

# Promoting Progressive Holiness

by J. Glyn Owen

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of maintaining a holy and separate life from the world, avoiding relationships and partnerships that compromise one's faith and values.*

**Duration:** 55:03

**Topics:** "Holiness"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker addresses the issue of believers being yoked together with unbelievers. He poses five questions that require negative answers to highlight the incongruity between righteousness and wickedness, light and darkness, Christ and Belial, believers and unbelievers, and the temple of God and idols. The speaker emphasizes the importance of breaking away from any illicit relationships and pursuing deep fellowship with God. He urges the congregation to search their hearts, confess their sins, and fully commit themselves to God, relying on His strength and guidance. The sermon concludes with a call to live in obedience to God and spread the gospel of His grace to those who do not know Him.

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## Transcript

The whole message is summarized in the opening verse of 2 Corinthians chapter 7. 2 Corinthians 7 and the first verse. Since we have these promises, dear friends, or literally Paul said beloved, I don't know quite why they translate it as dear friends, since we have these promises, beloved, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God. Now no one would charge the church of today with excessive zeal for holiness.

It's good to see some salvationists with us tonight. Salvationists have invariably been among those who are strong on the doctrine of Christian holiness. It cannot be said of the church universal.

I have a cutting before me coming from the pen of a very well-known Christian writer and broadcaster here in North America, and he expresses sheer bewilderment at something that caught his eye one evening. He says that while switching channels on television, his attention was drawn to a very well-known performer, one who has publicly declared his faith in Christ and is having the foremost place in certain Christian circles. He was introducing a woman friend as a guest on the program, and from the way she was dressed, says this man of God, it was quite evident that she was not a Sunday school teacher.

Together they strolled to the front of the stage as the audience gave them a thunderous applause, but the comments that followed were the most suggestive and degrading that I have heard over many years. I

turned off the set in sheer disgust, but the picture of that Christian man walking hand in hand with that ungodly woman has been fixed in my mind ever since. I don't know who he's referring to.

I might guess, never mind. But the fact of the matter is this, that there was no sense of there being a line of demarcation between that which is holy and that which is obscene. Obscenity and sanctity seem to have become converged so that smuttiness and iniquity parade under the auspices of a Christian man, apparently.

Now, in the passages preceding our text, going right back to verses 11, 12, and 13 in chapter 6, the Apostle Paul has been appealing to the Corinthian Christians for an openness of heart and mind. The language in the NIV is much clearer than in the King James Version. That's one reason why I read it tonight.

We have spoken freely to you, says Paul. We've been open with you. That's what he's saying.

And we've opened wide our hearts to you. We are not withholding anything from you. We're not holding our affection from you, but you are withholding yours from us.

As a fair exchange, he says, I speak as to my children. They were his converts. Open wide your heart also.

Now, as a man who says that his heart is open wide because he loves them, carnal though they were, often sinning and dividing the church of Jesus Christ and bringing dishonor upon their Lord, nevertheless, says Paul, I want you to know that I love you and I open my heart towards you. And out of this open heart, I want to tell you something which may hurt. And he comes to tell them of something that they certainly did not want to hear.

And if I understand things are right, the Christians of the 20th century in Toronto, in Canada, in North America, or throughout the world, for all I know, have an equal distaste for the old biblical doctrine of holiness, of separation from sin, and of dedication to be the Lord's exclusively. But the Apostle Paul, who, as we saw this morning, was guided and directed into life by the fear of God and the love of Christ, by those two motivating forces, cannot keep his lips silent. When he sees these, his children playing with sin, toying with evil, bearing the name of Jesus, living the life of the children of unbelief.

Now, I want us to look, therefore, not only at this first verse in chapter 7, the verse you notice throws us back into chapter 6, because the verse begins, since then we have these promises. Well, immediately you ask, what are the promises? And so that takes us back into chapter 6, and we've got to start, really, with verse 14. Now, I want us to look at the incompatibility that is there, exposed.

Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. The passage starts there. The roots of the thinking of the first verse in chapter 7 take us at least back to verse 14.

Now, with these words, Paul puts his finger on a very raw spot in the Corinthian's life. But he must say what is on his mind. God has given him his word.

The Spirit has spoken. Paul must obey, and obey he does. Now, let's try and get this and be as brief as we can about it, but it's very, very important.

