

"Purity"

2 Corinthians 7:1

Introduction: Last week in our study of 2 Corinthians we finished up our look at 6:1-7:1 but because of time we did not get to really examine what Paul wrote in 7:1 so tonight I want to take a close look at what is recorded within this verse.

In 6:14-18 we looked at how Paul commanded the Corinthians not to be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. The problem within the church at Corinth was the false teachers who were against Paul and the immorality of the city. Corinth was known as the pleasure capital of the world in those days and because of the traffic which passed through the city it was very immoral. There was a temple built within the city to the sex goddess Aphrodite and connected to the temple were upwards of ten thousand prostitutes which would go into the city at night to entice the people. This is the very place where God chose to place His church for a couple of reasons.

1. **These people of Corinth were loved by God and they needed salvation.**
2. **This strategic location of the church had the potential to change many lives.**

The Corinthian believers were therefore exposed to a great deal of temptation and immorality around every corner. They needed to live in Corinth but at the same time they had to refrain from unequal yokes. They would have contact with the unsaved within the city because the unsaved needed to hear the Gospel. But they also needed to keep themselves unspotted.

Now for a few moments I want to revisit the command given by Paul and at the same time I want us to consider how it would have impacted the lives of the believer's in Corinth. I want you to notice the words of Barclay concerning the cost of faith for the Corinthians.

- a. *Often it meant that a man had to give up his trade. Suppose he was a stone mason. What was to happen if his firm received a contract to build a heathen shrine? Suppose he was a tailor. What was to happen if he was instructed to cut and sew garments for priests of the heathen gods? Suppose he was a soldier. At the gate of every camp burned the light upon the altar sacred to the godhead of Caesar. What was to happen if he had to fling his pinch of incense on that altar in token of his worship? Time and time again in the early Church the choice came to a man between the security of his job and his loyalty to Jesus Christ.*

No man is keeper of another man's conscience. Every man must decide for himself if he can take his trade to Christ and Christ with him to his daily work.

- b. *Often it meant that a man had to give up social life. In the ancient world, as we saw when studying the section on meat offered to idols, many a heathen feast was held in the temple of a god. The invitation would run, "I invite you to dine with me at the table of our Lord Serapis." Even if that were not so, a heathen feast would begin and end with the pouring of a cup of wine to the gods. Could a Christian share in that? Or must he get out and say good-bye to the social fellowship which used to mean so much to him?*
- c. *Often it meant that a man had to give up family ties. The pain of Christianity in the early years was the way it split families. A wife became a Christian and her husband might drive her from his house. A husband became a Christian and his wife might leave him. Sons and daughters became Christians and might find the door of the home shut and barred in their faces. It was literally true that Christ came not to send peace but a dividing sword upon earth and that men and women had to be prepared to love him more than their nearest and dearest. They had to be prepared to get out even from their homes.*

This is where the promises which Paul pointed to would come into play in the lives of the Corinthians. Their faith would cost them much in their life but what they lost could not compare with what they would gain spiritually.

Notice 2 Corinthians 6:16b-18

As we looked at last week these were promises given to the Nation of Israel and they will be fulfilled in the coming Kingdom Age but at this time we who are the church experience the spiritual aspect of these promises now. God dwells in us and He is our Father and we are His people. We have been raised to a higher and holier ground than Israel than Israel ever was.

I. The Exhortation

A. The Motivation

Notice 2 Corinthians 7:1

He begins this verse by point to the riches which they had in Christ namely the promises which they as the church could claim. Paul is going to exhort them to live lives of purity and the motivation behind the exhortation is the riches which they had in Christ.

Application:

I believe it is good for us to sit down periodically and count our blessing which we have in Christ as well. These riches are great motives to keep us on the path of holiness. Let me just refresh our minds on some of the riches we have in Christ.

