PURIFY FROM ALL CONTAMINATION

2 Corinthians 6:11-7:4

Key Verse: 7:1

“Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.”

In the last lesson, we learned that Christ’s ambassadors are God’s fellow workers, urging people not to receive God’s grace in vain, but to bear the time of God’s favour and salvation. God’s fellow workers need to commend themselves in every way, particularly in great endurance, in purity, in the Holy Spirit, in the word of truth, and with weapons of righteousness, in the awareness of the paradox of the ministry of reconciliation through honour and dishonour, and in both joy and sorrow. In today’s passage, we can think of love and purification in light of the commands, “Open wide your hearts” and “Purify from all contamination” along with the command, “Do not be yoked together with unbelievers.”

**First, open wide your hearts (6:11-13; 7:2-4).** Verse 11 says, “We have spoken freely to you. Corinthians.” Here, “freely” is also translated “openly” or “honestly.” We see that Paul spoke freely, openly and honestly concerning himself and the ministry and also Corinthians until now. He had said in 2:4, “For I wrote you out of great distress and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to grieve you but to let you know the depth of my love for you.” He also had said in 3:2, “You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everybody. You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.” And he had said in 4:7-9, “We have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed” and in verse 12, “Death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.” He also said in 5:20, “…We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God.” In the previous passage 6:1-10, Paul expressed 28 elements in commendation of the including “in great endurance”, “in the Holy Spirit”, and “in the word of truth” with the paradox of honour and dishonour, and joy and sorrow, dying and living. Paul did not speak freely, openly and honestly to all people but to the Corinthians with whom he had built up the special relationship in holiness and godly sincerity through the gospel of Jesus Christ. We remember Ephesians 4:15, “speak the truth in love”, which is an essential element in a love relationship.

Paul continues in verse 11, “…and opened wide our hearts to you.” Paul has spoken freely to them, opening wide his heart to them. Again, Paul did not open his heart to everyone but to the Corinthians with whom he had built up a spiritual relationship in Christ Jesus. Surly it must not have been easy for Paul to open wide his heart to the Corinthians, on whom he lavishly poured out his love only to be misunderstood and even falsely accused in their shallow understanding and superficial judgment, spiritually ignorant due to the influence of false teachers. Paul was very pained. Yet Paul opened his heart wide to them in the hope of restoration of the beautiful love relationship between them. He desired to have a heart-to-heart relationship. We see that Paul’s wounded heart loved no less.

Paul continues in verse 12, “We are not withholding our affection from you, but you are withholding yours from us.” In other translations, “You are not restricted/retrained by us, but you are restricted in your own affections.” The Corinthians felt that Paul did not love them, because they were restricted in their own affections, not because Paul was withholding his affection from them. In their love relationship, Paul really wanted their affection not to be restricted or restrained.

Paul appeals in verse 13, “As a fair exchange—I speak as to my children—open wide your hearts also.” Paul’s love is evidenced by a desire for fellowship. “Open wide your heart” means “enlarge your hearts” or “have an enlarged heart.” To love someone deeply and not have them love you in return is heartbreaking. Paul wanted a heart partnership. He wanted his love returned. He, after all, was their spiritual father and they were his spiritual children.

We can go to 7:2, “Make room for us in your hearts.” That can be the meaning of the enlarged heart. Paul also said in Philippians 1:7, “It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart…” Paul continues here in 2 Corinthians 7:2, “We have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have exploited no one.” We learn more that love does not corrupt and it does not do wrong, and it is not benefit-seeking. Love is to be pure and right. And in verse 3, “I do not say this to condemn you; I have said before that you have such a place in our hearts that we would live or die with you.” There is forgiveness in love, and there is loyalty, sharing life together even to the point of death. And then Paul says, “I have great confidence in you; I take great pride in you. I am greatly encouraged; in all our troubles my joy knows no bounds.” Love is characterized by trust. And then finally, love is also marked by joy.

