

Perfecting Holiness • 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Read Text

B. The Call To Holiness

1. It's really not difficult to get someone interested in the message of the Gospel but it is terrifically difficult to *sustain* that interest.
 2. Millions of people in our time have made decisions for Christ, but there is a dreadful attrition rate.
 3. Many claim to have been born again, but the evidence for mature Christian discipleship is mighty slim.
 4. In our kind of culture anything, even news about God, can be sold if it is packaged right; but when it loses its novelty, it goes on the garbage heap.
 5. Today especially, there's a great market for religious experience; but there is little enthusiasm for the patient development of virtue,
 6. There is little desire to sign up for a long apprenticeship in what earlier generations of Christians called holiness.
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II. TEXT

A. 7:1

1. Want to begin with the last part of that last verse today . . .

{1} . . . let us , perfect holiness in the fear of God.

2. In both the Old and New Testaments, the command is given to God's people, "Be holy, for I the Lord your God am Holy."
3. Now, we know that we are *declared* holy by virtue of our faith in Jesus
 - a. that righteousness is imputed or put to our account the moment we are born again
 - b. but that is not the dimension of holiness that God is referring to when he commands us to be holy
4. He means that we are to be pure – that because He is pure, as His people, we are to reflect His nature
5. Here, Paul is calling us to go on in holiness – to become increasingly pure and holy
6. The desire for holiness should be one of the chief passions of the Christian
7. In what comes before this, we find *how* we can achieve personal and practical holiness . . .

B. Vs. 14-16

{14} Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?

{15} And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an

unbeliever?

{16} And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will dwell in them And walk among them. I will be their God, And they shall be My people."

1. "Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers."
 - a. here's a well known verse that is almost always used in reference to romantic relationships
 - b. it may come as a bit of a surprise to realize that while it certainly applies to dating and marriage, it's scope is much broader than that
 - c. specially when we think of it in an historical context
2. Remember who Paul was writing this too – the church at Corinth
 - a. Corinth was a city know for it's immorality
 - b. and the Corinthians had a reputation all over the Roman Empire of being rude and crude
 - c. Corinth was the Las Vegas and Rio de Janeiro of the Roman world
3. The moral environment of Corinth was bound to have an impact on the morality of the church
4. The members of the Corinthian church were not drawn from the upper classes and those who had lived pure lives
5. They were a cross section of Corinthian social life –
6. In 1 Corinthians 6 Paul writes,

{9} Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites,

{10} nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.

{11} And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.

7. There is the past, marked by sin; and there is the present, lived by faith in Christ
8. And as Paul wrote in 5:17, those who are in Christ are new creations, the old things have passed away and are gone – and something new has come.
9. Paul now reminds them that they are to live as the new creations they are; saints, not sinners
10. Being born again means entering in to a new life and a new nature
11. And it is nature that determines association:
 - a. because a pig has a pig's nature – it associates with other pigs in the mud hole
 - b. because a sheep has a sheep's nature, it likes to eat grass with the flock in the pasture
 - c. the Christian is someone who has been born again and received a new nature –
 - d. so he or she should want to associate with those who also have new natures and who value the same things
 - e. just as one would find a sheep lying with pigs in a mud hole, or a pig grazing in the midst of a flock of sheep highly curious,

- f. so the Christian who wallows in immorality with the unsaved is an absurd contradiction
 - g. now I know a popular movie of a couple years had a pig mixing with sheep, but that was fantasy friends
 - h. the nature of pigs and sheep is very different – and so are the natures of sinners and saints
12. Paul's point is that this difference in nature must take visible form in our associations

13. When he says we are not to be unequally yoked together with unbelievers, he is drawing from Deut 22:10

“You shall not plow with an ox and a donkey together.

- a. the ox was a clean animal to the Jews while the donkey was not
 - b. they also possess two very different natures and would not work well together
 - 1) the ox is compliant and strong
 - 2) the donkey is stubborn and hard to work with
 - 3) the ox will follow a straight line, the donkey will tend to wander and want to go it's own way
 - c. it would be cruel to both animals to force them to work together
14. When Paul says that believers are not to be unequally yoked together with unbelievers, he means that the Christian is not to become entangled in a way with someone who does not share the new nature, values, and priorities of Christ
- a. why?
 - b. because it will end up being a miserable experience for both of them
 - c. and it will certainly result in the hindering of the life and work of the believer

