

AF A9 BIBLE STUDY: II Corinthians 7

Scripture of Lesson: II Corinthians 7: 1-16

This chapter may be called a 'holiness chapter' of NT and 'a chapter of pastoral fellowship' between the ministers of God and the church.

1. Repentance of the Corinthian Church: 1-7

In continuance of his exhortation for the saints' holiness from the previous chapter [v. 6:14-18], where Paul compared the church as "temple of God" [v. 6:16], he further exhorts them to "cleanse themselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit" to perfect their holiness in the fear of God. How do we achieve holiness? In Pentateuch we learn that there are two kinds of filthiness that can corrupt the people of God -- filthiness of the body and filthiness of immorality through violation of the commandments. The greatest sin was in violation of the commandment on their relationship with God -- commandments against idol worship. Some human sins bring filthiness of our body, others bring about corruption of our mind and spirit. When our clothes get dirty, all we need to do is to take them off and wash them to make them clean again. But when we take in illicit drugs, for example, it brings about polluting effect on our body for quite a while. Furthermore, such an action offends God because God created the humans in His image. Likewise, when we commit sins of morality against other human beings or against God, such acts of sin offend God deeply because He expects us to live a holy life while here on the earth.

Paul points to a solution that can help us to overcome sins. That is to have "fear of God" in us. Having fear of God can only come when we have correct understanding of who God is. He is the Maker of entire universe including all humans. Genetic scientists have determined through genetic research that all humans come from the same female and male ancestors and they must be Adam and Eve. God is a just God who demands that we pay for our sins unless we have been redeemed through the blood of His Son. Once we have been saved from our past, however, we are expected to seek the help of Holy Spirit each day to keep ourselves clean from sin. For this reason, Paul exhorts Christians to offer ourselves as living sacrifice:

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. [Rom 12:1]

When we have genuine fear of God and face a temptation of sin, the Spirit of God reminds us of the wrath of God for sinners, how Christ died for our sins which we do not want to fall back into. That would be crucifying Christ on the cross again, negating God's mercy and grace, and testing God's patience. We are the temple of God and how can we contaminate God's temple with sin's filthiness? How can I worship idols and thus damage my loyalty to God and bring about sadness in God's heart? These thoughts should keep us from taking a step toward sinning willfully and thus causing filthiness to our body or soul. We can achieve 'holiness' through our daily conscious effort to give our body, mind, heart, soul and strength as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God. We would not want to offer a sin-filled, filthy heart or body to God. Such offerings cannot be accepted by God and will only bring displeasure to God.

Previously, Paul expressed his anxiety of not locating Titus in v. 2:13. But, now in v. 7:6, he expresses his joy of having linked up with Titus and hearing from him how he has been received well by the Corinthian Christians. More importantly, Paul rejoiced to hear through Titus of the repentance of the Corinthian church in response to Paul's chastisement regarding the lax morality and lack of discipline regarding the incestuous person among them as expressed in 1 Corinthians 5. Apparently, Titus testified of the genuineness of their repentance by delivering their "earnest desire, mourning and fervent mind" towards Paul [v. 7:7]. Paul is satisfied and comforted from God that the church had responded positively to his exhortation.

2. Godly Sorrow and Repentance: v. 8-12

As “fear of God” is a preventative to sinning, “godly sorrow” is the antecedent to true repentance after sinning. As was the case of the Corinthian church, Christians can sin after their conversion. Paul’s two letters to the Corinthian church describe how pastoral exhortations by ministers of God can bring about true repentance in a church. Paul recognized that it was their godly sorrow that resulted in their repentance, and he contrasts that to “sorrow of the world,” which only results in death.

Godly sorrow is concerned with a Christian’s relationship with God and with others so that the tenderness of a Christian’s heart is troubled by damages to such a relationship from either internal or external factors. Godly sorrow is also concerned about the state of the church, community, nation or the world because of the Christian’s concern and interest for the kingdom of God. A genuine Christian has the “heart of God,” shares the interests of God toward others and toward this world.

