

# 2 Corinthians Chapter 7 Paul's Testimony About Holiness

by A.B. Simpson

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of separation from evil association, cleansing, perfecting of holiness, indwelling of God, living as the children of God, and enlargement in the spiritual life.*

**Scripture:** 2 Corinthians 6:14

**Topics:** "Holiness", "Separation from Evil"

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## Description

A.B. Simpson emphasizes Paul's testimony in 2 Corinthians 7 about the necessity of holiness and separation from evil associations, particularly in the context of the Corinthian church, which faced issues of immorality. He stresses that true holiness involves not only outward separation but also an inner cleansing of the heart and spirit, requiring cooperation with the Holy Spirit. Simpson highlights the importance of perfecting holiness through a progressive relationship with God, where believers are called to live as children of God, reflecting His character. He concludes with the call for believers to seek enlargement in their spiritual lives, embracing the fullness of God's grace and growth in holiness.

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## Transcript

We have had Paul's testimony about salvation, the supernatural life of the body, victory over trial and other important experiences. In the sixth chapter of 2 Corinthians we have his testimony about holy living. There were special reasons why this should be emphasized in Corinth, because some of the members of that church had been guilty of flagrant offenses against purity, and their conduct had been condoned by many in the church. It was, therefore, necessary that a most emphatic protest should be made by him for practical righteousness and holy living. But this is just as important in every other age and place, and the apostle's message is of permanent application. Let us gather out of this paragraph the principal elements that constitute the life of practical holiness.

### I. It Is Separation from Evil Association

"Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship has righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what concord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has he that believes with an infidel? 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 in them, and I will be their God and they shall be My people. Wherefore come out from among them and be you

separate, says the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you." (2 Cor. 6: 14-17).

The idea of separation is fundamental to the church of Christ. The very word for 'church' in the Greek language means 'called out.' From the first God has always kept His people separate from the ungodly world. The principle of contagion through association needs no proof. No sensible man or woman would continue to live in the same house with a smallpox patient, and no wise Christian will presume on fellowship and intimacy beyond the absolute necessities of life with those who are necessarily the fountains of moral and spiritual defilement. When Baalam could not curse Israel, he succeeded in destroying them by drawing them into unholy intimacy with their enemies.

The prohibition of this chapter applies to our whole practical life. It takes in our personal friendships and affections which we should not allow to become bound up with the ungodly, for it is in the heart that all the evil first begins. "Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life."

It embraces the family and prohibits intermarriage between God's children and the ungodly world. One reason why the Hebrew race has been preserved distinct among the nations for thousands of years, and is steadily today recovering its place of supremacy, is that the true children of this race refuse to allow intermarriages beyond their own people. No Christian man has a right to marry an ungodly wife; no Christian girl has a right to marry an ungodly man, and no Christian minister has the right to solemnize the marriage ceremony between such parties.

Further, this applies to the business of life and forbids partnerships between children of God and ungodly men. Such combinations are almost sure to involve you in compromises and make you a consenting party to wrongs that you yourself would never think of doing in your private business. God was much displeased with one of His servants of old, who was faultless in every other respect, but it is said of him that "he joined affinity with Ahab and a prophet of Jehovah came to him with the message: 'Should you love them that hate the Lord? Therefore there is wrath against you from the Lord.'"

Little wonder that Jehoshaphat's partnerships failed, that his ships were lost, his investments a failure and his very life narrowly saved.

The church is equally forbidden to allow herself to be compromised with the world either by admitting an ungodly member, by adopting worldly methods of finance, or by allowing secular control, social ambition, worldly amusements or fashionable extravagances to mar her sacred purity and compromise her testimony against this present evil world.