Now, look first of all at the imagery that we have here. Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. Paul evidently draws this image from the Old Testament.

He could do so from one or two or three or even more passages. I believe that he probably had one particular passage in mind without now trying to explain why. I believe that he had Deuteronomy chapter 22 and verse 10 particularly in his mind, a passage which says, among other things, do not plow with an ox and an ass yoked together.

Now, those of you who've been brought up in the city and you know nothing about the country may not see very much to that, but those of you who are country folk will have some idea of what this means, and I trust we shall all before we're through. You see, an ox and an ass are not suited for one another so that the yoke would only chafe and cut both of them. A yoke is a transverse pole of wood going from the neck of one animal to the neck of the other, but the ox is taller than the ass.

The ass would be down there and the ox would be up here, and when they come to walk, it's a pretty laughable picture to see them trying to walk together. Sometimes you have a husband and wife holding hands and the one is much taller than the other, and not holding hands, holding arms I should say, and anybody in that situation knows how difficult it is because the steps of the shorter person are so much shorter and she has to run to keep up with a bigger man. Now, you have something of that here as far as the ass and the ox are concerned, so that if they have the one yoke going from the neck of the one to the other, both of them are going to be hurt.

First of all, they're going to be wounded, the wound is going to get deeper, and ultimately they're going to be hurt, hurt grievously, and in due course, really, the burden of whatever they're bearing is going to fall upon the poor little ass. Now, says Paul, don't be an ass. Don't be unequally yoked together with anyone.

Christian, don't be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. Now, the common application of this text to mixed marriages of Christian and non-Christian is undoubtedly justified. Probably this is its first and its major application, and that is for this reason if for no other.

It is so because of the context here in Corinthians, which I'll say nothing about tonight, but it is especially so because, you remember when Jesus said, whatever God has joined together, let not man put us under. Now, what Jesus really said was this, whatever God has yoked together, let not man put us under. He used exactly the language that we have here.

In other words, marriage is coming under a joint yoke, a yoke that spreads from the neck of the one to the neck of the other, and the spirit of the one to the spirit of the other, so the two are joined together under yoke to the God that bound them. That's what real marriage is. So it applies in the first place, it applies in the first place to those who are contemplating marriage.

Now there are occasions when God intervenes to save a member of a marriage after they have entered into the covenant. This passage does not appear to say anything to such people. There is another passage in Corinthians that has something to say to those, and much prayer and much grace and much wisdom is necessary to know what to do in that particular situation.

I'm not saying anything about that tonight. Paul here is addressing those who are contemplating marriage in a pagan environment. The Christians are in the minority, the pagans are in the majority, they're all pagan men and women around.

Can not a Christian go out and find a pagan wife for a pagan husband if she's good-looking or he's good-looking? Isn't that enough? Now, says Paul, there is something far more important than looks in this matter. Do not become unequally yoked with unbelievers. It is wrong.

Now important as that is, I think that we would be doing the passage and the Bible a great disservice if we did not go on from there. To say that the same principle applies to any conceivable kind of partnership in life where two people are bound together and the very binding of the Christian jeopardizes his conscience and his liberty to do what is right. It equally forbids every other kind of intimate partnership that yokes two people together in any kind of contract that is liable to compromise the Christian's morality.

Whether it be a marriage or a business contract matters not. I know men who have had a business contract and they have been unable to put into operation, as they have said, their Christian principles, and they have suffered spiritually, and others have suffered spiritually, and they become dwarfed morally and otherwise because they've been shackled to a principle and a partnership where those alongside of them were pagan in their principles. Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers.

I don't think we realize, you know, how difficult it was for the Christians of the New Testament. Sometimes it was even difficult for a Christian to have a job because of this principle. I have before me here a commentator who refers to this, and I just want to just just to refer to something.

Often he says it must have meant that a man had to give up his trade rather than be unequally yoked. Suppose a man, he says, was a stonemason. What was to happen if his firm received a contract to build a heathen shrine? Could he do it? Suppose a man was a tailor.

What was to happen if he was instructed to cut and sew garments for priests and the heathen and heathen gods? Suppose a man was a soldier. At the gate of every camp there burned the light upon the altar that was sacred to the godhood of Caesar. What was to happen if he had to fling his pinch of incense on the altar in token of his worship? Time and time again, says this man, time and time again in the early church the choice must have come to a man between the safety and the security of his job and his loyalty to Jesus Christ.