In contrast, worldly sorrow is concerned with losses of physical and material nature. Life is often littered with losses and they bring sorrows to human hearts naturally. However, such sorrows only result in death eventually. Christians’ role in response to worldly sorrows is to share empathy towards sufferers of such sorrows as our Lord showed toward the family of dead Lazarus [John 11:35].

Paul describes the outcomes of godly sorrow in the Corinthian church as follows [v. 7:11]:

- 1) Carefulness in carefully examining their sense of morality and spiritual health of the church, particularly with regards to the sexual morality and the church’s standard;
- 2) Clearing of their guilt and reputation through repentance and re-establishing the correct moral standard;
- 3) Indignation in that they had allowed such a degradation of morality in the church and thus disappointed God’s heart;
- 4) Vehement desire to make things right with God through repentance and restoration; and
- 5) Zeal in restoring their brotherly fellowship as well as pastoral fellowship with God’s ministers.

We are reminded that similar effects occurred in the heart of King David when he repented of his sin regarding his adultery with Bathsheba and murder of her husband, Uriah, as shown in Psalm 51. As we read this psalm together, let us decide within ourselves to confess our secret sins before God and repent as David did through genuine godly sorrow:

- 1 Have mercy upon me, O God, According to Your lovingkindness;
According to the multitude of Your tender mercies, Blot out my transgressions.*
- 2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.*
- 3 For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is always before me.*
- 4 Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight—
That You may be found just when You speak, and blameless when You judge.*
- 5 Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me.*
- 6 Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts, and in the hidden part You will make me to know wisdom.*
- 7 Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.*
- 8 Make me hear joy and gladness, that the bones You have broken may rejoice.*

9 *Hide Your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities.*
 10 *Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.*
 11 *Do not cast me away from Your presence, and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.*
 12 *Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and uphold me by Your generous Spirit.*
 13 *Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, and sinners shall be converted to You.*
 14 *Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God, The God of my salvation,*
And my tongue shall sing aloud of Your righteousness.
 15 *O Lord, open my lips, And my mouth shall show forth Your praise.*
 16 *For You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give it; You do not delight in burnt offering.*
 17 *The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart—*
These, O God, You will not despise.
 18 *Do good in Your good pleasure to Zion; Build the walls of Jerusalem.*
 19 *Then You shall be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness,*
With burnt offering and whole burnt offering; then they shall offer bulls on Your altar.

3. Pastoral Joy: v. 13-16

In the last part of this chapter, Paul is divulging what has been in his heart toward the Corinthian church. He confesses that he had boasted to Titus when he sent Titus to a pastoral mission to this church that the church would respond positively to the exhortation of the pastors [v. 7:14], and his boasting turned to be true! What joy it must have brought to both Paul and Titus [v. 13]! Because the church received Titus with fear and trembling and responded to the exhortation through obedience, Paul's affection toward them has increased abundantly. This is a joy that God's servants reap from their pastoral endeavors just as farmers rejoice when their labors bring forth a rich harvest from a field. And as a result, Paul has confidence in the church that, because they went through this difficult test on their own through the pastoral exhortation of the ministers, their spiritual journey ahead would be smooth. In this Paul rejoices [v. 16].

When I speak to Christians in this locality about the Bible Study group at Air Force Headquarters in Pentagon, I boast about each of you --how you are responding so positively to the word of God and how much you have grown spiritually over the past months. You are my joy and pride! Christ our Lord in heaven has the same pride as He looks down on each church, each Bible study group, each Christian striving to achieve holiness in their lives and churches. Let us strive to offer our bodies, hearts and souls wholly as living sacrifices to God each day so as to bring honor, glory and joy to God's heart! May God bless each of you in this endeavor!

Discussion topics:

1. *Share your experience of how God answered your plea out of godly sorrow in your life.*
2. *Share your experience of how you and your pastor shared fellowship because of a difficult life experience.*