The apostle tells us that such yokes are always unequal. The adversary will get the advantage of you if you allow yourself to be drawn into any sort of partnership with him. He can afford to do things that you cannot, and at the end of the partnership you will find yourself in the situation of the too confiding foreigner who was persuaded by a sharp American speculator to invest his money with him in an enterprise where the American had all the necessary experience and the foreigner's money was considered an equivalent in the partnership. At the end of the year our friend was very glad to get out, and in referring to the affair he said: "When we started he had the experience and I had the money, but when we ended he had the money and I had the experience." The enemy is too keen to fail to get advantage of you at every point. You may think that you can influence your ungodly husband by marrying him, but you will find it all the other way. You can lift people up only by keeping on a higher level. If you sink to theirs, they will surely drag you still further down. God help us to be true to our separation.

## II. Cleansing

"Having, therefore, these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit."

Sanctification includes a good deal more than mere outward separation from evil persons. The worst evil is in our own hearts, and that must be removed by the deeper work of the Holy Spirit. But in this we must ourselves cooperate. There is a step for us to take first and then there is the work of God. We must consent to the work of cleansing. We must pass sentence upon our sinful heart and give God the right to cleanse it. Then His grace will come in and accomplish the work, but not until we first of all have given Him the right of way. God will not take one step until we have handed ourselves over to Him unreservedly and pronounced sentence of death upon our carnal nature and our sinful heart. Therefore we read constantly in the old Testament of God's command to the people, "Sanctify yourselves," and at the same time of God's promise that He will sanctify them. Both are true. We must cleanse ourselves by putting away all known evil, renouncing every sin and yielding ourselves unreservedly to God to cleanse every sin and fill us with the Holy Spirit. All kinds of defilement are mentioned. The first is of filthiness of the flesh. This includes not only the indulgences of the body in disobedience to the divine law, but it also means those passions and desires which have their seat in the soul and find in the body the instrument of their unhallowed indulgences. The word for flesh here is not the usual word for the body, which is "soma," but it is the word "sarx," which always carries with it the idea of the carnal nature and the fleshly heart.

Then the apostle speaks of the filthiness of the spirit as well as the flesh. We may be outwardly free from immorality, but our minds and hearts may be filled with vile imaginations and unholy desires, and this God counts sinful and unholy. True holiness includes the thoughts, the emotions, the sensibilities and tastes and all the faculties and powers of our being. You may not yourself be guilty of immorality, but you may feed your eyes upon it on the stage in some prurient play. You may follow its sensuousness in the modern novel, and grovel in all the unrestrained depths of insinuating vice. You may have your spirit softly fanned by its fetid breath in the insidious poetry of romance. So saturated is much of this with the very spirit of darkness that Lord Byron gave express commands that his most famous poetical romance should never be allowed in the hands of his own daughter. Too well he knew the fatal blight which it would bring to her modesty and purity. Many of the new philosophies are permeated with an unhallowed spirit. Theosophy, Christian Science and most of occult teachings current with a certain class, who have caught the craze for higher culture, are of this nature, and a sensitive, spiritual conscience will find itself barred at the gateway of all this class of literature and be conscious of the very breath of hell the moment it comes under its influence. May God give us a quickened conscience and an obedient will to detect every form of defilement and cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit.

## III. The Perfecting of Holiness

"Perfecting holiness in the fear of God." This has reference to the progressive side of sanctification. There are two experiences in holiness. The first is the act by which God definitely accepts our entire surrender, cleanses us by the blood of Christ from sin, and puts within us His Holy Spirit and the life of Jesus to constitute the very source and principle of our new life. But after this there comes a gradual growth. There is a place for the growth as well as for the more instant transformation. In the first chapter of 2 Peter, the apostle describes both. He tells of a moment when "You escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust." Then he proceeds to lead them forward to the life of progress. "Besides all this," he says, or more literally, because of this, "giving all diligence, add to your faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance," etc.,

and then a little later he adds, "If these things be in you and abound they shall make you that you shall be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord, Jesus Christ." Here we have the addition of many graces to our Christian character and in each of them a still higher degree of progress and grace.

The word "perfecting" here does not at all imply our sinless perfection. The sense of the word is completing, finishing, carrying forward to maturity that work that has already been begun. The idea is that of the garden which has been cleansed from weeds and planted with seeds, and now it is being carried forward to the fulness of the blossom and the fruit. Do not, therefore, let us settle down in self-complacency because we have received the baptism of the Holy Spirit and entered upon a deeper life, but let us go deeper and press farther on until we reach "the fulness of the stature of Christ."