And lest you think that it was only in ancient times, he gives us one rather modern illustration. He refers to the case of the late Mr. F. W. Charrington, very well known in the head of a brewery firm. He was heir to the entire fortune made by brewing.

One night he was passing a tavern. You use that word here, don't you? Yeah, that's right. He was passing a tavern and he saw a woman coming out and she was holding on to her husband trying to dissuade him from going back again.

And as he was about to intervene, this man struck his wife such a terrifying blow that both her eyes were affected and her face was like a pulp, an open sore. And Mr. Charrington looked up above the door and he saw his own name. And he said, not only did that man knock the sense out of his wife, but he knocked sense into me.

And that night he had his last hours thinking of himself as the heir to that fortune. He said goodbye to it all for his soul's sake. Why? Because he could not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers in business, a business that brought no glory to God, brought dishonor and pain and anguish to a myriad homes.

Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers. The imagery, the incongruity of it. The imagery points to a basic incongruity.

The fact is that the ethical interests and allegiance of a Christian are diametrically opposed to those of a non-Christian. They're antithetical, they're opposites, the interests of a Christian and a non-Christian. The one is centered in God.

If you're a Christian, that's your center of gravity. Your life is hid with God in Christ, that's your center of gravity. But if you're a non-Christian, your mainspring, your inspiration, your center of gravity is anywhere other than in God and in Christ.

And whatever the inspiration of the unbelievers' principles may be, if they are not from God, as revealed in Christ, they are incompatible with that of a Christian man or a Christian woman. By implication, you see, there is something here which is very startling for us. And I know from experience, and I think it's, if you'll pardon me for saying it, it's far worse here in North America than in the Britain that I left eight years ago.

And it was bad enough there. By implication here, you see, there are only two kinds of people in this world today. And they're poles apart.

They are believers in Jesus Christ and in God in Christ, and they are unbelievers. And there is such a chasm that separates them, that chasm is as big as God. God stands between, the difference between them is God.

And however great God in Christ is, that is the chasm that separates the unbeliever from the unbeliever. Now, one thing we must be very careful about, and this is where I must be diligent to rectify any possible imbalance. Of course, we must be careful to state that what this verse prohibits is not our ordinary social fraternizing with the people of this world.

Doesn't, doesn't, doesn't say that we can't talk to people and chat with people and meet with people and even have make business, have business with people. It doesn't say that at all. How could it say that? If we are to be the salt of the earth, we've got to rub shoulders, we've got to come close to people.

If we are to be the light of the world, we've got to be among people. Oh, let me give Paul's own language in another place. In the first letter to the Corinthians, he says, I become all things to all men, to the Jew I become one thing, to the Gentile I become another thing, that by any means I might save some of them.

Yes, but you see, there was one rider there, a basic undergirding rider is this, that I will not compromise my Christian sanctity and allegiance to Jesus Christ. Paul would want you and would want me to become all things to all men too, in order that we may win some, but not at the expense of our Lord's good name and of the sanctity which God requires of his people. There is a measure of urgency about this.

I shall not pause now simply to refer to it. You'll find it later on in verse 17 there. Therefore, says Paul, come out from them and be separate.

Touch no unclean thing. It's as serious as that, he says. If it's a binding relationship, get away from it.

Now, he's not talking of marriage here. If it's a binding relationship of another kind, get away from it. Don't touch it.

The incompatibility. Now, let's move on a little step, coming nearer to our text. The incongruity is then explained.

What thrills me as one who tries to study the Bible and tries to expound it is this, you read the scriptures through and they explain the difficult passages themselves. They have a way of casting a light upon that which challenges us and which may be difficult. Now, you go on to the second part of verse 14 and then on to verse 16 and you have the answer to the problem that faces us at this point.

Let me read. Why should there be no yoke binding together believer and unbeliever? Well, says Paul, I'll ask you five questions and each question requires a negative answer. Here they are.

What do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Can you answer that? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols, for we are the temple of the living God? Now, let's try and face these five questions and just briefly to try and take in what they say, because you see, they are really explaining the incongruity. You ask, why can't I be joined in this intimate way with people, either in marriage or in business? Here is a five-fold answer. One, Paul asks, what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Now, you see, he is there thinking of the Christian as a righteous man.

