



A Passion for Holiness – Part 4
2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1
GCSP – 03/28/2009

How many of you enjoy being criticized? Let me see your hands; raise them up high. Man oh man Pastor Al, I can't begin to tell you how excited I get when someone criticizes me! Anyone?

Now don't raise your hand on this one because I do not want anyone to sin right now during the sermon by not raising your hand, but being completely honest with yourself, how many of you enjoy criticizing others?

More often than not, criticism comes from the simple fact that the person dishing it out thinks he or she knows better than the person they are criticizing. In other words, the one who criticizes is not seeing things done the way they would do them; and of course, their way is the only right way of doing things.

I get criticized all the time. It seems that accepting criticism should be part of the job description for a pastor. I have reached the point where I rarely even try to defend myself anymore because it just isn't worth the time and effort. If someone has made up their mind about me, arguing with them is not going to accomplish anything other than soothing my sense of self-righteousness and extending the argument. If the criticism is valid I need to accept it and ask the Lord to lead me onto the path of change. If the criticism is not valid I can escalate the issue by refuting the criticism and in turn criticize back, or I can let them speak their peace and move on to more constructive uses of my time. I have discovered that defending myself is usually a great waste of time.

Now if God or His Word is what is truly being criticized, then I feel compelled to jump in and correct that, but if it is just me, I can take it and prefer to be a peacemaker or at least prefer to stop any further escalation of the situation. Most people who are bold enough to criticize someone to their face are not easily swayed in their opinions; and I, for one, simply do not have the time or energy to engage in futile activities. If I let every criticism and every offence occupy my thoughts and my time I would in essence be allowing the enemy to steal my joy.

So accept valid criticism and make the necessary changes, but consider the benefits of ignoring the invalid criticism that come your way and moving on to more worthy pursuits.

How you handle criticism has a direct impact on holiness in your life, and that is one of the issues we will look at tonight in our continuing series, "A Passion for Holiness."

Turn with me in your Bibles to the Book of **2 Corinthians**.

2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1

Let's pray.

The focus of this passage is found in the phrase, "**Let us cleanse ourselves**"; and we will spend the majority of our time **7:1** tonight. But we should first understand the context and the background because Paul begins **7:1** with the word "**Therefore**", and all of know by now that when we see that word we have to find out what it is there for, meaning we have to back up some to understand why he is now saying what he is saying.

When Paul says, "**Let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God**", this command is coming from the fact that the Corinthian believers were living like the world. They had become so enamored with and entangled in the world that no unbiased observer would be able to tell the difference between them and the world. The Corinthian believers acted like the world, looked like the world, talked like the world, dressed like the world, was entertained the same way the world is entertained, and to a great extent believed what the world believes. And the world is under the power of Satan and is his domain for the present time. Why on earth would any true and genuine Christian want to be identified with the world? Yet we do it all the time.

So Paul starts this section of Scripture by saying, "**Do not be bound together with unbelievers.**" And while that may be a little vague it needs to be. The King James says to not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. Through the years I have heard this verse applied primarily to not marrying an unbeliever and not going into a business partnership with an unbeliever. And while that is a good and valid application of this verse we need to go much farther and much deeper than just that. Because if that is as far as you go with this principle and you are married to a believer and do not have any business partnerships with unbelievers, then you may be under the false assumption that this passage has no bearing on your life; and nothing could be farther from the truth.

When Paul says, "**Do not be bound together with unbelievers**" he is simply saying, "Do not be like the world." He then goes on to give us a few examples of what we are really doing when we do act, and dress, and think, and talk like the world.

Righteousness and lawlessness cannot be put together, yet when a genuine Christian tries to be as close to the world as he or she can we are dragging the righteousness of Christ through the muck and mire of Satan's lawlessness.

Light and darkness cannot coexist, yet when we fill our minds with the philosophies of this world and engage in the activities of the world we are doing everything we can to snuff out the light of God's Word in our lives.

Christ and Satan are not brothers, as the Mormons and other false religions teach, yet when we justify or rationalize our sinful behavior we are attempting to bring Satan's lies in harmony with the truth of Jesus Christ.

Outside of both being human, believers and unbelievers have virtually nothing in common, yet we are constantly attempting to eliminate those differences by blending in with the world so that no one could pick us out of a lineup and say, "That one is a Christian." We wear the fashion of the world even if it is too revealing or too immoral.

We cut our hair like the world, wear the same makeup, wear the same jewelry, listen to the same music, watch the same programs and movies, and of course usually act like the world acts. And the point is not that everything the world wears and watches is evil or sinful but in why you are wearing and watching the same things. If it is to follow the world and be as close to the world as possible while still holding to some Christian values than you are only fooling yourself and you are limiting your witness to a lost and dying world.

And I have heard all the excuses before about if I want to reach my worldly friends I have to be like them. Be careful. An attitude like that is only a step away from saying I would have to be a drug addict to reach drug addicts, or a homosexual to reach homosexuals, or a murderer to reach murderers, or a rapist to reach rapists. The Bible says you will reach the lost by living a life that is totally different from what they know.

