

II Cor. 7.1
7 March 2010

The apostle Paul has exhorted the Corinthian saints not to be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. To be unequally yoked with unbelievers is to become spiritually one with the through close association and common cause. This was done by some in the Corinthian church through mixed marriages as well as attending the idolatrous feasts of the heathen community. Hence, they are exhorted, “Be ye not unequally yoked with unbelievers”. Continuing, the apostle exhorts the Corinthian saints to spiritual separation, “wherefore, come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing”. To this the apostle promises to those who separate themselves from the uncleanness of the world, that he will be as a father unto them, living with them and walking with them.

The text of chapter 7.1 rightfully belongs to chapter 6 because the text is a conclusion to what was written in chapter 6. The chapter and verses in the Scriptures are not inspired but were added later so that it makes reading and referencing easier. The word “therefore” is a word of conclusion to what was written in the preceding verses: that in view that the Christian is holy, he is to keep himself pure by avoiding the contamination of sin but also to strive to become pure. Let us come to the words of our text in II Cor. 7.1, “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”.

The theme is: AN EXHORTATION TO CLEANSE OURSELVES. First, the meaning, Secondly, the goal, and thirdly, the incentive. First, the meaning. Let us cleanse ourselves. The apostle Paul exhorts the Corinthian Christian to spiritual cleansing. This implies that we all are spiritually filthy and are in need of spiritual cleansing. We all have become filthy when we commit sin and sin is committed when we do not live our lives according to the law of God. In our life as a Christian pilgrim, we start the day desiring to live a life pleasing in the sight of God. We want to avoid all temptations, evil companions and all appearances of evil. And we want to do what pleases our Lord by obeying His Word, but we often fail. And we agree with the apostle Paul that we too are in need of cleansing. And the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper instructs us that this is what we ought to do. That in Christ alone there is cleansing from all our sins. We confess our sins and repent by turning away from our sins and cease from committing them. For our Lord by his death on the cross through his perfect obedience has earned for us the righteousness of God. And He imputes this righteousness to our account by faith. And by this, God has forgiven all our sins for Christ’s sake, and cleanses us from all unrighteousness. This is our confession when we have come to the table of the Lord. And we lay hold of the promises of God that when we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us and to cleanse us from all our unrighteousness (I John 1.9). And the Lord effectively cleanse us from our sins – this is the force of the word, “cleanse”. It is not just a possibility that we could be cleansed but we are actually cleansed from our sins.

How do we obey this exhortation for cleansing? The apostle says, “let us cleanse ourselves”. He does not bring himself above them who rebuke them because they are unclean. Rather, he joins himself to the Corinthians because he too is a sinner who is in need of cleansing. The apostle Paul has made this exhortation personal. No one can

do it for us or by proxy. Each one of us must come to the Father for cleansing. We come to God constantly for cleansing from our sins. There is no time that we could say that we do not need the cleansing from our sins for we sin all the time and our sins cleave to us.

We are exhorted to cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit. What is the filthiness of flesh and spirit? The word, “flesh” here does not refer to the old man of sin, but rather to the physical flesh, that is, the body. And the “spirit” is used interchangeably with soul, which comprises of mind, will and emotions. And so, together body and spirit refer to the whole man: the sin of the whole man. This is clearly demonstrated when our evil thoughts, lusts and adulteries defile our spirit. That we are jealous of our neighbours when they are richer than we are or have more of the world’s goods and so we lust for what they have. And what do we do? We sin by using the members of our bodies to steal, rob and commit murder. The Word of God calls us to cleanse ourselves of all the filthiness of flesh and spirit. We cleanse ourselves when we get rid of our lives of the sins that defile us before God. This spiritual cleansing involves cleaning upon our lives by turning from the sins that defile us. It implies that we cease using our flesh and spirit as instruments with which to sin and use them rather as instruments with which to serve God. This can be done, not according to our own strength, but only in the power of the blood of Jesus Christ. Christ’s blood alone washes away our sins. Consequently, the Christian who will cleanse himself of the filthiness of flesh and spirit must daily fall to his knees in prayer to seek from the hand of God the cleansing power of the cross.

And the goal of cleansing ourselves is to perfect holiness. There are two aspects to holiness: separation from sin and utter devotion to God. Scriptures teaches that the child of God is already sanctified in principle, that God also continually sanctifies him, and he is called to strive after sanctification. We are dead in sin, and it is impossible that we still live in sin. This does not mean that sin is dead in us, in fact, the very opposite is true. A radical change has taken place in our hearts with our relation and attitudes towards sin. Formerly we lived in sin and agreed with sin, but now we are dead in sin and no longer yield our members to serve uncleanness and sin. Instead, we yield our members servants to righteousness unto holiness. We are buried with Christ unto baptism into death, even as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, so also we should walk in newness of life. What has happened to the old man? Our old man is crucified with Christ so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and therefore, we do not serve sin. We are freed for sin and we have become servants to God; and have their fruit unto holiness and everlasting life. We are freed from the law of sin and death by the law of the Spirit of life.

