

## CLEANSING FROM FILTHINESS OF FLESH AND SPIRIT

**"Having, therefore, these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." – 2 Cor. 7:1.**

IN OUR TEXT the expression, "filthiness of the flesh," seems to be a general one, in contrast with the Divine purity in which man was created. All violation of Law is sin; and all sin is symbolized by leprosy, a very filthy disease. The Apostle, however, does not mean that he and the other brethren were filthy in having the very gross sins that the world has; for any one worthy of the name of brother in Christ would have turned his back upon all gross sins and would have put away all those before he could have become a brother. But the Apostle is speaking of the "dearly beloved" who have left all these, who have left the "wallowing in the mire," as the Apostle Peter puts it.

To what extent we may cleanse ourselves will depend upon the viewpoint from which we speak. The Apostle's thought seems to be that we *continue* cleansing ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, as though he were pointing to a *progressive* work – to a high standard toward which we progress: "Be ye perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." (Matt. 5:48.) In one sense, this is impossible. With imperfect bodies, we cannot always do perfectly, even with the best of intentions and motives. But God's provision is that the blood of Jesus Christ keeps cleansing us from all sin, so that His people should maintain this very condition in the Lord's sight – a condition of perfection at all times. That is to say, if they find they have come short, they should go to Him for a covering of their blemishes.

But even if the Lord's people do not recognize where they have done wrong, they should know that all have sinned and come short; therefore, they should entreat the forgiveness of their trespasses. They

should come to the frame of mind where they will be willing to cover the weaknesses of others, as *they* desire to be forgiven by God. We cannot suppose that God would be in love with any one who is practising sin. But He has made that arrangement by which we may be cleansed from sin. Thus the Lord's people are exhorted to be "without spot or wrinkle or any such thing." Their robe is to be wholly without filthiness of the flesh. If a spot should appear, small or great, it would be the duty and privilege of the one whose garment is soiled to have it cleansed without delay and not to remain in filthiness. This matter of keeping our garment unspotted from the world is one that should have our continual attention if we would have the Lord esteem us without spot or wrinkle.

## **WHAT CONSTITUTES FILTHINESS OF THE FLESH AND SPIRIT?**

"Cleanse yourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit." It is the New Creature that is addressed. It is the New Creature that is to do the cleansing – the new will. The flesh is what remains of the old creature which has been reckoned dead as respects domination of mind or will. But the old body has been turned over to the new will to be its servant of righteousness, to be its tabernacle, until it receives its glorious body in the resurrection. The new will has the stewardship or responsibility over the **[R4975 : page 63]** old body. Not only are we not to permit it to practise sin, but we are to control it in the service of righteousness.

The Apostle here says that we are to cleanse ourselves from the filthiness of the flesh; and we are to judge of what might be filthy habits – or of habits we have that we might afterwards think filthy, impure, undesirable. As rapidly as we come to recognize these, we, as New Creatures, will seek to expunge them, eradicate them, remove them. Sometimes filthiness of the flesh is manifested by uncleanness of the hands, uncleanness of the teeth, etc. From the time the Holy Spirit begins to operate, the Lord's people want their bodies washed literally;

they want their hands clean; they want their teeth clean. Again, filthiness of the flesh might be in the nature of rubbing snuff on the nose, for instance. This would not be quite so bad as the chewing of tobacco, not quite so filthy as the smoking of tobacco. The same person at different times in his experience might have different conceptions of this matter, but as we come to see we should correct these habits.

But above all, the Lord's people desire purity in their inward parts; and the Apostle says that we should cleanse ourselves from filthiness of the spirit. This does not imply that the New Creature is filthy, but that the mind is filthy. How could the mind of the New Creature be "filthy" or unclean? We answer that the New Creature must use the old brain; and it is for the New Creature to exercise control, not only in the things which we chew and take into our bodies, but also in the operation of the brain, so that we shall think purely; for the brain, as well as the hands and feet, is the implement, the servant, of the New Creature, who is responsible for these things. He is to show his loyalty to the Lord by the way he deals with these things entrusted to his care.

Considering the latter part of the text, we are to understand that God will look even deeper than our words and actions – even to the thoughts and intentions of our minds, to see to what extent we would harbor an impure thought. If we find that there has been harbored *in our mind* a thought disloyal to the Lord and to the brethren, or a malicious thought, whether spoken or not, it is a sin, a blemish, a filthiness of the mind; for it is something out of harmony with us as New Creatures – out of harmony with our God.