1. **In Christ we are covered in the righteousness of God.**

Romans 3:22

²² *Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe:*

2. **In Christ we are accepted by God.**

Ephesians 1:

⁶ *To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.*

3. **In Christ we are forgiven of ALL sin.**

Ephesians 1:

⁷ *In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace;*

4. **In Christ we are forever secure.**

Hebrews 10:14-17

¹⁴ *For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.*

¹⁵ *Whereof the Holy Ghost also is a witness to us: for after that he had said before,*

¹⁶ *This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them;*

¹⁷ **And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.**

These are just a few of the riches which we have in Christ and they should be enough to motivate us to a life of purity.

B. The Details

Notice 2 Corinthians 7:1 again.

Paul exhorts these believers to cleanse themselves from all filthiness of the flesh and the spirit.

The word "filthiness" refers to ANYTHING which can defile us. As these believers lived in the midst of a contaminated city they were to cleanse themselves from all the filthiness which was around them. They were to live their lives unspotted from the world.

James 1:27

²⁷ *Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.*

Let me show you what the Psalmist recorded concerning purity.

Psalm 119:1

Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the LORD.

Let us now get back to the verse again. Paul exhorts them to cleanse themselves from all filthiness of the flesh and the spirit.

Before we get into the way of cleansing here and what he actually means let me first of all point out that in Christ we are given the power to live the way in which Paul is calling for here.

2 Peter 1:2-4

² *Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord,*

³ *According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue:*

⁴ *Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.*

Romans 6:5-7

⁵ *For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection:*

⁶ *Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.*

⁷ *For he that is dead is freed from sin.*

Now getting back to the verse I want to raise a question, "What does Paul mean when he tells them to cleanse the **flesh** and to cleanse the **spirit**?"

The flesh refers to what we PRACTICE in this life and the spirit refers to our ATTITUDE in this life. Let me use the Scriptures and give you an example of both of these.

✓ **The sins of the flesh**

Luke 15:11-13

¹¹ *And he said, A certain man had two sons:*

¹² *And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living.*

¹³ *And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living.*

The younger son of this man wasted his substance on riotous living. This was the sins of the flesh.

✓ **The sins of the spirit**

This is seen in the brother of the prodigal son.

Luke 15:25-30

²⁵ *Now his elder son was in the field: and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard musick and dancing.*

²⁶ *And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant.*

²⁷ *And he said unto him, Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound.*

²⁸ *And he was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and intreated him.*

²⁹ *And he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends:*

³⁰ *But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf.*

The elder son had within him pride, a judgmental attitude, bitterness, selfishness, hatred, and anger. These were sins of the spirit. Let me show you the words of Morgan on cleansing the spirit.

"Our pride, our legalism, our self-focus, our self-righteousness, our bitterness, and our hatred can all be far worse to deal with than the more obvious sins of the flesh. "There is a defilement of the spirit which is independent of the defilement of the flesh. The spirit

can be defiled in many ways. I sometimes think that the sins of the spirit are more deadly than the sins of the flesh."

Now let us get back to the exhortation given by Paul. Paul was exhorting the believers at Corinth to separate from that which would defile the flesh and they were to guard their attitudes and their minds.

Application:

The same applies to our lives as well. We must be very careful for we also live in a contaminated world. Our lifestyle should always be lived in the light of our position in Christ.

Ephesians 4:1

I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called.

Philippians 1:27

²⁷ *Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel;*

Colossians 1:10

¹⁰ *That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God;*

But it is not just our practice which needs to be watched but also our attitudes.

2 Corinthians 10:5

⁵ *Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ;*

Philippians 4:8-9

⁸ *Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.*

⁹ *Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you.*

Conclusion:

Notice 2 Corinthians 7:1 again.

This then leads to a perfecting of holiness.

God is continually working within our lives and he is shaping us into the image of Christ. In this process we have a responsibility to separate our flesh and our minds from anything which causes defilement.

Let me leave you with the words of Clarke:

"How can those expect God to purify their hearts who are continually indulging their eyes, ears, and hands in what is forbidden, and in what tends to increase and bring into action all the evil propensities of the soul?" (Clarke)