Unbelievers have a huge hole in their souls and they are not looking for something that is similar to them; they are looking for radical and meaningful change. Watering down your life is the same thing thousands of churches across America has been doing for decades now. It's hard to walk into a church that actually teaches and preaches the principles of God's Word anymore because they do not want to offend unbelievers. When we make the church and make our lives into something unbelievers are comfortable with, why on earth would that attract them when they feel in the depths of their soul that they are missing something?

Paul finishes his illustration by comparing the Temple of God with false idols. Genuine believers are the Temple of God and when we choose to be like the world we are bringing worthless and satanic idols into God's Temple.

7:1 opens with, "**Therefore, having these promises...**" So allow me to clarify what promises he is talking about.

The first promise is that we have a *divine indwelling* – "**I will dwell in them.**" I am appalled at how casually most Christians take this truth of their life as a believer. The Holy Spirit of God dwells within us. His house is our bodies.

When you have company coming over for dinner, meaning someone is coming to temporarily dwell in your home, you straighten everything up, vacuum the floors, dust the furniture, put stuff away you don't want other people to know you have, etc. In other words, you want your company to see you and your house at your best. Yet how casually do we treat the Holy Spirit who has come to permanently dwell with you? How pitifully do we treat Him by the things we submit our bodies, His home, to? Should the Holy Spirit be subject to having His house look like the houses of Satan and his demons?

Beloved it is an unimaginable promise and privilege to have God the Holy Spirit living within us.

The second promise is *divine communion* or divine fellowship – "**I will walk among them.**" Just as Abraham was called a friend of God, so too, we can have that same relationship. Just as God intimately spoke with His friends, He will speak to you. If you will tell him the story of your heart He will tell you the story of His heart, for **Psalm**

25:14 says, **"The secret of the Lord is for those who fear Him, and He will make them known His covenant."**

Do we truly understand the priceless gift we have in this divine fellowship? It is like having a room full of gold bars in your house and never opening the door when we ignore the fact that God walks among us, or better said, walks with us.

The TV game show, "Who Wants to be a Millionaire?" had a feature for the contestants called "Lifelines" when they didn't know the answer to a question. One of the lifelines was the ability to call a friend to ask them if they knew the answer, so they would call a friend who had an interest in or had some expertise in the field of the question. Sometimes the friend knew the answer and sometimes the contestant was left on their own to guess.

Having God walking with us means we have THE answer to any and every question we face. Having God walking with us means we never have to be left to our own devices. You don't have to guess, you don't have to worry or fret, and you don't have to go it alone ever! Yet most of the time we act as if God is not there.

The third promise is we have a *divine covenant* – **"I will be their God and they will be My people."** God gives Himself to those who confess Jesus Christ as Lord and believe in their heart that God raised Him from the dead. Did you catch that? God gives Himself to you! And in turn He has purchased you with a great price to be His own possession. This divine covenant is between you and God and it cannot be broken or terminated. God does not and simply cannot lie or break a promise and His promise is that He will be your God and you will be His people for all eternity.

Yet, just like the nation of Israel, we chase after other gods. We commit adultery and prostitute ourselves like Gomer did against her husband Hosea. We choose the things of the world over the things of God. We settle for the comforts of sin instead of the comforts of God's loving arms.

The fourth promise (**v. 18**) is *divine adoption* – **"I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to Me."** The beauty of adoption is that the parents choose which child they want. With natural born children there is no choice, but with adoption there is a choice. And God chose you, and you, and you, and you, and you from the billions of choices in this world He could have chosen.

God loves you with a perfect father's love, guides you with a perfect father's care, protects you with a perfect father's watchfulness, instructs you with a perfect father's wisdom, bears with you with a perfect father's patience, and longs for you with a perfect father's longing. You are His tender child and He is your tender loving Father.

In light of these promises He first says, **"Come out from their midst and be separate...and do not touch what is unclean"** (**v. 17**). God pleads with us and commands us to stop trying to be like the world. Stop acting like the world, stop dressing like the world, stop trying to look like the world, stop trying to impress the world, stop watching what the world watches, stop reading what the world reads, stop

partying like the world parties, stop drinking what the world drinks, simply stop being like the world!

We are to be separate! Yet most Christians are joined at the hip with the world. Most Christians are bowing down to Satan even if they are not aware of it. This world is not our home. This world is not our model of standard behavior. This world is not the basis for our choices in life. This world should have absolutely no hold on you. If we are ever going to have even an inkling of holiness in our lives we must stop trying to mimic the world and get about the business of being separate from the world!

And then in light of these promises, the Bible says, "**Beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God**" (**Z:1**).

Let us cleanse ourselves. The first step is up to you if you desire to live up to the promises of God; if you desire to live like the son or daughter of the King of kings and Lord of lords. The promises of God should lead each one of us to a passionate pursuit of holiness in our lives, instead of a passionate pursuit of the world's pleasures and morals and values.

