

Message #20**II Corinthians 7:1-4**

A school teacher once asked her students to finish the sentence: “Cleanliness is next to” One young boy raised his hand and said “Cleanliness is next to impossible.”

Now the answer the teacher was looking for is “cleanliness is next to godliness,” and when we journey through this part of II Corinthians, that point is absolutely true. God wants His people clean. He wants them separated from unclean things. This is not an impossible objective. This is very doable for every child of God.

That was the point Paul wanted to communicate as he wrote these verses:

GOD WANTS HIS PEOPLE CLEAN FROM ANYTHING THAT CAN DEFILE THEIR FLESH AND SPIRIT, AND PAUL WRITES TO MOTIVATE PEOPLE TO THAT END.

We need to observe how Paul addresses these Corinthians; he calls them “beloved.” This is a word which is used by Paul very sparingly. Other N.T. writers use this word often, but Paul only uses this word seven times in all of his epistles and four of the seven times he uses it in reference to the Corinthians (II Cor. 7:1; 12:19; I Cor. 10:14; 15:58; Rom. 12:19; Phil. 2:12; 4:1).

By using this word, Paul is letting these Corinthians know that he loves them at the highest possible level. They are very dear and special to his heart. It is true that Paul had to write some strong things and say strong things to the Corinthians, but he did this because he loved them.

Now as we look down through these verses, it seems to me that there are four motivations Paul presents for God’s people to live clean lives:

MOTIVATION #1 – We need to cleanse ourselves in view of the promises of God. **7:1**

In view of what God promises to do for His people who are clean, we need to cleanse ourselves from all defilements of the flesh. We need to get away from anything that can contaminate our relationship with God.

Now carefully observe that Paul is no prima donna pope; he uses the pronoun “ourselves,” which includes himself. He was not just preaching at people, he was living out what he preached. Every believer who wants God to fulfill His great fellowship promises must heed this exhortation. Every believer must make adjustments in his or her life. Both “sons and daughters” of God need to be clean and the aorist tense of the verb indicates there are points of time in all of our lives when we need to take this action.

The specific promises Paul is referring to are the promises of God that he mentioned in the preceding three verses. If a child of God will purpose to separate himself from unclean things, Almighty God will have intimate fellowship with that person and he will be welcome at any time in his relationship with God. God will carefully walk with that person through life and use and bless the person in many ways. If we do not break away from unclean things, God cannot treat us like a son or daughter. God's children need to get cleaned up and cleanse themselves.

The verb “cleanse” (καθαρίζω) is one that means one must continually make pointed decisions, moment of time decisions to keep himself clean and pure (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 222). Now we are not left to wonder what we are to cleanse ourselves of because the text says “from all defilement of the flesh and spirit” (απο παντος μολυσμου σαρκος και πνευματος).

This is worthy of careful grammatical dissecting. The preposition “from” means we must depart from the side of things that defile. Some of the Corinthians were living life in a defiled way and they needed to make an immediate departure. Now the word “defilement” refers to things that are dirty and things that can stain something clean (*Ibid.*, p. 296). There are filthy, dirty things that can and will make a believer dirty in their flesh and spirit. God will not ever view his children as clean if they are snuggling up to dirty things.

Now notice the challenge “cleanse ourselves from “all” defilements.” That adjective “all” means everything, every kind of defilement. If we want to have intimate fellowship with God, if we want God to fulfill all of His promises to us, we must separate ourselves from every kind of unclean, dirty thing that can stain us in our flesh and spirit. The aorist tense means we must make point of time decisions to separate ourselves from unclean things. Murray Harris, who has written a good commentary on the Greek text, says the aorist tense indicates there needs to be specific moments of the repeated action of cleansing (*The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 512).

Now what is the difference between defilements of the flesh and defilements of the spirit? All defilements are dirty and filthy in the sight of God, but what is the difference? Well, defilements of the flesh are filthy sins one commits in his body—drunkenness, immorality and gluttony. Defilements of the spirit are sins one commits in his mind—impure or immoral thoughts, pride, arrogance, vanity, unbelief. No matter what the defilement, if we want God to do wonderful things with us and for us, we need to separate ourselves from every bit of it. **God will not ever fellowship with anything dirty.**

Now the Corinthians were literally getting involved in immoral cult worship services. They were thinking about it and they were doing it. They were getting involved in immoral, evil things and Paul challenges them that they need to be clean and make themselves clean so they could have great fellowship with God. They were saved, but they were also dirty and needed to get clean.

But this is not just a challenge for the historical times of Corinth; this challenge is relevant to you and me. We live in a Corinthian atmosphere.

We live in a culture that flaunts sin and makes it look good. It doesn't matter what the sin is, this world makes it appealing. We are to cleanse ourselves.

The truth is we have some dirty, unclean things available to us that they did not have in Corinth. In fact, we have some defiling things available to us that they did not have when some of the great preachers like C.I. Scofield and Lewis Sperry Chafer were alive. We have remote control TV and satellite dishes that will bring evil, unclean things right into your living room. We have access to the internet that will bring any vile, unclean thing right to you to look at. There are undoubtedly many believers who are being defiled by these things and they do not see the damage it is doing to their relationship with God. They do not have the power of God. They do not have close fellowship with God. They are not clean and God will not have intimate fellowship with anyone not clean.

God's exhortation to us is to cleanse ourselves from "all" of it, every bit of it. Now you are going to have to make a personal decision that you will either obey God in this or not. You will either decide I am going to do this or I am not going to do this. If God gave the Corinthians time to decide, he will do the same with us. But it is our decision and at the end of **verse 1** there is something you might want to consider as you decide whether or not to break away from dirty, unclean things.

