

PLEASING GOD BY PERFECTING HOLINESS

BY DR. JERRY VINES

By the Book™ A Chapter by
Chapter Bible Study Series
from Jerry Vines Ministries
2295 Towne Lake Parkway
Suite 116 #249
Woodstock, GA 30189

Let's Begin

Oswald Chambers noted in his devotional, "Sanctification means intense concentration on God's point of view. It means every power of body, soul, and spirit is chained and kept for God's purpose only. It will cause an intense narrowing of all our interests on earth, and an immense broadening of all our interests in God." Is it your life's goal to please God? If you are a Christian, your goal cannot be less.

Today's lesson will assist us in living so in tune with Jesus Christ, our wants will be His wants, our goals will be His goals. After all, that is precisely what it means to be sanctified, to be holy.

As we study through 2 Corinthians 7, let's follow the outline below:

- I. The Negative Dimension to Sanctification: Separation (v. 1a)**
- II. The Positive Dimension to Sanctification: Consecration (v. 1b)**
- III. The Corporate Dimension to Sanctification: Reconciliation (vv. 2-16)**

I. The Negative Dimension to Sanctification: Separation (v. 1a)

Salvation is revealed in Scripture as having three dimensions: justification (Christians have been saved); glorification (Christians will be saved); sanctification (Christians are being saved). Sanctification is sandwiched between what happened the moment we received Christ as Savior and what will happen when we meet Christ as Savior in our afterlife.

In addition, sanctification may be seen in three dimensions, the first of which is the *negative* dimension. And, the heart of the negative dimension is *separation*. While we introduced separation in our last lesson, we continue teasing out the implications of separation. Paul writes, "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (v. 1). The negative side of sanctification begins with "cleansing ourselves."

The moment we are saved, our life enters a cleaning cycle. We experience a change of attitude toward sin. The closer we get to the Word, the more we see sin. The closer we walk with Jesus, the more potent guilt feels in our hearts. Why?

First, sin becomes more evident because of the way sin is *characterized*. Paul calls sin "filthiness." Interestingly, we have an impressive repertoire of adjectives at our disposal to describe sin in less offensive ways. We speak of "mistake," "bad choice," "boo-boo," "slip-up," or an "affair" among others. The Bible is more straight forward. The fact is, until we see sin as God sees sin, our progress in our walk with Christ will remain at a standstill.

According to Scripture, sin is dirty, vile, and filthy (cp. Ps. 51: 1-2). Sin contaminates every sphere in our lives. It stains, corrodes, and destroys. Nor may we imagine that because we are Christians, sin cannot affect us

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like it does non-Christians. Sin is to the soul what dirt is to the body. And, just as being Christian does not eliminate the need for baths, neither does being a believer eliminate the need for spiritual cleansing.

Second, sin becomes more evident because of the way sin is *catalogued*. Paul exhorts us to cleanse ourselves from the filthiness of “flesh and spirit.” What does the Apostle mean when he speaks of sins of the “flesh and spirit”? When Paul speaks of sins of the “flesh,” he primarily means sins committed with our eyes, ears, lips, and body. For example, reading or watching pornographic materials, listening to ungodly music, or speaking obscenities among other sins of the “flesh.” We are, as Paul affirms elsewhere, the “temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 3:17; 6:19). Being the embodiment of God’s presence, there is no excusing the litter in God’s temple.

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Reflection Connection

Reflect for a moment on your practice when you pray. Do you have times of intense confession? Why or why not? Do you confess not only sins of your flesh but also sins of your spirit?

In addition, Paul refers to the sins of the “spirit.” Some Christians feel comfortably smug, reasoning that since they have no “sins of the flesh” about which to concern themselves, they must be in tip-top spiritual condition. Caution: just because one may be unaware of any sins of the “flesh” does not mean one has none. Note well David’s plea, “Who can understand *his* errors? cleanse thou me from secret *faults*” (Ps. 19:12). David was well aware of the possibility of *unknown sin* and prayed God to deliver him from blind spots in his discernment.

