

Right Motives Make All The Difference

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 13 November 2022

Preacher: Bill Dunlop

[0 : 00] I'd like to speak on 2 Corinthians chapter 7 verse 1. It comes at the end of one of the go-to passages on Christian holiness.

Let me read it slowly. Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God, bringing holiness to completion or perfection.

I find myself interested very especially in the prophet Elisha.

Or do you call him Elisha? I'm never too sure. He's a sort of, he can be a bit abrupt, you know, brusque even. And he's sometimes a man of few words.

But there's one cameo about his life that is so telling.

[1 : 23] He used to make visits to a village called Shunem. And this was on his rounds presumably as a prophet.

And he was asked on going there to come in and accept hospitality from a rich lady. And he did this once and he must have done it time and again.

Because after a while the lady turned to her husband and said, See, I know that this is a holy man of God who's forever passing our way.

Holiness. We admire and adore the beauty of the holiness that we see in Jesus Christ.

We, like the Shunemite lady, appreciate holiness when we see it in one another. And as believers, we long for more of that holiness ourselves.

[2 : 36] We want it. And we who found new life in Christ, we look to the calling we've been given to be a holy people.

Let me begin briefly by defining what Paul has already defined as holiness in 2 Corinthians.

And if you have your Bibles, it'll be a help to refer to one or two verses in the epistle. Holiness is our transformation into Christlikeness.

That's what Paul had said to the Corinthians in chapter 3 verse 18. We all, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.

That is the image that we've seen in Jesus. And so, sanctification or becoming holy for Christian people is this process of becoming more and more like the Lord Jesus Christ whom we love.

[4 : 11] And as we turn to this verse, I want to begin by pointing out that holiness for you and me as Christians is surely something absolutely central.

We are told to bring it to completion or bring it to perfection. Now, Paul had written to the Corinthians and he'd addressed them as people who have been called to be saints, called to be holy people.

We all have callings of one kind or another, callings in employment, callings perhaps in Christian service.

Most of us will have callings of family responsibility towards parents or children or spouses. And these are all important callings in life.

But the greatest calling that we have is to be holy people. That's our appointment.

[5 : 29] We've been saved to be holy. The supreme vocation of Christians and the goal of their living is holiness, said Professor Finn Lisson, known to the over-70s among us.

And it is so right that we see holiness not as something optional, peripheral to our Christian lives, but it's something that we are going to.

It was said of George Mallory in his attempt on Everest 98 years ago that he was last seen going to the summit.

And Christians have picked up the phrase, and rightly so because it's an illustration of what we are doing in our Christian lives. We're going on to perfection, to completion.

Now, we're not going to make it in this life. It's not till heaven that we join those just men and women who've been made perfect, but we still strive for it.

[7 : 05] And if you look at so many of the verbs that are used in Scripture for Christians and their holiness, you see how pressing it is. Striving.

Making every effort to complete. Going on to maturity. Training ourselves in it. And Paul wrote about one of the churches that he wants to present every man and woman complete, mature, perfect in Christ.

Well, now, I want to see in this first verse of chapter 7 that this great desire that we have needs to be seen against the background, the back cloth of the right motive.

The right motives for Christian holiness. The Bible actually gives several motives for our pursuing holiness.

And there are two of the great ones here. And I want to look at them in turn. The verse says, since we have these promises.

[8 : 40] It's because we have promises that we can go on to rid ourselves of defilements and dirt.

Exactly which promises he's referring to is open to question, but we can be fairly sure he's referring to the promises we've read in chapter 6.

Let me just look at those with you for a minute. The promise is, first of all, from God, I will make my dwelling among them. Verse 16.

And I will be their God and they shall be my people. It is the promise that God comes into that special bonded relationship with us.

that he's our God and that we are his people. And the privilege is immense. Secondly, he goes on in verse 18, the promise he says to the Lord that I will be a father to you and that you will be sons and daughters.

[9 : 52] That he takes us in, that he brings us in to the living room of God. The place of intimacy and closeness where parents raise their children and he says, I welcome you.

You're my child. Or we could go back in to chapter 5 at the end of the chapter and see that immense promise.

For our sake, God made him, that is Jesus, to be sin who knew no sin so that we might become the righteousness of God.

And there you have the purpose of God in sending his Son, the Holy of Holy Son, who on instruction from his Father came from the glory and entered into our humanity and for 33 years his deity was largely obscured and he came close to human beings, so close that he touched them. And then he actually took their sin. He became a sinner who knew no sin himself so that we might receive his righteousness.

[11 : 26] It was a swap. His divinity, his perfect righteousness in himself and he gave it to us.

And the exchange, the deal was that he would take our sins. Now, these are promises. These are great promises.

And the point that the apostle is making in this verse is if you want to be holy, you need the motive of spending time in those promises.

There are many motives for holiness that we can find as Christians.

Good and right ones. We can examine ourselves on a regular basis to see if we're coming up to the mark. We can go to the commandments and apply them and how right that is.

[12 : 33] we can benefit from being in a Christian fellowship where we encourage one another to holy living. But the great motive that we have here is that we spend time in the gospel promises.

It's a great thing that Christ is so central to our ministry in this congregation. and as we come Lord's Day by Lord's Day we come to take in more of Jesus to spend time with him to soak up the grace of God in the gospel and there's something about that that that permeates our souls and gets into our psyche.

Now part of it is gratitude of course. We want to be holy because we've seen the vastness of his love for us. But it actually seems to be more than that.

It seems that seeing him makes for transformation. That's what Paul meant in that verse in chapter 3 that I read earlier.

We all with unveiled face a reference to Moses on Mount Sinai. We all with unveiled face looking at the glory of the Lord are being transformed into his image from one degree of glory to another.

