

Purity Within and Without

November 19 — 1 Corinthians 4:1-7:40

Day 323 — 42 Days to Go

Today In Your Reading...

Paul addressed some important issues in the lives of believers in the church of Corinth — their disunity, spiritual pride, sexual immorality, lawsuits against each other, and questions about marriage. Evidently, there was a great deal of spiritual immaturity in this church. While the people said all of the right things, they were not living righteous lives. Paul wrote to them, “The Kingdom of God is not just fancy talk; it is living by God’s power” (4:20).

The bottom line of Paul’s instruction on these issues is that **God expects His people to be pure**. He desires purity in His Church and purity in our personal lives. This theme was central to God’s covenant with His people in the Old Testament — “Be holy for I am holy” — and it is a theme in the New Testament as well. Paul even started his letter to the Corinthians by saying, “We are writing to the church of God in Corinth, **you who have been called by God to be His own holy people**. He has made you holy by means of Christ Jesus...” (1:2, 3).

The holiness or purity that God has enacted for us internally, by the work of Christ, **should be expressed externally in our lives**, first by how we live and, then, by how we view and treat the Church. This letter includes Paul’s most pointed words regarding church discipline. “Don’t you realize that if even one person is allowed to go on sinning (this was in regards to sexual sin), soon all will be affected? Remove the wicked person among you, so that you can **stay pure**. How terrible that you should boast about your spirituality and yet you let this sort of thing go on” (5:6-12).

However, **purity in the Church begins with purity in our individual lives**. Noah Webster defined purity as “innocence, cleanness, or freedom from foulness, dirt, or defilement.” As

Christ has set us free on the inside, so, in His power, we must free ourselves on the outside, both from sin and worldly distractions. “Don’t you know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit...? You don’t belong to yourself, for God bought you with a high price. So you must honor God with your body” (6:19, 20).

He continued, “God purchased you at a high price, so **don’t be enslaved to the world**... Those in frequent contact with the things of this world should make good use of them without becoming attached to them, for this world and all it contains will pass away. In everything you do, I want you to be free from the concerns of this life... I want you to do whatever will help you serve the Lord, with as few distractions as possible” (7:23, 31, 32).

Daily Reflection

Evaluate your personal holiness. How would you rate your life (0-10) in the area of purity and freedom from worldly distractions? Explain.

With what temptations, sins, and distractions do you struggle most? What issues exist in your life that are not honoring to God? What steps do you need to take to correct these things?

Gray Areas

Today In Your Reading...

We continued Paul's letter to the Corinthians. In this particular section of the letter, he addressed a question that was common for Christians in his day. Was it right to eat food that had been sacrificed to an idol or dedicated to some false god?

Paul's short answer to this question was that it was perfectly fine for Christians to eat meat dedicated to idols, because there is only one true God. Dedicating food to an idol was simply dedicating it to nothing. "The earth is the Lord's," he wrote, "and everything in it" (10:26). However, Paul also wrote, while Christians "are allowed to do anything, not all things are helpful or beneficial" (10:23).

Paul went on. "Be careful with this freedom of yours. Do not cause a brother or sister, with a weaker conscience, to stumble... Weak Christians, who think it is wrong to eat this food will see you eating in the temple of an idol. You know there's nothing wrong with it, but they will be encouraged to violate their conscience... So because of your superior knowledge, a weak Christian will be destroyed... You are sinning against Christ when you sin against other Christians, by encouraging them to do something they believe is wrong" (8:10-12).

Simply put, **Christians have differing thoughts, opinions, even convictions about certain issues**, such as alcohol, entertainment, proper diet, movies, body piercings, tattoos, dancing, fashion styles, gambling, video games, music, politics, smoking, etc. While the Bible may speak to these issues in general terms, it does not provide any hard lines on what is right or wrong for Christians to do. Therefore, **God's people are free to follow their conscience and establish their own convictions.**

Daily Reflection

However, **God's people are warned not to misuse their freedom and cause others to stumble.** "Don't think only of your own good," Paul said. "Think of other Christians and what is best for them... Don't give offense. That is the plan I follow. I try to please everyone in everything I do. I don't just do what I like or what is best for me, but I do what is best for them so that they may be saved" (10:24, 32, 33).