So the first aspect of holiness centers around self-cleansing. Some Christians believe a false teaching that we can achieve perfection in this life and thus do not have the need to confess and repent of our sins after salvation. I submit to you that if any man outside of Jesus Christ had even a near claim to this it was the Apostle Paul. Yet he says, "**Let us cleanse ourselves.**" He doesn't tell the Corinthians and us to get about the business of cleansing yourselves but he includes himself right alongside us; "**LET-US-CLEANSE-OURSELVES.**" I guess if someone has the self-righteousness to believe they do not sin then it wouldn't be a stretch to place him or herself above the Apostle Paul either.

So how do we cleanse ourselves? We start by spending more time reading and studying and meditating on, and memorizing God's Word. The light of God's Word reveals all the dirt of the world that dwells inside you; the more light you get the more dirt that will be revealed. As you immerse yourself in light of God's Word you will discover sins that you used to think nothing of; you will discover sins you have justified and rationalized for years.

The light of God's Word will reveal sins you have winked at your entire life. The light of God's Word will reveal nasty habits you have surrendered your life to. The light of God's Word will reveal the filth that rolls off your tongue and through your lips; the unholy thoughts that captivate your mind and heart. The light of God's Word will break down strongholds of doubt and fear and personal agendas and bad theology.

"Let us cleanse ourselves."

It goes on to say that we must cleanse ourselves "**from all defilement of flesh and spirit.**" I have explained this to you before from the Greek, but just in case some of you missed it, what does the word "all" mean? All means all. It doesn't mean most, it doesn't mean 99%, and it doesn't mean all only when it is convenient; all means all.

We must not hang onto or hide or justify or rationalize even one pet sin in our lives. You can't say you are living in holiness while you allow the sin that so easily besets you to a place in your house. You can't deceive yourself into thinking you are holy and righteous while your pet sin is allowed to roam free and have its way. It would be like allowing your pet dog or cat to destroy your rugs and floors by letting them take care of their business wherever they want. That is what your pet sins are like: feces and urine defiling your life.

In the Old Testament and still today in orthodox Jewish households, when Passover has come the man of the house inspects every cupboard and every countertop and every nook and cranny of the house to be sure that all leaven is purged from the house before they can celebrate the Passover. This same diligence should be employed by each one of us in purging sin from our lives. No stone should be left unturned and no sin should be left un-purged.

When Paul mentions "flesh and spirit" he is meaning outward and inward defilements. We all have sins and bad habits that are visible and of the body, but we also all have sins of the mind and of the heart. Don't make the mistake of legalism by cleansing yourself only of the things that can be seen by men and leaving behind a reprobate and defiled mind and heart.

So what things in your life defile the flesh and the spirit? What activities and habits of your life cause you to think unholy thoughts?

Think about it this way: If you were dusting and vacuuming and mopping your house would you clean most of it but leave a pile of mud in the middle of the living room floor? Would you clean all of your windows except the one you look out the most? Would you do all of the dishes except the plate that now has some fuzz growing on top of the leftover pork chop from last week? When we cleanse ourselves from most defilement of the flesh and spirit this is what we end up with.

Do not be deceived and simply say "I can't help myself" – you must help yourself. You have no more right to shake hands with your bad habits and your unholy activities as you do to shake hands with the devil. You also can't simply say "I am naturally this way" – of course you are naturally that way; all of us are naturally bad. You no longer have the right or the liberty to live in the natural though; it is your duty and responsibility to live in the power of the Holy Spirit. The work of the Holy Spirit is required for your sanctification but it is equally true that we are actively involved with our sanctification – **"Let us cleanse ourselves."**

Hold your place in **2 Corinthians** and turn with me in your Bibles to the Book of **Philippians**.

Philippians 2:12-13

Do not misinterpret this passage; it is not saying you must work your way to salvation but only that what God has implanted in us must be worked out in our actions by our will and choosing. God has worked in us and we must now work it to the outside. This is the process of sanctification and the partnership we have with the Spirit in it.

And lastly, our text says, "**Perfecting holiness in the fear of God.**" As we start recognizing how much influence the world has on our lives and how much we are in need of cleansing from all defilements of flesh and spirit, we will begin the process of true holiness in the fear of God. And that last phrase is vitally important because most of us quite honestly have very little if no fear of God. We fear man much more than we fear God; and that is evident by the decisions we make in our lives and in how distinguishable we are from the world.

I alluded to this earlier, but if you were put in a police lineup could anyone who didn't already have prior knowledge, pick you out as a Christian? And then is there enough evidence to convict you of the charge if someone did pick you out? Would the court of God's law be able to present enough habits and activities of your life that prove you are indeed a Christian?

In the beginning of **7:2**, Paul says, "**Make room for us in your hearts.**" In the context of what we have studied tonight I believe it is appropriate for us to consider if we have any room in our hearts for God or if the world has already filled our hearts to capacity?

Do you desire holiness? Then cleanse yourself and make room in your heart for God and the things of God.

Let's pray