Even more importantly, sins of the “spirit” may cause one more spiritual harm than sins of the “flesh.” And, what are sins of the “spirit”? “Spirit” sins often affect attitude, sins like malice, gossip, pride, an unforgiving spirit, and a judgmental spirit. Furthermore, sins of the “spirit” frequently go unnoticed, especially by the one committing them. Hence there is an unusual danger because these sins are difficult to detect.

Nonetheless, whether it is sins of “spirit” or “flesh” a Christian faces, the same remedy exists for both: “cleanse ourselves.” Paul is not advocating a self-oriented salvation. Rather all he is suggesting is, we must initiate our daily walk with God. Sanctification is not passive; sanctification is active. Conviction of sin produced by the Holy Spirit results in confession of sin. When we “confess,” we are saying to God, “I am guilty; I have sinned” (1 John 1:9-10). Consequently, the Holy Spirit applies the death of Jesus Christ in a moment-by-moment, daily experience for the believer.

II. The Positive Dimension to Sanctification: Consecration (v. 1b)

Now let us move on to the positive dimension of sanctification, *consecration*. It is not enough to just “clean up.” Some wrongly assume that if a believer does not do certain things, he or she is living a holy life. However, observing moral



boundaries about what is wrong to do does very little in telling us what is right to do. Observing a “No Swimming Here” sign tells us where we cannot swim. It does not tell us where we can swim. Hence, there is a positive dimension to sanctification. Indeed the positive and negative dimensions go together similar to two sides of the same coin, so to speak.

Moral filthiness backs down when holiness stands up. Holiness and moral impurity cannot stay long together in the same container. In fact, holiness pushes moral impurity out the back door as it comes in the front door.

Scripture reveals much about holiness. First, there is the *pattern* of holiness. For example, the Bible says, “Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord” (Heb. 12:14). The term “holiness” is the Greek word *hagios* which means “pure.” Holiness has to do with consecration. It is being set apart to Jesus Christ. Our goal is to be like Jesus while He was here on earth. We live as He lived and behave as He behaved. Becoming like Christ is becoming holy.

Reflection Connection

Do you think there is sufficient emphasis on holiness in the church today? Explain.

Second, there is the *promise* of holiness. Paul expects one day to be like Christ completely. He writes, “To the end he may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints” (1 Thess. 3:13). Between now and then we must progress toward the goal of the high calling in Christ (Phil. 3:14).

Third, there is the *process* of holiness. Since sanctification is a process, so is holiness. We “follow holiness” (Heb. 12:14). Hence, we are moving toward holiness at the same time we are holy. Our motivation for moving toward holiness is twofold: love and fear. Our desire is to please Him.

III. The Corporate Dimension to Sanctification: Reconciliation (vv. 2-16)

Thus far we have noted both the positive and negative dimensions to sanctification. Now let us consider the third dimension to sanctification, the corporate dimension: *reconciliation*. It may come as a shock to new believers, but even Christians face conflicts within their faith community. Indeed, Paul was having problems with the very ones he’s writing to at Corinth!

Recall in his earlier letter, he counseled the Corinthians to put a particular man out of the church for a gruesome act of immorality (1 Cor. 5). They followed Paul’s counsel. However, the man apparently repented of his deeds and sought restoration to the church. However, evidently a sizable part of the church did not want the man back in the fellowship.

With this background in mind, carefully note the Apostle’s words begin to unfold, “Receive us; we have wronged no man, we have corrupted no man, we have defrauded no man. I speak not *this* to condemn *you*: for I have said before, that ye are in our hearts to die and live with *you*. Great *is* my boldness of speech toward you, great *is* my glorying of you: I am filled with comfort, I am exceeding joyful in all our tribulation.” (2 Cor. 7:2-4).