MOTIVATION #2 – We need to cleanse ourselves in view of the fear of God. **7:1b**

Many years ago, I was teaching a doctrine class and was teaching on the subject of the need to fear God and another minister in the city got his hands on my notes and tried to convince people I did not know what I was talking about. His idea was that we need to stress the love of God. Now I will be the first to admit that the love of God is so incredibly deep, I doubt there has ever been a theologian who has grasped it. But when you carefully study the Scriptures, it is quite obvious that we are to live our lives with a fear and a reverence for God. Paul uses this as a motivation for being clean.

Paul qualifies the fact that we need to be after a complete holiness and cleanness all the time in the "fear of God." We are the property of "Almighty God" and we need to live our lives in the fear of God. The participle "perfecting" (επιτελουντες) means to continually need to be completing, executing and accomplishing a full level of departure from all defilements in the fear of God.

Now don't miss this point. The way we come to a complete and full level of holiness is by cleansing ourselves and getting away from unclean and dirty things. One thing that prompts us to do this is a "fear of God."

We had better think very seriously about the fact that we are going to face God and that will be a very intimidating moment. God wants us fearing Him and He wants us clean.

MOTIVATION #3 – We need to cleanse ourselves in view of the apostolic example and teaching. **7:2-3**

Paul’s apostleship and ministry were under attack. Some in Corinth were trying to dismiss Paul and his teaching from any real relevancy. He was apparently being accused of many things, some of which show up here.

In **verse 2**, Paul challenges the Corinthians to make room for him in their hearts. The verb “make room” is an imperative, so this is a command. The word means to give way and make a space for Paul. The aorist tense means these Corinthians are being commanded to make room for Paul and his teaching right now at this point of time. They needed to apply this teaching at this point. They need to realize that this challenge to get away from unclean things is critical to their spiritual lives.

When Paul says “make room for us” this would also mean make room for the teaching we are presenting to you.

To prove the validity of the message, Paul said there were certain things we did not do that prove this is how you should govern life and this is the way we governed our lives. Paul had negatively avoided doing anything that would prevent one from seeing that his life backed up his message. There are four negative considerations and one positive consideration he wanted the Corinthians to consider:

(Negative Consideration #1) - We did not wrong anyone. **7:2a**

The word “wrong” means to wrong or injure someone in some wicked or criminal way (*Ibid.*, p. 9). The aorist tense of the verb indicates there was never any point in time when Paul did this. He never was some snake involved in things immoral or wicked.

(Negative Consideration #2) - We did not corrupt anyone. **7:2b**

The word “corrupt” means to spoil something to the point of destroying it (*Ibid.*, p. 468). Again, the aorist tense of the verb means there was never any point in his ministry when he did anything that would have corrupted someone to the point where they were destroyed. Paul never used his office or power in any corrupt way. He always pointed people to the true, pure ways of God.

(Negative Consideration #3) - We did not take advantage of anyone. **7:2c**

The word “take advantage” means to do something that would defraud someone of something so you could have more (*Ibid.*, p. 364). The aorist tense of the verb means there was never any point in Paul’s life when he took advantage of anyone. There was never a point when he defrauded anyone so he could have more. Paul had never exploited these people or done deceitful things to get their money.

(Negative Consideration#4) - We did not speak to condemn you. 7:3a

The word “condemn” means Paul did not write or speak to give a condemnatory judgment against these Corinthians. When Paul writes to live in the fear of God, he does not mean live in the fear of hell. In fact, no believer in Christ can ever be condemned because “there is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:1).

He wrote and spoke so they would have their lives right with Almighty God so they could have wonderful, intimate fellowship with him and expect full reward at the Bema Seat. Paul never went on some personal vendetta in his preaching and teaching ministry. He did not just emotionally flare up at something and then go on some verbal tirade. Someone who has not done these kinds of things to you is worthy of your trust and friendship.

(Positive Consideration #5) - We do speak because I care about you. 7:3b

Paul says you are so much in our hearts and a part of our lives that we live and die together.

MOTIVATION #4 – We need to cleanse ourselves in view of apostolic confidence. 7:4

Paul had confidence in these Corinthians. In fact, Paul says he had “great confidence” in the Corinthians. The word “confidence” is interesting because it is one that means to have so much confidence in someone that you may speak to them freely and boldly (*Ibid.*, p. 347). Paul had so much confidence in the Corinthians that he felt he could speak to them about anything. When you know someone has confidence in you, it does make you want to perform at the highest level. There is no question that you can motivate people more by believing in them rather than by insulting them. Paul believed that these Corinthians would respond. The Corinthians affected Paul in three positive ways:

(Positive Affect #1) - He boasted on their behalf. 7:4a

The word “boast” (καυχῆσιν) refers to boasting and glorying in something (*Ibid.*, p. 243). In spite of all of their inconsistencies, Paul still boasted about what he had seen God do in this church.

(Positive Affect #2) - He was filled with comfort. 7:4b

One commentator observed that Paul always kept in his memory the triumph of God’s grace in these people’s lives and that brought him comfort.

(Positive Affect #3) - He overflowed with joy. 7:4c

In all of the pressures of Paul, he found joy in thinking about these Corinthians and all God had done in their lives. As we shall see, when he got to Macedonia, he got word from Titus that the Corinthians truly had responded to the Word of God (7:5-6).

There is no question that “cleanliness is the key to godliness.” When we are clean, we bring joy to God.