

THE GREAT LIFE-WORK OF GOD'S CHILDREN



TEXT: **2 Corinthians 7:1-42** *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. 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.*

THESIS: To show Paul's desire to be received by the Corinthians as he had loved them.

INTRO.: A. Dr. Bob Jones, Sr. said: "You can go as far as you can on the right road with anybody. The right road leads out at the right place. It is always a compromise to go any distance on the wrong road with anybody." Paul had just written his powerful exhortation on separation in 6:14-18. But he knows that outward separation does not guarantee inward spirituality. Many churches and Christian schools are outwardly separated, i.e., the boys hair length is just right and the ladies dress length and hair length is just right, but their hearts are harder than prison inmates!

B. Paul's desire is twofold: that Christians not be corrupted by associations but be sanctified by their separation. But even that separation must be more than external. It must be internal as well. So he gives a 3-fold exhortation...

I. BE CLEAN: (THE BALANCED LIFE) v.1

ILLUS.: Before he begins chapter 7 he refers back to the promises in ch. 6 from the book of Isaiah (52:11) and makes a spiritual application of a physical command given to Israel. He is saying that if you want the family relationship with the Lord spoken of in v.18, the first thing you need to do is to be cleansed.

Isaiah 52:11 *Depart ye, depart ye, go ye out from thence, touch no unclean thing; go ye out of the midst of her; be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the LORD.*

A. Cleansing +

1. The believer must always be careful to maintain a balance in his life; never only emphasizing the negative or the positive.
2. Cleansing has both aspects of negative and positive.

ILLUS.: When you bathe you not only cleanse yourself, but you must get rid of the dirt. When you cleanse a garment, you must not only clean that garment, but use stain remover for the spots and stains. Even if a garment is clean, it is useless if it remains stained. Paul is speaking of a cleansing that is thorough; that doesn't just make the Christian clean, but uses some spiritual stain remover to get rid of the spots in our lives.

B. Filthy Flesh -

1. Paul here refers to external cleansing.
2. We don't need deodorant or perfume to cover up our flesh, we need cleansing!

ILLUS.: Paul, as usual, is very graphic in his description and speaks of "the filthiness of the flesh." If you don't believe the flesh is filthy, try not bathing for a week, not brushing your teeth, or changing your underwear! You won't have to ask anyone if you need cleansing; in fact you will have to yell across the room to speak to anyone! The application is apropos. He is speaking of sins, of course, not simply dirt on the body! But these are sins related to the flesh, e.g., drinking, smoking, adultery, fornication, gluttony, etc. The list could easily be expanded. (I recently asked my students at Solid Rock to make a distinction between sins of the flesh and sins of the spirit. They easily came up with numbers of fleshly sins. They had a harder time with sins of the spirit. Why? We don't preach about them as often and don't like to be reminded of them. But they are more subtle and dangerous!)

C. Filthy Spirit -

1. Paul moves from the outside to the inside; from the fruit to the root!

ILLUS.: If you find yourself confessing the same fleshly sins over and over, perhaps you need to probe deeper! Get to the reason you continue to commit those fleshly sins. You will find the root of the external buried deep beneath the surface in your spirit.

The difference between fleshly sins and spiritual sins is illustrated by the Prodigal Son and his elder brother. The Pharisee was clean in the flesh (for the most part) but not in the spirit!

2. Soul or spirit pollution is worse than body or fleshly pollution! (How many sins of the spirit can you name or will you admit to?!)

QUOTE: Ruckman: "A good rule of thumb for deciding what is 'filthiness of the flesh and spirit' is 'if it is doubtful, it is dirty.' If you can pray over it and ask God to bless it and then do it with a clear conscience, then it is all right. If you can't pray over it and ask God's blessings on it before you do it, then it is not right."

D. Holiness +

1. The phrase "perfecting holiness in the fear of God" implies an on going progress in the believer's life.
2. He or she is never to stop the "pursuit of holiness" or being "conformed to the image of our Savior" or purging their lives of sin and striving for mastery over the flesh & spirit; it's called yieldedness!

II. BE CAREFUL: **THE BLESSED LIFE v.2,3**

A. Wrong No One:

1. Paul's desire for the Corinthian's acceptance ("receive us") has the strength of personal practice behind it; he could honestly say he had never wronged them.
2. What an example he is for us today; it seems that some Christians don't even care if they offend someone or wrong someone.

B. Corrupt No One:

1. The Greek word means to defile, destroy or to ruin by moral influence.
2. In Ezekiel God speaks of the moral corruption of Israel because they had committed greater sins than Sodom: **"...thou was corrupted more than they in all thy ways."**
3. God's punishment of His people was due to their corrupting influence on others.

C. Defraud No One:

1. The word defraud means to take unfair advantage of someone, especially regarding finances.
2. We know that Paul refused financial support from the Corinthian church due to their carnal reputation; he didn't want to be indebted to them so they could charge him with being greedy or taking advantage of them. cf. 2 Cor. 12:13,14
3. He had a clear conscience concerning them, even though he knew his refusal to ask or accept support weakened the ministry of the church.

ILLUS.: Churches and Christians need to voluntarily do right, even if they have no visible means to do so. God blesses proper motives and actions. Faith must be a vital part of every believer's life. They need to trust the Lord when they do right; they cannot do so otherwise.

D. Love Everyone:

1. Paul appeals to the Corinthians on the basis of his love for them and reveals how deep that love is; **"ye are in our hearts to died and live with you."**
2. Can you say that you have not wronged, corrupted or defrauded anyone and that you love those especially in the household of faith, with Paul?!

III. BE CREATIVE: **THE BOLD LIFE V.4**

A. Brag On Believers:

1. Paul not only speaks without guile to them, but he brags about them, in spite of all their shortcomings. **"...great is my glorying of you"**

- a. He had birthed many of these believers – was their spiritual father – so he loved them genuinely and spoke of their positive qualities and not of their shortcomings.
- b. In order to keep the unity of the Spirit, we need to manifest a love for the brethren - even when they disappoint us.

c. If we badmouth other believers the unsaved will have one more excuse not to get saved and their blood will be on our hands.

B. Count Your Blessings: "...joyful in all our tribulations"!

1. From the human standpoint Paul had little to glory in or be thankful for; (cf. ch.11,12)
2. But from some spiritual depth he had been able to overcome a complaining spirit or even a bitter spirit and even be "JOYFUL" in "*tribulations!*" What a great Christian.

CONCL.: In these few verses Paul has summarized **"THE GREAT LIFE-WORK OF GOD'S CHILDREN"** to **Be Clean, Be Careful and to Be Creative!** How are YOU doing?!