The Apostle puts cleansing the flesh first; not that we are to have the flesh clean before the mind, but we are more liable to see the defilements of the flesh than those of the mind. As we get into the practise of looking for the imperfections of the flesh, we are not to forget to look after the imperfections of the mind, as the Apostle exhorts. He proceeds to say that we are learning more and more, under the instructions of our Lord and Head, the Father's Representative. We

are in the School of Christ, learning what the standards of truth and righteousness are. Now, if we would not do the things which would offend our earthly friends, then we should be very zealous lest we come short of doing the things which would be pleasing in the Father's sight.

### **THE MISRULE OF THE MIND OF THE FLESH**

There is a difference to be observed between the spirit, which stands for mind, and the will, which is the New Creature. As an old creature we had both a mind and a body; and the mind in a more or less riotous manner had more or less irregularly governed the body. Sometimes one organ was in control; sometimes another; at one time the organ of alimentiveness, at another time, another faculty. But these qualities of the mind are more or less unbalanced by our conditions in life and our environment.

The world in general seems to be running along this line. Today they find pleasure in one thing; tomorrow in another. Sometimes it is ambition. One may say, "I will be a great general," and that thought becomes the mastering element of his mind. With another, the chief thought is some scheme of motherhood; with another it may be pride of dress and show; with another it may be the love of money, which becomes the controlling element of mind; with still others it may be politics which takes possession of the life. In either case, it rules the life. Anything which would interfere with these aspirations would be pushed aside; and anything that would help them would be encouraged.

But with the Christian the matter is different. His aspirations and ambitions are that he may be in harmony with God and have the blessings of eternal life, which it is God's will to give to any who are of the right attitude of mind. With the world, the first thought is, "I have been working for some time to be a politician, and I will continue"; or "I have been striving for a certain position in society, and I will still strive for it"; or what not. Frequently the thought of becoming children of God and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ our Lord, is set aside as being too hard to strive for. Their thought is that they do not know whether

or not they would ever get the things which "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man" (I Cor. 2:9) – the things which God has prepared for those that love Him – for at first these things are not great inducements. This appreciation of righteousness is what the Scriptures intimate to be God's drawing influence.

But if the right influences prevail, there will be a radical change of life, the reward of which, if faithful, is to be a high and glorious future. Our Lord said that we should first count the cost. Those who take heed to His counsel, in proportion as they may realize what that cost is, find it to be the putting aside of all earthly ambition or honor. These must all be laid aside or counted as loss or dross in contrast with God's glorious promises. In making up one's mind the decision is reached after a discussion of all the qualities of the mind. If there is not such a discussion, there is likely to be trouble afterward. Some element will say that it had not been consulted. Hence, one should do as the Lord said, "Count the cost!"

### **LET THE WILL OF GOD RULE YOUR HEART**

To those who count the cost and make a full submission to God, it means not only a turning from sin, but more than that. It means the full surrender of all one has, every talent possessed, to the Lord Jesus. That function of the brain by which the various qualities of the mind are consulted and a decision reached, depends upon the force and weight the higher qualities of the mind have. By "higher qualities" we mean justice, appreciation of Divine mercy, reverence for God, for righteousness and for all things which are holy, etc. The individual who has not such a constitution of brain is not on trial for life at the present time. Only such as possess these qualities belong to the household of faith. Only such are begotten of the Holy Spirit.

This action of the mind, of the spirit, when it determines or wills to accept the Lord's will, is best represented by a legislative chamber, as, for instance, the Congress of the United States or the Parliament of

Great Britain. These bodies are composed of different members. The person who receives the largest number of [R4975 : page 64] votes has the largest influence, and may be said to have control of that Body, for he is the representative of the majority. So in our minds; having decided to surrender to God, these higher qualities have accepted the Lord Jesus as the great Head of the Church. Thenceforth the person is subject to the will of God.

It is not that we put any quality of our mind to be ruler, but that we put the will of the Lord there and accept Him to be Ruler in our wills, in our minds. Now, having reached this position in which Christ is the great Head, we should seek not only to cleanse the expressions of our tongues, and our actions, but to cleanse our minds also and bring them into subjection. It is our reasonable service that we cleanse not only our bodies and our words, but the very inmost thoughts of our minds. Anything that could be injurious either to ourselves or to another – envy, strife, hatred, bitterness – is to be put down and submitted to the new regulations, the new will which has taken control.

The very object of the begetting of the New Creature, the very object of giving it the opportunity of the present life, is to develop character and to crystallize that character. This seems to be the thought of the Apostle when he says, "Whom He [God] did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son" – not partly conformed, but fully conformed to the image of His Son. Our mental state, our will, must be fully fashioned after the mind of Jesus Christ. And His will was full obedience to the Father's will, to the extent of self-sacrifice, even unto death.

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