15. Paul asks 5 questions that all reinforce the need for believers to maintain their independence from the lost

- a. what *fellowship* has righteousness with lawlessness?
 - b. what *communion* has light with darkness?
 - c. what *accord* has Christ with Belial (which is another name for Satan)?
 - d. what *part* has a believer with an unbeliever?
 - e. what *agreement* has the temple of God with idols?
16. Of course, the answer to each of these inquiries is, “NONE!”
17. But it's the 5 nouns he uses that give us the understanding of what he means by “yoking” in v. 14
- a. fellowship, communion, accord, part, and agreement are all words which speak of a common sharing
 - b. they imply more than casual contact – they are rich words picturing people who share the very substance of life
 - c. in fact, the word *accord* in v. 15 is the Greek word from which we get our word “symphony”
 - 1) it speaks of beautiful music that comes when the players are reading from the same score and obeying the same leader
 - 2) but in life, we either play the music of heaven or the world

3) and the conductor is either Jesus or Satan

18. So, when Paul says that we are not to be unequally yoked together with unbelievers, it applies to much more than simply romance
19. The first few generations of believers understood this much better than we today
20. You see, for them, applying this often meant that a man had to give up his *trade*.
 - a. suppose he was a stone mason: What was he to do if his company received a contract to build a heathen shrine?
 - b. suppose he was a tailor: What was to happen if he was told to cut and sew garments for priests of the heathen gods?
 - c. suppose he was a soldier: What was to happen if he had to fling his pinch of incense on that altar to Caesar in token of his worship of the emperor as a god?
 - d. time and time again in the early Church the choice came to choose between the security of a job and loyalty to Jesus Christ.
 - e. a man came to the church leader Tertullian with his problem of having to choose between his faith and his job.
 - 1) he told him his problem and then he said,
 - 2) "After all, I must live."
 - 3) Tertullian replied, "Must you?".
 - f. very simply, in the early Church, a man's Christianity often meant that he had to quit his job.
 - g. but even in more modern times, being true to the faith has meant the same thing
 - h. F. W. Charrington was the heir to a fortune made by brewing.
 - 1) on night while passing a tavern he saw a woman waiting at the door.
 - 2) a man, who was obviously her husband, came staggering out
 - 3) she tried to keep him from going back in but with one blow of his fist the man knocked her out.
 - 4) Charrington started forward to her aid, but as he did, he looked up to see that the name above the tavern was his own
 - 5) Charrington said, "With that one blow that man not only knock his wife out, he also knocked me clean out of that business forever."
 - 6) Charrington gave up the fortune he might have had, rather than touch money earned in such a way.
21. No man is the keeper of another man's conscience; and every man must decide for himself if he can take his trade to Christ and Christ with him to his daily work.
 - a. let me use another example if I may to express my point here
 - b. it's an example that touches us right where we live
 - c. we have many families here at Calvary who are employed at or connected to Port Hueneme and Point Mugu
 - d. let's suppose we have two believers who work in support of the missiles that are carried on F-18's; Frank & Sue
 - e. Frank is fundamentally opposed to war and killing

- 1) he sees missiles as nothing but weapons whose sole purpose is to kill
 - 2) convicted that his job supports the taking of human life, he is compelled to quit
 - f. Sue works with Frank; she too is opposed to war and killing
 - 1) but she believes the best way to deter evil men and corrupt foreign regimes from going to war is for the United States to have a strong military
 - 2) she sees the missiles as weapons whose mere presence will hold war and death at bay
 - g. Frank and Sue attend the same church – and they have spent many lunches debating their position with one another
 - h. but being the mature and gracious believers they are, each realizes they must live by the dictates of their *own* conscience
 - i. Sue encourages Frank when she hears he has given his notice – she does not deride him, she respects and honors the tough decision he has made
 - j. and Frank does not belittle Sue because she doesn't follow his example; he honors and affirms her work to make the world a safer place
 - k. they just disagree how that end is best served
22. Some occupations are clearly inappropriate for believers; others are issues of personal conviction
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23. In the early church, applying this often meant that a man had to give up some parts of his *social life*.
- a. in the ancient world, many a heathen feast was held in the temple of a god.
 - b. the invitation would say, "I invite you to dine with me at the table of our Lord Serapis."
 - c. the feast would begin and end with the pouring of a cup of wine to the gods.
 - d. could a Christian share in that-or did he have to say good-bye to the social fellowship which used to mean so much to him?
24. While Paul tells us not to be unequally yoked together with unbelievers, Jesus invites us to be yoked to Him