What do you think Paul meant when he wrote, "I try to please everyone in everything I do?" Does this mean that He chose people over God?

What do you think Paul meant when he said, "I try to find common ground with everyone so that I might bring them to Christ?"

In regards to these gray areas, consider several principles. First, *God's glory must be your top priority.* "Whatever you eat or drink, or whatever you do, you must do for the glory of God" (v.31). Second, *the good of others must take precedence over your own good.* Your actions should not harm your testimony, hurt your influence in someone's life, or hinder the Gospel message. Third, in regards to the convictions of others, *you must avoid legalism and, instead, extend liberty and grace.*

The Indispensable Element

Today In Your Reading...

Paul dove into three issues with the church of Corinth — public worship, the Lord’s Supper, and spiritual gifts. In regards to public worship, he addressed the topics of authority and submission (head covering discussion). “A man is responsible to Christ, a woman is responsible to her husband, and Christ is responsible to God” (11:3). *Paul is not insinuating inequality or inferiority.* Christ, the Son, is equal to God the Father, but He submitted His will to that of His Father; Jesus placed Himself under His Father’s authority. Likewise, though men and women are equals, men have been delegated headship or authority over their wife in marriage, as well as over the church. These directives have nothing to do with personal worth or value, but everything to do with obedience to God.

In regards to the Lord’s Supper, Paul confronted the “unworthy manner” in which the Corinthians were handling this ordinance (11:17-34). This symbolic meal has tied to it some weighty reminders that cause us to reflect upon the sacrifice that Christ made on our behalf. To disrespect the meal in any way, whether it be with its parts or practice, would be to disrespect the body and blood of our Lord. Therefore, God’s people must “examine themselves” to avoid ritualism, apathy, unrepented sin, contentions with other believers, or any other ungodly attitude.

Finally, Paul described the meaning and use of the spiritual gifts. The illustration that he used is that of the human body; while it is one unit, it has many parts, each part supplying an important function for the health of the body. Likewise, “a spiritual gift is given to each of us as a means of helping the entire church” (12:7). Each of us, then, should be a member of a local church, using our spiritual gift. *While God will use us to minister to others, He will likewise use others to minister to us.*

Daily Reflection

What is your spiritual gift? How are you using it in your local church?

How have you been blessed by someone else using his or her spiritual gift?

Though each one of us is different in personality, spiritual gifts, and other strengths, **there is one thing that all of us can do — love** (12:31-13:13). Love is the indispensable element in Christian service. Without love, your strengths and abilities will add up to nothing. Why?

To love is easier said than done. While you may genuinely love people, *your love must be expressed.* Those people whom who love must know that you care about them, and you do that by expressing gratitude, showing signs of affection, demonstrating hospitality, praying with them, and meeting their practical needs. It does no good to say that you love people if you do not back it up with deeds (1 John 3:18). **While others need you to use your spiritual gift, it will be ineffective without the motivation and expression of love.**

Not for Naught

Today In Your Reading...

Our passage equally covered two topics — the imperative to have order in worship and the importance of the resurrection of the dead. First, Paul confronted what seemed to be chaos in the Corinthian church; services were not regulated, so naturally they were informal and free. When they got together, everyone practiced or paraded his spiritual gift (particularly that of tongues or prophecy), which promoted disorder and confusion. Therefore, Paul laid down some basic guidelines so that “everything would be done properly and in order” (14:40).

The motivation behind this free-for-all was selfishness, to draw attention for personal praise or to focus on personal growth. However, Paul reminded the Corinthians to “let love be their highest goal” (14:1). If their motivation was love, then they would not focus on themselves or their gifts but on others; and, everything they did in their worship services would “be useful to all and help build them up in the Lord” (14:26).