He's righteous in more senses than one. A Christian is a person who has been made right with God. Originally, he was unrighteous, but the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ was imputed to him, and that is what we have in mind when we refer to the doctrine of justification by faith.

The righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ is imputed to the believer so that he is clothed in Jesus Christ. He is righteous in Christ. Not only that, but he is made a new creature and created, as Paul says in Romans 4.24, created to be like God in true righteousness and in holiness.

Now, let's get there. Not only is the righteousness of Jesus Christ imputed to him, but he is made to become inwardly righteous, inwardly righteous like God is righteous and like God is holy. Now, the unbeliever, on the other hand, is lawless.

That's the word. God's law doesn't bind the unbeliever. If he doesn't like it, he says, well, I won't have anything to do with it.

I'll live my own way, bless him. He's quite logical. He doesn't accept that God is God, and he says, I will not have God's law spoil my life.

If I obey that, and if I bow to that, then I'm going to be a man without any joy, without any pleasure in this life. I know of no other pleasure, so I must break the law to get my pleasure. Now, what harmony, what fellowship, what has the righteous and the wicked in common? The one honors God's law.

He is righteous in Christ, and he is becoming righteous in his living, whilst the other is lawless. He only obeys God's law if it's good for him and if he likes it, and he generally doesn't like it. Come to the second question.

What fellowship can light have with darkness? Now, the opposite nature of light and darkness is instinctively and universally appreciated by everybody. You don't need to have gone to the U of T to know this. I'm not sure you'd know it if you got it.

I'm sorry. Jesus Christ is the light of the world. Believers share in that light because Christ the light comes to live within them, and he infuses something of his own light into men by the presence of the Holy Spirit.

We are kindled, we are illumined. The light of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, says Paul in 2 Corinthians 4, shines in unto them and brings light into the darkened soul. That's a believer.

The light of the knowledge of the glory of God penetrates the soul, kindles, illumines the life within. But an unbeliever is in darkness, and he's in the kingdom of darkness, and he's under the prince of darkness, and he can't get out of the darkness other than through the Christ whom he rejects. So you see, Paul is asking, what fellowship, what koinonia, has light and darkness? They're two opposites, you can't bring them together.

His third question is, what harmony is there between Christ and Belial? Now here, of course, he refers to the heads of the two parties. The heads of the hosts of light and of darkness, and he places them in juxtaposition. Christ, our righteousness, the light of the world, is set over against the prince of darkness and lawlessness.

What harmony can there be between them? Now I only need to pose the question, and you will all give me the same answer, I'm sure. There is no harmony here, but sheer disharmony in the depths. Paul's fourth question is this, what does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? Now, I've already said that the one is centered in God, as revealed in Christ, whilst the other's center of gravity and mainspring of action is elsewhere.

Let me add this. The treasure of the one is in heaven. The treasure of the other is upon earth.

The values of the one are the values of the world to come. Those of the other are the values of this world, and they change from time to time. The one seeks the glory of God, and he fears God with a holy awe.

The other seeks his own glory, and he fears men, if he fears anyone at all. What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? Now here Paul is getting still nearer the situation in Corinthians, because he says that the Christian is the temple of God. It's a solemnizing thought when we remember that these bodies of ours, if we are Christian people, these bodies of ours are the temples of the Holy Spirit.

When you became a Christian, God by his spirit came to dwell in your very body, and he's there tonight. And wherever you go, you take God with you. And if I had time tonight, I would like to refer to some of the fathers of the church of the third, fourth century, who made much of this.

And they spoke of carrying God. They were the bearers of God into the situations of human life. And they used this image so much in the world of evangelism, bearing God into the lion's den, into the fury and the flame, bearers of God, carriers of God.

God was in them going everywhere. You believer, God dwells in you by the Holy Spirit. But what about the unbeliever? He worships idols.

That idol may be an image in the mind, or an image in the home. Makes no difference. It may be an image of metal, or it may be an image of which is purely mental.

Metal or mental, it makes no difference. He worships images. He worships gods that are no real gods.

Now it will be seen from this that the propriety of the command not to become unequally yoked together with unbelievers is proven by this five-fold insistence. You simply cannot bring these two parties together so that they are one in the sense in which God would have men be one. Now that brings me then to the Christian duty as expounded in this first verse.