{Mat 11:28-30} "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

{29} "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

{30} "For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

25. Whose yoke are you bearing today – the world's or Jesus'?
- a. it's one or the other
 - b. we are all laboring, we are all working at life
 - c. is your burden heavy? Are you tired? Do you need rest?
 - d. if so, then the yoke you are bearing is not the yoke of Jesus
 - e. because He says that His yoke is easy and His burden is a light one
 - f. being yoked with Jesus means that all of the power and grace of God is working alongside you to accomplish the work
 - g. he bears the burden, he carries the weight; we just get to go along for the

- ride
- h. and then receive the reward for the work done
26. So, whose yoke are you laboring under – the world's or Jesus'?

C. V. 16b-18

1. Paul bases his call to separation on the promise God made to Israel in Ezekiel 37 . . .

{16b} As God has said: "I will dwell in them And walk among them. I will be their God, And they shall be My people."

{17} Therefore "Come out from among them And be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you."

{18} "I will be a Father to you, And you shall be My sons and daughters, Says the LORD Almighty."

2. Paul mixes several OT passages together in these verses
3. They all speak of God's desire and promise to make Israel His *own* people; to enter into a unique and new relationship with them that no one else was privileged to enjoy
- He will dwell among them
 - they will be His very own special people
 - He will be their Father, and they His children!
4. But if they were to enjoy the benefits of His fatherly love, then they needed to do something
5. As v. 17 says, they must "come out and be separate."
- this is a quote from Isaiah 52:11 in which God is speaking to the Jews in Babylon
 - He calls them to come out of their captivity and return to Him and the place of promise
6. This call to "come out" is a common one God issues to those who would follow Him
- that was the word of God that came to Abraham in Ur of the Chaldees: "Get out of your country and from your kindred and from your father's house" (Gen 12:1).
 - that was the warning that came to Lot before the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. (Gen 19:12-14).
 - it was the word given to Jacob in pagan Mesopotamia when it was time for him to return home
 - and it was the word given to the children of Israel when it was time to leave Egypt
7. Interestingly, in Rev. 18:4, it's also the word God speaks to His people in the last days as He prepares to rain down fierce judgment on a godless and god rejecting planet
8. Paul's point here is that there are things in the world with which the Christian *cannot* and *dare not* associate himself.

"Come out from among them And be separate, says the Lord.

9. Does this mean that we should all go home, pack up a Winnebago and move

- out to start a commune in the desert?
10. Actually, that's exactly what it means and so we'll be selling the official Calvary Chapel edition Winnebagos right after service today!
 11. Throughout history there have been individuals and groups who have taken this literally and moved out from the cities to live in the wilds
 - a. monasteries and convents were enclaves of Christians trying to retreat from the world and the influences of sin; so the men and women were kept in separate communities
 - b. Qumran, the community which produced the Dead Sea Scrolls, was a Jewish monastery of men who had fled the corruptions of Jerusalem to live in the wilderness as a holy community
 12. But the separation God is calling for is not so much physical separation as it is moral and practical separation
 13. And no where do we see this modeled more clearly than in the life of Jesus
 - a. His critics said he was a "friend of tax collectors and sinners" (Luke 7:34)
 - b. yet when He invited them to lay a charge of sin at His feet, they were unable to
 14. The most telling character of our separation from the world is found in Jesus prayer in John 17

{14} **"I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.**

{15} **"I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one.**

{16} **"They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.**

{17} **"Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.**

{18} **"As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world.**

- a. just as Jesus was sent *in to* the world, so you and I have been sent by God *in to* the world
- b. so, we are to be **IN** but not **OF** the world
15. Our separation is not physical so much as it is moral
16. We are to maintain our identity as citizens of heaven, not this world
17. We live by God's word, discovered in the pages of scripture; not man's word found in newspaper editorials, the latest bestsellers, or volumes like *Mein Kampf* or the *Communist* or *Humanist Manifestos*
18. Listen to the words my friends:
"Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you."
19. This both appeals to me and repulses me; it appeals to my spirit but my flesh is repulsed
20. Jon Courson used an illustration this week at the Pastor's Conference that I'd like to adapt this morning because it fits here nicely . . .
 - a. I come home from work one night to discover Lynn has made a fantastic gourmet dinner
 - b. she spent hours on it – all our favorite dishes, done to perfection
 - c. it's laid out in the most gorgeous manner imaginable