The second issue that Paul addressed was the importance of the resurrection. **Without the reality of the resurrection of both Jesus and His followers, the hope that we have unravels.** Paul wrote, “If Christ is not raised, then all our preaching is useless and your trust in God is useless. We apostles would all be lying about God... If Christ has not been raised, then your faith is useless, and you are still under condemnation for your sins; all those who have died believing in Christ have perished. If we have hope in Christ only for this life, then we are the most miserable people in the world” (15:14-19).

As you can see, the resurrection is the lynchpin holding together the entirety of the Christian faith. If Christ is dead, then He was not God; and, if He was not God, then He was a phony, the Bible is not true, our hope is unfounded.

Daily Reflection

However, **Christ is not dead!** His resurrection is a reality, which means that our resurrection will be a reality. Otherwise, Paul wrote, “Why should we be continually risking our lives, facing death hour by hour?” (15:30). How could Christ promise us eternal life if He were still in the grave? He defeated death Himself, so then He is able to offer His followers the same opportunity.

Your body, which is a disappointment to you now will one day be raised full of glory. Though your body is weak today, it will then be full of power. What excites you most about the after-life, your resurrection from the dead, or your second body?

Paul’s purpose in writing about the truth of the resurrection was to encourage the Corinthians (and possibly himself) in their work on God’s behalf. “So, my dear brothers and sisters, be strong and steady, always enthusiastic about the Lord’s work, for you know that **nothing you do for the Lord is ever useless**” (15:58).

Have you ever grown weary in God’s work? Have you ever questioned the reality of the resurrection and whether or not your sacrifices, your persecution, and your efforts are worth it? How do Paul’s words encourage you?

Unhinged

Today In Your Reading...

After spending quite a bit of time in Ephesus, Paul's "open door" of ministry there was closing. The Gospel message had challenged the worship of Artemis in the city, and the idol business was suffering. Local craftsmen banded together and started a riot, engulfing the city in chaos and confusion. Paul recognized that it was time for him to leave; he returned to Macedonia, then spent three months in Corinth (Greece). While in Corinth, he wrote a letter to the church in Rome.

Paul's opening in the letter to Rome has a close connection to the events that he witnessed in Ephesus. *He had seen first-hand the influence that idolatry had on the minds of men.* He wrote, "From the time the world was created, people have seen the earth and the sky and all that God made. They can clearly see His invisible qualities, His eternal power, and divine nature, so they have no excuse whatsoever for not knowing God. Yes, they knew God, but they wouldn't worship Him as God or even give Him thanks. They began to think up foolish ideas of what God was like. **The result was that their minds became dark and confused.** Claiming to be wise, they became utter fools. Instead of worshiping the glorious, ever-living God, they worshiped idols made to look like people, birds, animals, and snakes" (*Romans 1:20-23*).

Paul also witnessed the negative impact that idolatry had on society. He continued, "So then, God let them go ahead and do whatever shameful things their hearts desired. **As a result, they did vile and degrading things...** Instead of believing what they knew was the truth about God, they deliberately chose to believe lies. So they worshiped the things God made but not the Creator Himself... That is why God abandoned them to their shameful desires... He abandoned them to their evil minds and let them do things that should never be done... Their lives became

full of every kind of wickedness... **They are forever inventing new ways of sinning...** They are fully aware of God's penalty for those who do these things, yet they go right ahead and do them anyway" (*1:24-32*).

Daily Reflection

Just as one's view of God affects his view of everything else, so does **the view that society has of God affect that society positively or negatively.** *Morality in a society hinges on the general respect for God's moral laws, but that respect for His law hinges on the people's fear of God Himself. If a society refuses to fear God and unhinges itself from obedience to His laws, then that society is, in effect, removing the lynchpin to an objective moral standard.* The result will be **a society that deifies human reason, glorifies human wisdom, and justifies human depravity.**

In many ways, this truth describes the current conditions in our country. How so?