In this part, we thought of the accents of love, speaking the truth in love, desiring fellowship in purity, forgiveness, loyalty and trust and joy. Especially we learn the importance of opening wide the heart, even in a painful and wounded situation. It is to be mutual in fair exchange. It is remarkable to see that Paul’s wounded heart loves no less. May we grow in such a love relationship in our family and church community.

**Second, not yoked together with unbelievers (6:14-16a).** In the course of talking about love, Paul inserted this part concerning cleansing/purifying in relationship with the world or the unbelieving, specifically in the thought of the false teachers. This part is a most emphatic teaching in the Bible about believers’ attitude toward unbelievers. Certainly, this teaching is consistent in the whole Scriptures. It is one of the most basic and one of the most foundational doctrines of the Bible, regarding Christian conduct in the world.

First of all, Paul fixes the principle, saying, “Do not be yoked together with unbelievers.” And in response to the initial principle he gives us five reasons, or five motives for following this mandate. “Do not be yoked together with unbelievers”, this is an uncompromisable/unbending principle in the life of one who is in Christ. The backdrop of this principle is Deuteronomy 22:10, “Do not plow with an ox and a donkey yoked together.” Those two animals have two different natures. They don’t have the same gait, disposition and strength.  They don’t have the same kind of instincts.  They have completely different natures.  You can’t yoke them up and expect a straight furrow. In this analogy Paul says, “Do not be yoked together with unbelievers.” In other translations, “Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers” or “Do not be bound together with unbelievers.”

Subsequently Paul raises 5 rhetorical questions with the obvious answer “no” contained in them to explain the reason of this command. Number 1 is, “For what do righteousness and wickedness/lawlessness have in common?” Righteousness and lawlessness are quite opposite. Ten Commandments are the representative law and God is the God of the Law. Those who keep the law of God are righteous. But no one was able to keep all the laws of God. Before God no one is righteous. But we are made righteous through Christ Jesus who died for all our sins of unrighteousness. However, Christian life is not law-free life. It is to fulfill the law of God in Christ Jesus. Paul clearly said in Romans 3:31, “Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law.” Paul says further about this in Romans. Interestingly, the final Antichrist is depicted as the lawless one or the man of lawlessness in 2 Thessalonians 2:3, 8. 1 John 3:4 says, “Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness.” Hebrews 1:9 says, “You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness/lawlessness” quoted from Psalm 45:7. Definitely, righteousness and lawlessness do have nothing in common.

Number 2 is “Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?” This is an axiom, a self-evident truth. As we have studied, the battle is going on between the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness in this world to the end of the age. God is light and Jesus is the light of the world, and believers are children of light. Paul said in Ephesians 5:8, “For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light.” John 1:4-5 says, “In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.” Here the world is depicted as the darkness. According to Acts 26:17-18, the risen Jesus said to Paul, “…I am sending you to them (the Gentiles) to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God…” Here, darkness refers to the power of Satan. Obviously, there is no fellowship between light and darkness. They are mutually exclusive.  Nothing is more incompatible than light and dark.  One dispels the other.

Number 3, “What harmony is there between Christ and Belial?” By the way, the word “harmony,” *sumphnsis*, from which we get symphony.  It’s not just a musical term.  It means to come together for a common cause.  Belial is an old (Hebrew) term used for Satan.  Sometimes it’s translated with an “r” at the end, “Beliar.”  It comes from ancient times.  It’s used in the Old Testament in a number of places with the phrase “sons of Belial who are worthless ones.” (Judge 19:22; 1 Samuel 2:12; 2 Samuel 23:6; 1 Kings 21:10 in KJV). There is absolutely no harmony between Christ and Belial. “What harmony has Christ with Belial?”  Now we move to the idea of the personal power, the personal ruler of each kingdom.  There is an absolute, fundamental, eternal antagonism at the highest level of the kingdom of light and righteousness as over and against darkness and lawlessness. That is the difference between Christ and Satan.  They are not engaging in any common enterprise. Everything the Lord Jesus Christ would do, Satan would want to prevent.  Everything Satan would do, Christ will judge.  Christ has no partnership, no fellowship, no commonality with Satan.  And you have to understand that an unbelieve is a child of the devil (Jn 8:44) and a believer is a child of God.  The two cannot work together.

