

The Way To Personal Holiness
II Corinthians 7:1

INTRODUCTION

To call a person a "Holy Joe" is considered an insult. It suggests a person who has set themselves apart from others in a spirit of religious pride. Satan has used this insult to discourage the people of God in their pursuit of holiness. Just the mention of the word frightens some of us. Yet we come to a biblical statement like this, "Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminate body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God". Dare we ignore this direct admonition from the Lord?

The Apostle found two things that moved him toward holiness. One of these was the goodness of the Lord as revealed in His promises. "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves." The promises are those which close the prior chapter. They include promises of God's presence, God's protection and God's provision. They include the privilege of being His temple, His people, and His children. Such goodness from the Lord encourages Holy living.

The other great encouragement comes from the fear of the Lord. "Perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord". This fear is reverential awe of the Lord. Realizing how holy and glorious our God really is encourages holy living. Those who are indifferent about holiness and laugh about sin are clearly ignorant of true nature of our God.

In this passage in which He is applying the great truth of consecration, the apostle gives us the very practical way to personal holiness.

Before we look at the way, we best clarify the difference between positional and personal holiness. Holiness is consecration to God, being set apart to God. At the moment of salvation, each believer is set apart in the Lord Jesus to God. In Christ he is sanctified. This is the reason we are often addressed as "saintly" or "holy ones". However, this consecration is positional. We are set apart because we are in Christ Jesus. It becomes the responsibility of those who are so set apart to personally consecrate themselves, or to work out personal holiness. God says, "Be ye holy, for I am holy." But how do we do this? Paul makes two helpful suggestions in our text.

I. THIS IS A PURIFYING THAT PRECEDES PERSONAL HOLINESS.

This is the force of the first admonition, "Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit." Let's take a close look at this clause.

The purifying is to be personal. "Cleanse ourselves". It is of interest that the apostle includes himself. Even an apostle is not above needing this purification. The kind of world in which we live and the kind of person that we are will make it so, we are still living in a fallen world with a nature that is capable of falling.

This means that the need is personal to believers. No one else can ever bring about purity in your life. Not even the Lord apart from your cooperation.

The purifying is to be moral. "All filthiness". Filthiness is anything that contaminates or corrupts. It was used especially of immoral things. The Old Testament put much emphasis upon a purifying that was ceremonial. If you touched a dead body, or ate the wrong kind of food, you were in need of cleansing. The New Testament places the emphasis upon the moral. Everything that is morally unclean by God's standard of righteousness is to be forsaken. Attitudes and actions that are offensive to God must be put away if there is to be any personal holiness in your life.

The purifying is to be continual. Actually the verb is an aorist tense which could be a once for all kind of action. However, in this context, it is better to understand the verb to have the idea that the purifying is to take place from time to time as the need arises. The tense indicates that the break with pollution is to be complete every time it is encountered. But since as long as we are in this world we will continue to be confronted with temptation, the need for cleansing will continue. If you have not felt the need for such a purifying recently, it is more the result of your lack of sensitivity than your sinlessness.

The purifying must be external. By "flesh" we are to understand "body". Even Paul so uses the word several times. This means then that we are to stop using our bodies to do anything that is offensive to God. We should stop our tongue from speaking anything unclean. We should stop our ears from listening to anything unclean. We should stop our eyes from looking at anything unclean. We should stop our hands from doing anything unclean. We should stop our feet from taking us any place where we may be tempted to do anything unclean. Until you do this, you will not know personal holiness.

Does this need more application? Until we stop our eyes from looking on provocative things and our hands from purchasing provocative filthiness, we will never be personally holy. You must begin with the external. You must "mortify the deeds of the body."

The purifying must also be internal. It must extend to inmost "spirit". It is in the spirit that lust is hatched, that anger is cultivated into malice, that resentment matures into a root of bitterness, that a wrong becomes unforgiveness. If you are to ever know personal holiness, you must deal with the internal.

This purification must be thorough. "All filthiness" must be put away. "Body" and "spirit" must be cleansed! This is a necessary step on the way to holiness.

II. THERE IS THE PERFECTING THAT PRODUCES PERSONAL HOLINESS.

Then we speak of personal holiness, what do we mean? In my understanding we mean a character that is conformed to the image of Christ. Christ-likeness is the word! We are to be "perfecting holiness out of reverence for God".

This perfecting is a process. The verb has the continuous force. The word means basically to bring to completion, to bring to a logical end. This would indicate that personal holiness is a process of growth. We must stay from any promise of personal holiness apart from this process. Those who teach the necessity of certain experiences to find personal holiness have not read Paul carefully enough. He does not admonish us to seek an experience but rather to move the process of perfecting around.

This does not make personal holiness a product of human effort, but it does indicate that there will be no personal holiness without our cooperation. This is a call for positive effort on our part. The faithful study of the Bible is a positive thing. The Word of God is holy. If you want to be holy, you should hide it in your heart. The Psalmist wrote, "Thy word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against thee." A time of personal devotional daily is a must.

A consistent prayer life is a must. Prayer is communion with God. It is a principle of personality growth that we tend to become like the people we spend time with. If you would become like Christ, you must spend time with Him in prayer.

Obedience is a positive element. Every act of willing obedience to Christ does something good to the character of a man. Seek to be obedient to Him in the little things of life.

The surrender of life to the Holy Spirit is another positive thing. The perfecting is an important responsibility for, you. God will do what you cannot do, if you do what you can!

CONCLUSION:

Holiness is not an option. This is the way to Holiness.