#### IV. The Indwelling of God

"You are the temple of God, for He has said I will dwell in them and walk in them, and I will be their God and they shall be My people." This is the deepest truth in connection with sanctification. This is the climax of all other experiences and preparations. This is variously described in the New Testament as "the baptism of the Holy Ghost," "abiding in Christ and He in us," and such promises as John 14: 23, "My Father will love him and we will come unto him and make our abode with him." They are not essentially distinct, but phases of the same great fact. It is the Holy Spirit that first comes, and when He comes He brings Jesus and reveals Him, for He never works apart from Him, but Jesus always comes to reveal to us the Father and where He dwells, there the Father dwells in Him, so that the consecrated believer is the home and the temple of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost. This is the very principle of divine holiness. The apostle expresses it in 1 Corinthians 1: 30, in the clearest terms, "But of Him are you in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption." The yielded heart becomes the home of God and all our holiness and righteousness is but the reliving by the Lord of His own life once more in an earthly temple.

But not only does He dwell in us; He walks in us. All the activities of our Christian life are prompted by Him. He goes forth with us not only to our sacred duties, but to our secular calling. And so it is said, "Let every man abide in the calling wherein he is called; let him therein abide with God." We ought to be willing to go nowhere where He would not also be willing to go, and when our divine Companion calls a halt, it is always safe for you to tarry and dangerous for you to go. So let us walk with Him, and some day He will lead us so far that we shall never come back to this sinful earth again, but go in like Enoch, "to walk with Him in white."

#### V. Living as the Children of God

The apostle presents a very high ideal of the holy life in this passage, "I will receive you and will be a Father unto you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty." The idea is that we are to walk as the children of God with that holy dignity and consistency which will do honor to our royal dignity and our divine Father. A true child will cherish his father's wants and interests and avoid everything that would throw a shadow of reflection upon his name. Our loving Father is always watching over us for our highest good, and seeking to give us His best things, but He does this only as we ourselves meet the conditions and rise to the essential qualifications. Someone tells of a wealthy businessman who had two of his sons in his business, one in a position of high responsibility, and the other in a much lower position, but the visitor noticed that in the family circle both sons were treated with equal affection. He asked the gentleman if he was really doing as well by the second son as he could, and he replied that he was doing

as well as he could, but not as well as he would if he could. "I have longed," he said, "to be able to advance my boy to a much higher place, but I cannot do so until he qualifies, and I am doing all for him at present that I really can, but not all that I would love to do." This is the heart of our Father. Let us make it possible for Him to do for each of us His best.

God has His best things for the few

Who dare to stand the test;

God has His second choice for those

Who will not have His best.

## VI. Enlargement

It is possible to be free from sin, utterly sanctified and walking with God and as His children, and yet be living a very narrow, circumscribed life.

There is, therefore, one more message in this passage which may well form the climax of this subject. "You are not straightened in us but you are straightened in your own selves. Now for a recompense (I speak unto you as to my children) be you also enlarged." God wants us not only pure but glorious, not only robed in the spotless garments of the priest, but in the beautiful array of the Bride. The story is told of a Hindu girl, who, walking on the shore, picked up a silver spangle. As she held it in her hand, she saw attached to it a golden thread coming out of the sea. Drawing this to her she found spangle after spangle upon its apparently endless length. She began to wrap it about her neck and form, and as she did so it grew more beautiful and glorious, until at last she was decked in a garment of shining silver and resplendent gold.

The parable is true of our spiritual life. As we put on each new grace of the Holy Spirit, we find that it but leads the way to something still higher, and thus God would have us go on and "add to our faith, courage; and to courage, knowledge; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, charity." And then He would have these things so increase and abound that "an entrance shall be ministered unto us abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ."

May God increase our capacity for growth, and give us the blessing He gave to Solomon, "largeness of heart even as the sands upon the seashore."

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