Now listen again to verse one. Since we have these promises, dear friends, beloved, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord. In the light of the moral and spiritual incompatibility of the two parties concerned, and of the proven incongruity of yoking believers and unbelievers together, the Apostle urges the Corinthians and urges ourselves in terms of this comprehensive statement.

First of all, seeing that we have these promises, the promises that should encourage us to cleanse ourselves from every defilement and to go on to perfect holiness. What are these promises? Well, now get the context. The Apostle Paul has been calling upon these people not to enter into wrong alliances, not to touch, not to touch the illicit, the illicit thing.

Don't touch, he said. But people would say, well, if I don't, what am I going to do? How am I going to get on in this world? How on earth am I going to live if I'm going to be separate from people in this sense? Well, says Paul, since we have these promises, beloved, we're without an excuse. Well, what are the promises? Let me just cull them from the text.

Here they are. God gives these promises. Here they are.

I will dwell in them. I will walk in them. Talking, of course, about the Christians who will break, who will keep away, who will not become entangled under this illicit yoke.

I will dwell in them. I will walk in them. I will be their God.

I will receive them. And then changing the tense and speaking directly, I will be to you a father, you shall be to me sons and daughters. Brothers and sisters in Christ, do you see it? God is making it impossible for us to make excuses here.

He says, if you break from the illicit relationship to which I summon you, I will make it up to you. There is a way into my heart and into my bosom and into my arms and into communion with me that you can only know when you do not touch the illicit thing and when you break the unequal yoke. And it may well be, you see, that some of us are not knowing deep fellowship with God because we are not prepared to break the yoke to the unclean.

No, it's as serious as that. These promises, these promises, having these promises, they probably fall into two series. At least one commentator suggests that, and I think there's much to be said for his division.

The first series reveals the secrets of strength, the strengths that God will give us in order to do this. Where does the strength come from? Well, it comes from this. God says, I will dwell in you.

Really dwell, really dwell, really live in you. Not just be there and not make myself known, but I'll dwell in you. I'll walk in you.

I'll be alive in you. I know many people who say that they've invited the Lord Jesus Christ to come and live in their heart, but he seems to be dead there. Doesn't do anything.

They're not sensitive to God alive in their souls. Their consciences feel no difference. Their wills are not made stronger to resist sin, and they don't know anything of the love of God in their hearts of the kind that we were meditating upon this morning.

There's something wrong there. God says, I will walk about in them. It's a beautiful thought.

It's the Greek word from which we have our English peripatetic, walking around. And the point is, you see, wherever you go, God says, I'll walk around in you. I'll come with you.

I'll be in you. I'll be with you. I'll be in you.

I'll be walking in you, living in you. Men and women in Christ, surely this means something to you if you're Christians tonight, having these promises. Not only that, says the Lord, I will be to you a father.

That great Old Testament word goes very far when it says, like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him. It's an analogy. But this goes much further.

God is not promising here to have an orphanage for us and to act as if he were our father, like as a father. God is saying, I will actually be your father. I will act as a father.

I will live as a father. I will be towards you exactly what a father is, because I will be your father. And I will take the role of the father.

I will chastise you. I will comfort you. I will make your supplies available for you.

I will be your father. I will be your father. You got it? You're going to be separated from that thing that takes you down and down and down, that business relationship, whatever it is.

You're going to be separated from it and you don't know how to face life. God says, I will dwell in you. I will live.

I will be alive in you. And I'll be your father. Not like a father, but I'll be your father.

Having, therefore, these promises, beloved, the second series in the group indicates the method by which we enter into this experience. I will receive you and be to you a father. The notion, of course, is this.

It's now not of adoption. Adoption has taken place already. He's treating these people as Christians, but rather of the father receiving the child that runs into his arms and he's received and he's welcomed.

You parents, all of you know what that means. It's to welcome the little one when he's in trouble and when he's asking for help. And you bow down your ear to whatever he's trying to say.

And you put your arms around the little man and you say, you're mine. Don't we know something of that? God says, I'll do that. I'll be that.

I'll be the father. I'll receive you. The very pressures of your life will only squeeze you nearer and nearer to my bosom.

I will be a father. The incompatibility expressed, the incongruity explained. Now, the promises that should encourage obedience.

The purging of incurred defilement is the next. How are we to obey? What are we going to do? Two things. Thank you for your listening.