Number 4, “What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever?” Amos 3:3 says, “Do two walk together unless they have agreed to do so?” A believer and an unbeliever are different in their values, principles, motives and goals in life. God is in the heart and thought world of a believer, while there is no God but self in those of an unbeliever. Their viewpoint of the world and people are totally different, whether with God or without God. They cannot walk together in life.

Number 5, “What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God.” 1 Corinthians 3:16 says, “Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit lives in you?” Also 1 Corinthians 6:19 says, “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?” Believers are the temple of God or the Holy Spirit personally and collectively. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 8:4, “…We know that an idol is nothing at all in the world and that there is no God but one.” According to Psalm 96:5-7, all the gods of the nations are idols” and Psalm 115:4 says, “Their idols are silver and gold, made by the hands of men. They have mouths, but cannot speak, eyes, but they cannot see; they have ears, but cannot hear, noses, but they cannot smell; they have hands, but cannot feel, feet, but they cannot walk; nor can they utter a sound with their throats.” What a description concerning manmade idols! They are set in various images but not real, but demons use them as if they are real. All false religion is demon worship. All the gods of the nation are demons, because demons impersonate the idols that men create under their stimulation. Whenever Paul compares God and idols, Paul uses the expression, the living God, as he says here, “For we are the temple of the living God” implying that the gods of all nations are dead. They are nothing but lifeless idols. You can’t mix devil worship and the worship of God.  It can’t be mixed.  Christianity is completely and totally separate from every form of idolatry.  There’s no hope of agreement or commonality.

Paul said in 1 Corinthians 10:20-21, “…the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too; you cannot have a part in both the Lord’s table and the table of demons.” According to 1 Thessalonians 1:9, the Thessalonians turned to God from idols. But the Corinthians had turned to God from idols but because of the influences of the pagan culture they were in, they kept going back to their old idolatry.  The Corinthians were going to idol feasts.  They were going to what Paul “the table of demons.”  They were even engaging in prostitutes.  They were going to the acropolis of Corinth where there were a thousand prostitute priestesses and they were, as it were, in the words of Paul in 1 Corinthians 6:15, “joining/uniting Christ to a prostitute.” They were involved in pagan worship,  and then coming to the church to worship Christ. And in addition to that, they had opened the doors of the church and let false teachers in, embraced them and those believed and followed them.

This was not just the case of the Corinthian church. The church has opened its doors throughout its history to false teachers and let them come in and do their work, polluting the mind and wrecking the faith of people.  The church has thrown its doors open wide to the false teachings and it is still doing it even today, denying the inerrancy and authority of Scripture, the deity of Jesus Christ, and the doctrines of salvation by grace through faith alone and all associated teaching to that. In fact, the church today is trying very hard to embrace the culture and to redefine itself on a cultural level so that unbelievers feel comfortable there. Modern Christianity today seeks to blend Christianity with popular culture, wants to make Christianity more popular, less different, more palatable, less offensive, less narrow, less exclusive. As a result the true Christianity and the purity of God’s Word get corrupted, and the church can become useless and shameful and blasphemous in mocking the truth.  Not to be bound together with unbelievers is our greatest challenge. But for the one who believes, there can be no compromise.