- d. then she says, “Oh, by the way, while I was cooking, I spilled a little arsenic into the dishes, but don’t worry, dig in and enjoy.”
 - e. of course, this is absurd, she would never do this – unless she was purposely trying to kill us
21. Well friends, I have some sobering news – this is precisely what the world is doing to us
 - a. it is cooking up an enticing meal for the flesh
 - b. but it is mixing is poison
 22. A good example of this is a well known movie that recently won all the accolades the world can pin on a Hollywood production
 - a. now, most people, including many Christian would say, “What’s a little nudity? After all it’s a great story. It’s a real event. So what if there’s nudity on the screen. It’s not going to matter that much, a few minutes, a moment or two. After all it’s a great epic. Everyone’s seen it.”
 - b. here’s the problem - Pornography is a poison that is especially fatal as it is first ingested in *small* doses
 23. How many millions of young people have had their hearts and minds poisoned by movies like *Titanic*?
 24. How many adults sitting here this morning have been poisoned by Hollywood over the years?
 - a. and now they are reaping the fruit of death and destruction
 - b. in their marriages and personal lives
 25. Too many – too much!
 26. Listen to it again
- “**Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you.**”
- a. what does it mean?
 - b. what is the Spirit saying to you?
 - c. what do you need to separate yourself from

C. V. 7:1

{1} Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

1. God becomes our Father the moment we put our trust In Jesus as Savior
2. But He cannot BE TO US a Father unless we obey Him and fellowship with Him
3. Because God has given us the promise of His presence, we must be diligent to take advantage of that promise
4. And the way to do that is cleanse ourselves from all filthiness
5. It is not enough to ask God to cleanse us;
6. We must clean up our own lives and get rid of those things that make it easy for us to sin
7. Paul defines two types of moral dirt here – that which is of the flesh, and that of the spirit
 - a. fleshly filth would be the obvious sins of *carnal gratification*; sexual sin, materialism, drunkenness, and such

- b. spiritual filth comes from the sins of *attitude*; pride, envy, rebellion and their ilk
- c. the prodigal son was guilty of the sins of the flesh; his older brother was guilty of the sins of the spirit
- 8. Cleansing ourselves from the moral pollution of this world is only half of our responsibility
- 9. The other half is to ***perfect holiness in the fear of God***
 - a. the Pharisees were good at putting sin away– in fact, they were the all-time pros at it
 - b. but they weren't too good at *perfecting holiness*
 - c. their righteousness was an issue of what they *didn't* do – it was *negative*
 - d. but genuine holiness is *positive*
 - e. to be holy means to be set apart *from* sin *for* the special use of God
 - f. the instruments used in the temple had the words, "Holy to the Lord" written on them so that anyone seeing them would realize they were never to be used in common service – they belonged in the temple and for the service of the Lord
- 10. We have been redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ – we now *belong* to Him
 - a. as His people, we have an obligation to cleanse ourselves from all filthiness
 - b. and to go on in our pursuit of holiness
 - c. God has set us apart from sin for Himself
 - d. our response has to be to set ourselves apart from sin TO Him.

III. CONCLUSION

A. *Like Corinth*

- 1. Southern California is a lot like Corinth
- 2. These words Paul wrote to the church at Corinth the Holy Spirit speaks to us today
- 3. Life was meant to be lived in fellowship with God, not the world
- 4. We have been designed so that life really only works when it is lived for Him
- 5. So let me conclude by asking, how important is holiness to you?
- 6. In his book, *the Pursuit of Holiness* Jerry Bridges wrote,

One day as I was reading the second chapter of 1 John, I realized that my personal life's objective regarding holiness was less than that of John's. He was saying, in effect, "Make it your aim NOT to sin." As I thought about this, I realized that deep within my heart my real aim was not to sin 'very much.' Can you imagine a soldier going into battle with the aim of not getting hit very much?
- 7. A surgeon who selects a scalpel in the operating room rejects a scalpel with a minute spot of defilement on it as readily as one that was severely defiled, because even the smallest spot means the scalpel is defiled and cannot be used in surgery
- 8. The degree of defilement is inconsequential. The fact of defilement is what matters to the surgeon.
- 9. A thing is either sterile or defiled, clean or unclean.

10. A person is holy or unholy.
11. God is not concerned with degrees, only with absolutes
12. But what God looks at is the posture of our hearts toward Him
13. He can work holiness in the life of the man or woman who cleanses themselves from sin and seeks to be holy