated from Last Week~

“Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

Open your hearts to us. We have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have cheated no one.

I do not say this to condemn; for I have said before that you are in our hearts, to die together and to live together. Great is my boldness of speech toward you, great is my boasting on your behalf. I am filled with comfort. I am exceedingly joyful in all our tribulation.

For indeed, when we came to Macedonia, our bodies had no rest, but we were troubled on every side. Outside were conflicts, inside were fears. Nevertheless, God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus, and not only by his coming, but also by the consolation with which he was comforted in you, when he told us of your earnest desire, your mourning, your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced even more.

For even if I made you sorry with my letter, I do not regret it; though I did regret it. For I perceive that the same epistle made you sorry, though only for a while. Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance. For you were made sorry in a godly manner, that you might suffer loss from us in nothing. For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death. For observe this very thing, that you sorrowed in a godly manner: What diligence it produced in you, what clearing of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what vehement desire, what zeal, what vindication! In all things you proved yourselves to be clear in this matter. Therefore, although I wrote to you, I did not do it for the sake of him who had

done the wrong, nor for the sake of him who suffered wrong, but that our care for you in the sight of God might appear to you.

Therefore, we have been comforted in your comfort. And we rejoiced exceedingly more for the joy of Titus, because his spirit has been refreshed by you all. For if in anything I have boasted to him about you, I am not ashamed. But as we spoke all things to you in truth, even so our boasting to Titus was found true. And his affections are greater for you as he remembers the obedience of you all, how with fear and trembling you received him. Therefore, I rejoice that I have confidence in you in everything” (2 Corinthians 7:1–16).

Separation from the Filthiness of the Flesh—“Perfecting Holiness”

As a carryover from chapter 6 Paul wrote, *“Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God (vs. 1).*

This expression *“perfecting holiness”* says nothing of the positional holiness the Corinthians (and all believers) possess in Jesus. Our holiness is His—imputed. Do recall that, *“He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Corinthians 5:21),* and that we are among those who are *“blessed...with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ [knowing that] He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love” (Ephesians 1:3–4).*

Technically, holiness means to be “sanctified,” “set apart” (1 Corinthians 1:2). Therefore, as “chosen in Him,” and made “righteous,” our position in Christ is complete; we are holy! Therefore, the holiness Paul referred to here is practical, thus requiring the actions of the saints. In other words, one might translate this as suggesting: “You Corinthians are holy, now act like it.”

The False Teachers and Their Works—*“Come Out from Among Them”*

The call to perfect the “holiness” the Corinthians enjoyed (positionally) required a choice to separate from the evils of the *“flesh and spirit”* the Corinthians had chosen to entertain. Some suggest this to be the “fellowship with idols” Paul addressed in 1 Corinthians (see 1 Corinthians 10:14–22). However, the context of this letter (while making allowance for the need to *“come out”* from engagement with idolatry) seems better to suggest that he was calling them to come out from the influence of the false teachers/false apostles he had been addressing throughout this letter (2 Corinthians 2:17; 4:2,5; 10:2–18; 11:1–23a, etc.).

The Romans were called to *“note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them”* (Romans 16:17). To Titus Paul wrote, *“Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition, knowing that such a person is warped and sinning, being self-condemned”* (Titus 3:10–11). The Corinthians and all of us must do the same.

The *“Flesh and Spirit”*

Paul’s exhortation to *“cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit”* (vs. 1) needs some explanation.

“The flesh” refers to the sinful nature: *“sarx.”* *“Soma”* refers to the physical body. Therefore, inasmuch as the body (*“soma”*) can be used for fleshly and/or sinful things, here Paul is referring to the lusts generated by the *“flesh”* (*“sarx”*). In this case, he may have been calling for a refusal to take the *“easy road”* of compromise with the false teachers and/or idolaters. The *“flesh”* always wants the creature comforts...

Our “*spirit*” (“*pneuma*”) is granted purity—by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone—positionally. However, our spiritual lives can be polluted by compromise.

Every believer (experientially) knows the “blessed misery” we often discuss here at Candlelight. This “blessed misery” is an invisible manifestation in the emotional/informational realm: the “mind” (“*psyche*”). “Blessed misery” is produced as the result of fleshly “works” or spiritual impurity. The invisible emotional/informational “blessed misery” was not what Paul was addressing. He used “spirit” (“*pneuma*”) not (“*psyche*”) mind.

