

## “Having Therefore These Promises ...”

“... beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of the flesh and of the spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (2 Cor. 7:1).

The thoughts at the end of chapter 6 continue on into chapter 7, evidenced by the words, “Having therefore ...” Chapter divisions in the scriptures (made for convenience sake many years after the books were written) some times divide in the middle of a paragraph or even a sentence, although, in this particular case, the concluding thought and subsequent appeal is followed by a different subject. The appeal “cleanse yourselves” is made as the appropriate challenge to the promises given these brethren.

The apostle had urged brethren to “come out from among them” and to touch no unclean thing and if they would do that, God would receive them, be their God, be to them a Father, and they in turn would be to him sons and daughters. These are wonderful promises as are all God’s promises to His faithful children. Peter spoke of the exceeding greatness of God’s promises remarking that through them we become partakers of His divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4). God’s promises are exceeding great, not just because of the blessings those fulfilled promises bestow; but also because the certainty God’s promises can and will be fulfilled. Abraham was confident that what God promised He was able to perform (Rom. 4:21) and Paul rejoiced in that “how many be the promises of God in him is the yea,” i.e. God is not “wishy-washy” in the keeping of them (2 Cor. 1:2). Peter assured us that “God is not slack concerning his promises” (2 Pet. 3:9).

The appeal to cleanse ourselves from defilements must be understood to mean to cease the practice of them. Only God can “cleanse” us from the stain, the guilt of sin; that cleansing is in the blood of Christ (1 John 1:7). Ananais’s command to Saul of Tarsus (Acts 22:16) must be understood in this aspect. “And now, why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptized and wash away thy sins ...” were the preacher’s words to the distraught, penitent sinner but he is to be understood as telling Paul that he could wash his sins away only in that through his obedience to Christ’s commands (Mk. 16:16; Acts 2:38) he placed himself in his Savior’s hands to do for him what he could not do for himself.

Paul urged the cleansing of two things: defilements of the flesh and of the spirit. To cleanse oneself of the defilements of the flesh was to cleanse oneself of those things we are engaged in physically: uncleanness, fornication, adultery, etc. Jesus said, “The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Mt. 26:41). The desires of the flesh are strong and so men engage in fleshly lusts which war against the soul (1 Pet. 2:10). We must take heed and cleanse ourselves from the defilements of the flesh.

The apostle also urged the Corinthians to cleanse themselves from the “defilements of the spirit”. Judah’s last good king was Josiah and he made sweeping reforms in his nation, casting out every vestige of idolatry. Scarcely was he dead, however, until idolatry came rushing back into the nation. Jeremiah, a prophet in Josiah’s day and

beyond, spoke God's word and said the reform of Judah was only feignedly, not wholeheartedly (Jer. 3:10). To this nation Jeremiah urged they "circumcise your heart" — another way of cleansing self from the defilements of the spirit. All sin originates in the heart and a great portion of its defilement involves the spirit. True holiness, perfected holiness, is the combination of these two things: cleansing self of the defilements of the flesh AND cleansing self of the defilements of the spirit. James taught the same truth, expressing it in this way: "Cleanse your hands, ye sinners and purify your hearts, ye doubleminded" (James 4:4).

We must die to sin three ways. We must die to the love of sin. We must die to the practice of sin. We must die to the guilt of sin. The first two of these is something man can and must do for himself. Only God is able to do for us the third; our death to the guilt of sin. Only when we have died to the love and practice of sin will we have cleansed ourselves from all "defilements of the flesh and the spirit" and not until we cleanse ourselves from all defilements of the flesh and spirit will we perfect (complete) holiness in the fear of God!

Jim McDonald