[14:10] That is as we spend time in Christ in his incarnation in his going about doing good in his coming relentlessly making his way towards the cross and his going down down down into our sins and then coming up again on the third day as we see all that happening for us.

It has this transformative work in our characters. Here's what a 19th century Scot said, one of the Bona brothers.

The love of God to us and our love to him work together in producing holiness. The free pardon of the cross uproots sin and withers all its branches.

Only the certainty of love can do this. It's as we spend time there seeing the promises enjoying his love that sin is uprooted.

Seeing as the key, getting a better glimpse week by week, viewing his holiness and his love stage by stage.

[16:03] God gives fruit. It produces fruit. Not all at once, one degree of glory to another.

You may not notice it yourself, but others in the fellowship will. So the first motive that we have for gospel holiness in this verse is seeing the promises, seeing the gospel promises in Jesus Christ.

Now I'm not being specific tonight. I'm not singling out particular sins that need, that are defilements, dirt in our characters.

But as we look at these two motives, and we'll come to the second at the moment, can you ask the Holy Spirit to direct your thoughts to where you need gospel transformation?

Well, here's the second great motive of this verse, and it's the fear of God. Let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit that is in every part of our lives, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.

[17:41] Do you remember in Genesis chapter 3 when the man and the woman had eaten the forbidden fruit, that the Lord came to them and Adam said to his maker, I heard the sound of you in the garden and I was afraid because I was naked and I hid myself.

He was afraid of God. There is in scripture running right the way through.

We saw it in our Old Testament readings, we see it here in the New Testament and we could go many places. There is throughout scripture a quality of life that's found in human beings that's called the fear of God.

Now, the fear of God can have one of two different effects on people. For the people who have this experience of the fear of God, who have not yet known Jesus Christ, it brings them to see that God is infinitely holy and that they have violated his holiness.

And when they see that, it produces a fear of him. It's a terrifying thing that we've infringed his perfect commandments, that we've gone against him.

[19:37] You know, when you come up against God and see his holiness, you see him, says the scriptures, as a consuming fire.

And that is, that is a dreadful thing to happen to us. But that very thing that brings terror into our lives can actually be exceedingly beneficial.

And that's why John Newton, the man who led a vile life, immoral, and got himself steeped in trafficking people across the Atlantic.

And he came to a point in his life where he said, it was grace that taught my heart to fear.

fear, was a gracious thing that God, he said, brought me to my senses and made me afraid of him.

[20:50] Because when I was afraid of this infinitely holy God, it was then that I was moved to turn to him. And so he goes on to say, it was grace that taught my heart to fear, but grace my fears relieved.

And when God comes to somebody and shows him that he is the judge of all the earth, it produces a fear that is terrible, terrible, and dreadful.

But here's the thing, the same grace of God that makes us terrified of his holiness. When we come to Jesus, that fear becomes altogether different.

Because we are not in dread of God the judge, instead we have an awesome respectful fear of God our Father.

Can you see the difference? Those who've come to Jesus and found pardon and forgiveness, they gain a new, beautiful, wholesome fear of the Lord.

[22:20] Not a fear that has to do with punishment, that's a fear that is actually more akin to loving him. let me give you a couple of words here again, first of all from the 19th century.

The fear of God is the conviction that God's favour is the greatest of all blessings and his disapproval the greatest of all evils.

Do you get that? When you fear God you see that his approval, his pleasure in my obedience is the greatest of all blessings.

But his disapproval is something that makes me in fear of him. it's the sense that the last thing I want to do is to offend my father.

Here again, it's the realisation that the only thing that really matters is his opinion. opinion. The only thing that really matters is his opinion.

[23 : 49] It's to have the assurance, to have the assurance of his smile is everything. To feel he frowns at what we do is desolation.

So let's look at the verse again in that light.

Let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement. Let the Holy Spirit tell us what that particular defilement is for me and for you.

Let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit bringing holiness to completion in the fear of the Lord.

And it's this sense that what he thinks of us is what really matters that is one of the greatest inducements to whole living.

[25 : 05] sin when sin is crouching at the door of my life like some wild animal here is one of the great great inducements to refuse it.

The thought God that God delights in those who fear him. can we use these two great motives?

The motive of seeing the promises of the gospel and the motive of being filled with the fear of God that promotes holy living in us.

It's our calling. I want to close by looking at that word every.

Let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement. Everything dirty, everything that brings offence to God and shame to ourselves.

[26 : 41] there was a book appeared ten years ago on holiness by Kevin DeYoung, a minister in North Carolina and he gave it the eye-catching title The Hole in Our Holiness that is the H-O-L-E in Our Holiness and at the launching of the book he was interviewed and the interview went out on YouTube you can see it it's on the Desiring God website and after about 50 minutes of talking with John Piper Kevin DeYoung was asked what do you want people to go away from your book with and

DeYoung answered well I'd like them to go away knowing that holiness is possible and when I first heard that I thought that's a bit underwhelming couldn't he have said as his prime desire that people will see that holiness is essential holiness is a requirement holiness is something to strive for but he said I'd like them to think that holiness is possible and then I began to see what he was getting at it can come to us perhaps especially to those of us who've been in the

Christian life for a few years that we somehow think that there are sins which I've struggled with for so long that I don't expect victory it's a sort of frame of mind of fatalism which says I think I've just got to herple on to go limping to heaven never really having mastered this area of my life and what this book in one of its chapters is getting at that we need to come back to this essential truth about the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts that he is able to help us with every defilement and that said something to me and you know it's interesting that

Paul here says let us cleanse ourselves it's not that we go it alone we are utterly dependent on the Holy Spirit but with cooperating with him he enables us to keep going to maturity let's pray dear father you challenge us that we simply ask you help each one of us to go on to maturity for we know that that really matters to you and it matters to us amen what to be want here you you