The biggest problem in our country is not social, political, moral, or racial divide. *These are all symptoms of a bigger battle,* that of the prevailing worldview that we choose to follow as a society. Will it be the biblical worldview that has grounded our nation and Western Civilization for four centuries, or will it be the worldview of secular humanism that puts man on a pedestal and legalizes his baser instincts? **If we abandon God, our society will be unhinged,** and we will continue to be bombarded with every vile and degrading practice that men can invent.

Saved by Faith

BiAY.org | Daily Reflections

November 24 — *Romans 2:1-4:25*

Day 328 — 37 Days to Go

Today In Your Reading...

As Paul continued his letter to the Romans, he unraveled the idea that salvation comes by obedience to the Law rather than through faith in Christ (similar to his letter to the Galatians). In doing so, he targeted a sacred stronghold of Judaism – Father Abraham (4:1-25). No doubt, Paul's words were painful for Jews to hear. Abraham was their most cherished forefather; for anyone to meddle with his legacy was like walking into a mine field. Thus, one begins to understand why Paul was perfect for this role; his training in the Law and his background with the Pharisees qualified him, more than anyone else, to be able to speak into this area.

Furthermore, Paul was a brilliant debater; he used one of the Jews' primary weapons against them. No doubt Abraham's circumcision was employed by the Jews as strong support for their requiring Christians to be circumcised, but Paul rendered this weapon useless, and, instead, enlisted Abraham as support for the Gospel. How did he accomplish this task?

First, Paul pointed out that Abraham was "reckoned by God as righteous," not for obeying the Law, but by believing God through faith (v. 3-5, 13, 14). **Abraham did nothing to achieve righteousness. He simply believed God; that's all, no works.** Second, Paul made it clear that Abraham preceded the Law and, yet, was still justified by God (*Galatians 3:8a*). The Mosaic Law came much later; and, yet, Abraham was reckoned as righteous. Paul understood that Abraham's receiving righteousness by faith, apart from the Law, was an Old Testament picture of the Gospel. Thus, **Abraham should not be used as support for the Law but as support for the Gospel.**

Third, Abraham was reckoned as righteous before being circumcised (*Genesis 15:6; 17:10,*

11; Romans 4:9-12). Circumcision, which later became part of the Law, only marked Abraham as a "believer." *Circumcision did not make him a believer.* Therefore, although he is technically the "father" of the Jews, Abraham could not be used as support for the idea that only those who are circumcised can be saved or "reckoned as righteous." Clearly, Abraham's example is one of salvation before circumcision. **His works (circumcision) followed his faith; they were not prerequisites for his faith.**

Fourth, when Abraham believed God, he was a Gentile (pagan), not a Jew. Ouch! This fact would have hurt his Jewish readers. God foreshadowed the salvation of the Gentiles through Abraham. Technically, Abraham is our spiritual forefather, just as much as he is the Jews' national forefather. Therefore, it was prophesied of Abraham that through him "all the nations would be blessed" (*Galatians 3:8b*). When we sing the song about "Father Abraham, who had many sons; I am one of them and so are you," it is true. All men, Jews (nationally) and Gentiles (spiritually) are included in his family tree.

Daily Reflection

Paul answered a vital question – how were people in the Old Testament saved, before Christ? Simple, just like you and me – **by faith**. Those before Jesus believed God by faith in the Messiah who was to come, while we who live after Jesus put our faith in what He has already done. Both groups, Old and New Testament, are saved in the same way.

What, then, was the purpose of the Law? "To keep people from having excuses and to bring the world into judgment before God" (*Romans 3:19*). No one can boast that he has done anything to be accepted of God... There is only one way to be accepted by Him. **He makes people right with Himself by faith" (v.27, 30).**