Now we are washed, sanctified and justified in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ by the Spirit of God. Christ died for us in order that we should henceforth not to live unto themselves, but unto him who died for us and rose again. Therefore, we have become a new creature, old things are passed away, behold, all things have become new.

Our calling is to perfect holiness. The word, “perfect does not mean that we be so perfect while upon earth that no longer sin against God for this is impossible because we continually sin against God even as God’s dear children. Perfectionism is refuted by the admonitions in the Holy Scriptures that the saints must walk in the world in a new and holy life. This presupposes that sin is still in us. Eph 4.22 – 24, 22 That ye

put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; 23 And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; 24 And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness. Rom. 6.6, 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. Rom, 6.12 to 16, 12 Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. 13 Neither yield ye your members *as* instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members *as* instruments of righteousness unto God. 14 For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace. 15 What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid. 16 Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? Romans 7 is the description of the apostle Paul as a child of God who delights to obey the law but there is evil in him so that he cannot do the good. He says in verse 19 and 20, “19 For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. 20 Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. And if the apostle Paul who is one of the holiest saints that ever lived struggled with sin in his life, surely our sins are also present with us and thus there is no perfection without sin while we live on earth.

To perfect holiness is to complete holiness. One perfects holiness when he fills that which is lacking, so that he turns from all sin and lives completely in the service of God. This work of perfecting the saints is a continuous work of the Spirit of Christ in us. This is not a cooperative work where God will help those who help themselves. Rather, this is God’s work upon our hearts by the Spirit of Christ. And we are called to complete the work of holiness. This means that we are called to strive after sanctification and to walk holily in the world. While it is God who works in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure, we are nevertheless called to walk in obedience and to work out our salvation with fear and trembling. We must be followers of God as dear children of the light, and have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but to reprove them. And the sum of perfecting holiness is to put off the old man, which is according to the deceitful lusts and put on the new man which is after holiness and righteousness. Practically, this means that we put away lying, including half lies and we speak truth with our neighbour. We put off anger that cause us to sin and forgive. And finally, put off corrupt speech but speak edifying words that builds up one another. And when we do this, we are obeying the exhortation to cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit.

We are to perfect holiness in the fear of God, which acts as the motivation Firstly, that I want to perfect holiness because I reverence God in my heart. It is not a dread of God that I am fearful of the judgement of God or the consequence of not reverencing God in my heart. But because I know God and believe in Jehovah God. He is the God of the covenant that He has established and I have intimate fellowship with Him; He walks with me and I will talk with Him. And I love him from the bottom of my heart who loves me and has accepted me in the beloved for Christ’s sake. And I want to obey all his commandments because I love him, even though his commandments requires a great sacrifice of personal inconveniences, money and even my very life. That I want to live a life to all pleasing in the sight of God and to have a conscience void of offence towards God. Secondly, that I want to perfect holiness in the fear of God in all the moments of my life; including those times when I am alone and no one

is there watching over me. Whether I am at home, in the office, in school, or in vacation and where no one knows me. And that I abstain from all appearances that I suspect would be evil, fearful to sin against God and grieve the heart of God. And I want to live in all godliness. And so in these ways, we perfect holiness in the fear of God.

Finally, the incentive of cleansing ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, because we have these promises. What are these promises? The apostle has set before the saints wonderful promises: that God will be their father. And as their father he will receive them, he will live with them and dwell in them. What beautiful promises these are? They speak of God's fellowship with his people. This fellowship is the joy of the Christian. And second promise is that God will be a father unto us and we will be his sons and daughters. Essentially, these are the promises that God has promised us in the everlasting covenant of grace. This promised fellowship can only be realised in the way of holiness. The apostle has already made that very clear. It was only in connection with the call to spiritual separation for the world that the apostle spoke of God receiving and living in them as a father does with his children. God himself is a holy God and he cannot receive anyone who is not holy as God is holy. He certainly will not live with those who will trample his holy things under their feet. These promises of God's fellowship with those who are holy set forth before us as incentives to cleanse ourselves from all the filthiness of flesh and spirit. Already, now, as saints of God, we enjoy this promised fellowship. But how this fellowship is marred by our sins, as we daily defile ourselves before God. How much richer his fellowship becomes as we more and more learn to cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God. Having therefore, these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God. Amen.