Paul said, “Do not yoked together with unbelievers” with such sufficient ideas to support the principle of the command. This is to be absolutely true in worship, friendship, and marriage, in other personal relationships before God. It is certainly not to cut off all relationships, being taken out of the world. As Jesus said, we are in the world but not of the world (Jn 17:15). James 4:4 says, “You adulterous people, don’t you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.” 1 John 2:15 also says, “Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in them. For everything in the world—the lust of flesh, the lust of eyes and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world.” We can have connection with unbelievers for the purpose of evangelism for the salvation of their souls, showing God’s love and praying for them, not being influenced by them. It is in accordance with Jesus’ command, “You are the salt of the earth; you are the light of the world.” (Mt 5:13, 14)

**Third,** **purify from all contamination (6:16b-7:1)** Then Paul says in verses 16b-17, “As God has said: ‘I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people.’ ‘Therefore, come out from them and be sperate,’ says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you.’” “Do not be yoked together with unbelievers” is not just Paul’s command, but actually God’s. Paul provides rich ideas and teachings from the Old Testament. God says in Leviticus 26:12, “I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people.” Jeremiah 32:38 says, “They will be my people, and I will be their God.” And Ezekiel 37:27 says, “My dwelling place will be with them; I will be their God, and they will be my people.” God’s people are different from the people of the world. They were redeemed by the precious blood of the Lamb Christ Jesus. God has his people in this world.

“Therefore come out from them and be sperate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you.” This is clearly Paul’s message, but directly from what the Lord says. Paul wants us to know the weight of this message, the message of the Lord. Isaiah 52:11 says, after the words, “…all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God”, “Depart, depart, go out from there! Touch no unclean thing! Come out from it and be pure, you who carry the vessel of the Lord.”

It can mean, “Look, when salvation comes, make a clean break.  Come out of your old idolatrous patterns; come out of those idolatrous habitats.”  No more idolatrous feasts and festivals and meals and celebrations.  Make a clean break.” And it is written in Ezekiel 20:41, “I will accept you as fragrant incense when I bring you out from the nations...” This is really God’s profound plan for his people.

And we hear in Revelation 18:2-4, “Fallen, Fallen is Babylon the Great!...Come out of her, my people.” The idea of not being yoked together flows from the Pentateuch the first five books of the Bible, through the books of the prophets to Revelation, the end of the Bible. Believers of all ages have been told to separate completely from any pagan religious environment, any corruption of the world, anything that is not the truth of God.

Then Paul says one more thing from the quotation, “I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.” This is a quotation from 2 Samuel 7:14, “I will be his father, and he will be my son…” This is referring to David’s son Solomon but also further to the Son of God, Christ Jesus, who would come from David’s life. Believers are sons and daughters in Christ Jesus, inheriting all the blessings of the Father in heaven, in this special relationship. God wants us to be aware of and keep this amazing status and blessing while we live in this world.

Paul’s conclusion is this in 7:1, “Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.” There are many people who defile their bodies for pleasure and in their superstition. Tattoo store signs becomes bigger and bigger and its business prosperous. More seriously, people contaminate their spirit by exposing them recklessly to unclean spirits of the world, through TV, internet, and education. But God’s people are to be different. Romans 12:2 also says, “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” For the renewal of our minds, sincere and deep Bible study is absolutely necessary. Jesus said in John 17:17, praying for his disciples, “Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.” Apostle Peter says in 1 Peter 1:14-16, “As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: ‘Be holy, because I am holy.’” (Lev. 11:44, 45; 19:2; 20:7). God’s aim for us is to be perfectly holy out of reverence for God.

“Perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”  Perfecting, *epitele*.  *Tele* means to finish.  Jesus used that word when He said, “It is finished,” *tetelestai* on the cross (Jn 19:30).  *Epitele* means to really finish.  Not just start but complete.  We are to pursue the end of holiness with proper reverence for God.  Pursue holiness.  What is holiness?  It is separation. Pursue that separation from all that defiles both your body and your mind.  Pursue holiness, pursue Christ who is the perfection of holiness in bodily form.

May God help us to learn to open wide our heart to keep the love relationship and let it blossom, and have the command in our hearts, “Do not be yoked together with unbelievers” purifying ourselves everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.