First, observe Paul's *loving intention*. He desires nothing more but to deal with any conflict between believers with their highest edification in mind without sacrificing glory to the Father. He wants *reconciliation* between those who have broken fellowship with one another. He pleads with them to make room in their hearts for him for they surely know his heart has room for them. Furthermore, he wants them to understand his own objectivity in the matter, for he reminds them he has neither wronged, corrupted, nor defrauded anyone.

When Paul was getting quite discouraged, Titus came and comforted him (vv. 5-6). However, the Corinthians responded with consolation as well, "And not by his coming only, but by the

consolation wherewith he was comforted in you, when he told us your earnest desire, your mourning, your fervent mind toward me" (v. 7). Often times the darkest moment is just before the breaking of dawn. Just when we think we can't take anymore, deliverance appears just over the horizon. In fact, their consolation was equivalent to their repentance.

Second, observe Paul's *painful confrontation* (vv. 8-11). There are times doing God's work when tough calls must be made. All the facts may not be known but decision time appears and the Christian leader must decide. For Paul, it was time to confront. Hence, he fired off a stinging letter, rebuking the Corinthians for allowing immoral leaven to contaminate the entire loaf of bread! The man who committed the atrocious acts must be put out of the church.

Even so, the painful decision gave Paul much remorse. He writes, "For though I made you sorry with a letter, I do not repent, though I did repent: for I perceive that the same epistle hath made you sorry, though *it were* but for a season" (v. 8). A true leader never enjoys causing pain to other people. Paul had a moment when he questioned whether his decision was the right one. He had second thoughts whether the letter would edify the church and glorify God. This shows nicely the humanity of God's Apostles.

The result, however, was magnificent. The Corinthians repented of their passive neglect of God's church. Paul recorded their sorry like this, "Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance: for ye were made sorry after a godly manner, that ye might receive damage by us in nothing. For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death" (vv. 9-10).

Note the distinction Paul makes between "godly sorrow" on the one hand and "sorrow of the world" on the other. The latter may be described as little more than being sorry one got caught for the sin committed. There is no real remorse here. However, "godly sorrow" is true sorrow before God and hence it "worketh repentance" while the "sorrow of the world" only brings death. When one truly repents, life is the inevitable result.

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Reflection Connection

Does your church practice church discipline? If so, are you aware of the procedure? Perhaps this would be a great time to invite your Pastor or Chairman of the Deacons to come and share with the entire group concerning church discipline.



Golden Greek Nugget

Paul writes concerning the Corinthians, “For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death” (v. 10). The Greek term translated “repentance” is *metanoia* and it means a “change of mind.” This mind-altering experience is what produces life (cp. Luke 13:3). On the other hand, Paul uses another word from the Greek (*lupē*) which means “grief” or “sorrow” and has no life giving properties whatsoever. In fact, Paul is clear, “the sorrow of the world worketh death.”

Finally, observe Paul’s *delightful solution* (vv. 12-16). To be reconciled to the church of God is the ultimate earthly event for a wayward believer. No one can be truly sanctified apart from God’s church. Therefore, reconciliation was paramount to the repentant man’s spiritual health.

The reason Paul sent the letter in the first place was to prove his love for them. Paul now wants them to express their love to the repentant man. He writes, “Wherefore, though I wrote unto you, *I did it* not for his cause that had done the wrong, nor for his cause that suffered wrong, but that our care for you in the sight of God might appear unto you” (v. 12; cp. 2:5-11). Love is always deeper and stronger when it goes through testing. The Corinthians’ love for Paul was forged through this difficult time (vv. 13-16). Reconciliation is a key dimension to our sanctification.

Wrap Up

In 2 Corinthians 7, sanctification plays a vital role in understanding the dynamic between Paul and the Corinthians. We noted three dimensions to sanctification: separation, consecration, and reconciliation. The first is negative telling us what our boundaries are. The second is positive, informing us of our duty to holiness. And the third is corporate, and is key to continued church health.