I won't be long. First of all, we've got to purge away the defilement we've incurred in touching the unclean thing. Let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and soul, body and soul.

Paul sweetens the pill at this point by including himself along with the Corinthians in the exhortation. You notice how he puts it, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates. And also by this word beloved, which by the way, he only uses seven times in all his writings, but he uses it here because he wants the Corinthians to know that he loves them.

Now, I must give a reminder here, bring a reminder. Paul has already addressed all these Corinthians as saints, that is, as holy. And this may strike you as being a discordant note that you don't understand.

In the first letter to the Corinthians in chapter one and verse two, Paul addressed the Corinthians in this way, unto the church of God, which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, that means made holy in Christ Jesus, called to be saints. Later on in 2 Corinthians chapter one and verse one, he says this, Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God and Timothy, our brother, to the church of God in Corinth, together with all the saints throughout Achaia. So they're saints, they're sanctified already.

It needs to be remembered that some of the Corinthian Christians had been among the most profligate and immoral of the age and the location of Corinth. Corinth was known, as many of you know, it was known and it was called by some of the writers of the age as the moral dunghill of the age. And when Paul has given us a whole list of the most immoral people in 1 Corinthians 6, he turns up and he says to them, and such were some of you, but he says, but he says, you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God, such were some of you, but you're washed, you're sanctified, you're changed, you've made new creatures.

That's what the gospel did for you. And in virtue of that initial work of grace, you are called saints in Christ. At the end of chapter 1 of 1 Corinthians, he says that Christ Jesus is made unto us wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption.

So any man, any woman in Christ is sanctified already positionally. It is important to remember then that every solitary believer, be he but a babe in Christ, is heir to all this in Christ, that's his condition, that's his position. But now, what is this requirement? Well, this requirement is that every Christian who is positionally holy in Christ is now to set about the business of becoming a co-worker with God and making himself holy in actual living.

That he begins to draw upon his capital in Christ and by prayer and by discipline and by works and labor of love, bring into this life the resources of God in Christ and apply them to the problems and the passions of this body and the temptations of this world. In other words, it's what Paul speaks of in Philippians 2 as working out your own salvation with fear and trembling, working it out as God works in you. And the first thing to do, says Paul, is to learn how to cleanse yourself.

How to get rid of defilement. How do you do that? Well, John puts it in its most simplified form in his first epistle when he says that first thing we have to do is to confess our sins. Sounds very simple, doesn't it? Do you know what that word confess means? It means literally to say the same thing as someone else.

Well, what on earth can it mean when it relates to us and our sins? It means this. The man who confesses his sin is a man who says the same about himself as the Word of God says and the Holy Spirit says. If the Word of God says to you, man, woman, you are unequally yoked.

Confessing my sin, I say to the Lord what the Word says to me and what the Spirit affirms within me. I acknowledge before God the convictions of the Holy Spirit and I take them to Him and I confess and I ask for forgiveness and for cleansing. That's one thing.

It's the cleansing of the blood. Forgiveness, you see, great and precious as it is, is not enough. You need a clean mind.

You need a clean imagination. You need a pure heart. And when sin has come into your life and mine, our imaginations become topsy-turvy.

The pictures that hang on the walls of our imaginations are often obscene and it's not enough to take them down and throw them out. The whole imagination, the whole inner life needs to be cleansed and there is only one way of cleansing the inner life. It's by the blood of Jesus in the first place.

It's not the only way, but it's the first way. Another way is this, by letting the Word of God dwell in our hearts. You say, where'd you get that from? I get it from Psalm 119.

Thy word, says the psalmist, have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against thee. There is a defense against sin coming back. What is it? It's the Word of God, not just in the mind, but in the heart, deep down, lodging there, living there, setting up a standard against evil.

You know anything of that? You see, that is why it's so important to read the Word of God and meditate upon the Word of God and see that you're present somewhere or other, wherever it is preached and expounded faithfully, and listen to it and apply it. It's a matter of life and death, this. If you want to keep your soul from sin, keep near the cross of Christ and keep yourself in the Word of God and keep yourself trusting the Holy Ghost to do the work and to enable you.

Thereafter, this experience and that experience, that is supposed to be a shortcut to the way of holiness outlined in the Word of God, there is no shortcut. You and I will always have to acknowledge our sins and flee to the fountain where sin is washed away. You and I will always need the Word of God to keep ourselves clean.