Paul’s call to “*cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the...spirit*” was a call to cleansing from spirit (“*pneuma*”) pollutants. It was a call to be clean of false doctrine, the influences of false teachers, engagements with idolatry, etc. Inasmuch as we are sealed with the Holy Spirit and guaranteed an inheritance in Christ, we cannot think that mixture with spirit evils should be tolerated (see 2 Corinthians 11:1–4). All things may indeed be “lawful” but that does not suggest that all things are good, should be embraced, or tolerated. We are called to “come out” from and “touch not the unclean thing(s).”

The “Doctrine of Balaam” illustrates spiritual mixture perfectly. Although it was a “*sarx*” activity, the result was spiritual (“*pneumatikos*”) (see Numbers 22–24, 31; 2 Peter 2; Revelation 2:12–17).

It should be noted that the soul (“*psyche*”) and spirit (“*pneuma*”) are distinct and separate entities. This is detailed in Hebrews where we read, “*For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart*” (Hebrews 4:12). However, the divisions are difficult to discern apart from the carefully applied

Scriptures. The mind (“psyche”) is renewed by the word of God (Romans 12:2, Ephesians 4:23)—via corrected thinking. The spirit (“pneuma”) is only made clean by divine intervention (1 John 1:9)—via corrected actions: the fear (authentic reverence) of God, and repentance leading to obedience (vs. 1b).

Therefore

The first verse of this chapter is a carryover from the preceding chapters—therefore the word *“Therefore.”* Of special interest is that *“Therefore”* was followed by *“having these promises”* (vs. 1a) which Paul suggested were the reasons every believer should *“cleanse [themselves] from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting [bringing into maturity] holiness in the fear of God”* (vs. 1b).

The Corinthians were believers. Nowhere in the letters to the Corinthians does Paul suggest they were anything less. Therefore, as born again, they were (positionally) sanctified in the “spirit” (“pneuma”) (see 1 Corinthians 6:9–11, Colossians 2:10). However, the Corinthians, needed to clean up their behaviors and measure up toward their position in Christ. This is what Theologians like to call “Progressive Sanctification,” AKA “Maturity.” Unlike “Positional Sanctification” we as believers still need to grow up in the faith and mature in our walk with Jesus—not for salvation, but because we are saved!

The Promises

The “promises” are many. However, for our discussions (and staying within the context), note the following:

- 1) Grace: salvific and enabling (2 Corinthians 1:2).
- 2) Faith (2 Corinthians 5:7).
- 3) Spiritual consolation and comfort in Jesus (2 Corinthians 1:3–7).

- 4) A future climactic resurrection (2 Corinthians 1:9; 4:14; 5:1–8).
- 5) Divine protection (2 Corinthians 1:10).
- 6) Access to God through prayer (2 Corinthians 1:11).
- 7) Confidence and rejoicing in the day of the Lord Jesus (2 Corinthians 1:14; 4:14).
- 8) Spiritual “sealing” by the person of the Holy Spirit—as a guarantee (2 Corinthians 1:22).
- 9) Awareness of Satan’s devices (2 Corinthians 2:11).
- 10) An incarnational testimony to and for Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 2:15–16; 3:2–3).
- 11) Reception and acceptance into the New Covenant (2 Corinthians 3:3–13).
- 12) Spiritual eyesight (2 Corinthians 3:14; 4:6, 18).
- 13) Spiritual liberty (2 Corinthians 3:17).
- 14) Spiritual transformation (2 Corinthians 3:18).
- 15) To be known by the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:11; 6:9).
- 16) A new beginning (2 Corinthians 5:17).
- 17) Reconciliation with God (2 Corinthians 5:18–19).
- 18) Imputed righteousness (2 Corinthians 5:21).
- 19) The fruit of the Spirit (2 Corinthians 6:6).
- 20) Spiritual Armor (2 Corinthians 6:7).
- 21) Spiritual riches in Christ (2 Corinthians 6:11).
- 22) A personal relationship with God (2 Corinthians 6:16, 18).

With these promises in mind, if there are pollutants in your flesh (“sarx”) or spirit (“pneuma”), aren’t you inclined to take Paul’s advice and cleanse yourselves from these things too? Not for salvation—but because you are saved!

I love you all,
Pastor Paul