You were clean, says Jesus to the disciples, by the Word which I've spoken to you. The cleansing properties of the Holy Word of God, that's one proof of its inspiration, its divine inspiration. It cleanses us from sin.

Now I have to hurry to close. Thank you for your gracious listening. Even when we have been able to do that and we've got into the process of cleansing ourselves daily and keeping ourselves pure, acknowledging our sins, reading the Word, not grieving the Spirit, but honoring Him day by day in our lives.

What then? That's not everything. That's only the negative side of holiness. Cleansing ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, and then this, the positive, perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord, or out of reverence for God.

What does that mean? It means two things. Basically, holiness is consecration. Basically.

And you can never get away from that main thought, that main meaning of the Word. A holy man is a man who is separated from evil in order to be dedicated to God. The Pharisees were separated from evil, but they were not dedicated to God, as revealed in His Word.

And it is possible simply to be a Pharisee still, to be separated from the world, but never dedicated to God. Now that's not Christian holiness. Christian holiness is separation from anything that God calls evil, in order to be on the altar for God, available to God.

And it's much easier, you see, it's much easier not to go here and do that, that the pagans are doing, than it is to put myself on the altar for God. The first thing that is implied in holiness is this. The separation from sin must lead to dedication to God.

But arising out of that, there comes something new. You cannot, you cannot be at the Lord's disposal every day without beginning to become God-like. They who live at court grow courtly.

Those that live daily in the presence of God, with reference to God and His will, and keep themselves to the doing of His will, sooner or later will bear His image. You can't escape it. Men and women who are really in communion with God and are pledged to do His will, you'll see something of God-likeness emerging in them.

One of these earlier chapters of 2 Corinthians, Paul speaks of it as being changed from one degree of glory into another. Changed from glory into glory. There is something going on, there is a metamorphosis going on, there is a transfiguration going on.

If you're having real dealings with God, there's something going on in the depths. Now this is why, you see, we've got to abandon, we've got to keep away from a frivolous, superficial sort of Christianity, which is no Christianity, which only deals with a name of God, which only deals with a description of things, but never touches the reality. It is possible to go through the shibboleths of our Christian faith and to put the dot on every I and cross every T, but never to be touching the reality who is God, and therefore we are just the same now as we were ten years ago.

We talk about Him, we sing about Him, but we're not having any real spiritual intercourse with God. Brothers and sisters in Christ, you'll appreciate what I mean when I say I shuddered to bring you this message tonight. I know that your human nature, like my human nature, will not like it.

But this is biblical Christianity. And this is the Word of God. And it is my business as a minister of the Word to bring the Word of God, whether you like it or whether you do not, or whether I like it or whether I do not.

And I commend it to you. Indeed, I urge you to come to terms with it, for I'll tell you why. I believe that the church of this day and this age, and that includes our Knox church here, we are impotent spiritually to scratch the surface of things in this city.

And it is basically because we are so much like the world, there is no difference between us. We know next to nothing of the holiness that is like a fire in the soul. Brothers and sisters, I urge you, let's come to grips with reality.

Search our hearts, shall we? Let's light the candle of the Word and look at ourselves for a moment in the mirror of the Word and see what does God the Lord say to us about this kind of thing. Where he puts his finger on a raw spot, is it right? Confess it. Know the cleansing that is as deep as the vision of a holy God.

And then after that, come to him and yield yourself wholly to him and live with him and obey him and honor him and walk forward with him, persevere with him according to the means he has given us by his Word and his Spirit and the fellowship of his people. You will find that God is doing something in you. So let it be.

To his praise and to the outspreading of the gospel of his grace to those who know him not. So let it be. Let us pray.

Our God and our Father, we acknowledge our sins in your presence. This morning, we as a congregation were made to confess that we were not hedged in and constrained by the love of Christ any more than we are living in awe of our holy heavenly Father as we ought. Tonight, our Lord, we confess that there are many illicit relationships of an intimate nature that have caused us to compromise.

And like the salt, we have sometimes lost much of our saline properties. And we need to come to you for cleansing and forgiveness and renewal. Spirit of God, take the Word of God and apply it to us and minister sanctifying and healing grace to every child of yours tonight to the end that we may be worthy of him whose glorious name we bear.

We ask it in the name of Jesus. Amen.

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