

CHAPTER SEVEN

On Being Set Apart from the World

BACKGROUND: Chapter Six ended with a reminder that those who separate themselves from the ungodly will have fellowship with God, in a relationship of Father to sons and daughters. Now Paul issues a call to the next step, growth in holiness.

7:1. Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God. God’s promises to those who separate themselves from the ungodly produce hope and joy. They also should awaken fear, however, because they remind us that those who do not will be heir to that which they have reserved for themselves—eternity separated from God’s goodness. Therefore, it behooves us to continue our efforts to be Christ-like in all areas of our lives, *perfecting holiness (2 Pet 3:9-15)*. This necessitates being different, set apart from the world, not as elitists but to walk with and to lead others to Christ and to prepare for life in His Kingdom.

Not only did Christ fulfill the prophecies and plant the word of truth, but also in these happenings, He gave us guidance regarding our lives, providing us with a rule of conduct for every need; teaching us by every means how to live worthily.

CHRYSOSTOM¹

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: (a). What are the attributes of holiness?

During the Divine Liturgy, before the invitation to receive the Body and Blood of Christ, we hear the words: “The Holy Things for those who are Holy.” We respond: “One is Holy, One is Lord, Jesus Christ...” The Eucharist which is about to be offered is itself holy and is for the holy. But the stark reality is that no one is truly holy except our Lord Jesus. How then do we dare to approach to receive Holy Communion? By the grace of God, through which we become *a holy nation, His own special people (1 Pet 2:9)*. We dare to partake of that which is reserved for the holy because we are a part of the Body of Christ through Baptism. We remain a part of Him and thus progressively partake of *His* holiness, *if*, as we are able, we continually try to become in our lives what He has already made us by grace. As long as we continue in this struggle. we show our assent, our faith. By this faith we open ourselves to that which is holy, as Mary conceived Christ in her womb through the Holy Spirit the very moment she assented to the will of God (Lk 1:38). Her assent, however, was not just verbal. She lived in obedience to that which God asked of her in all ways, as she had prior to being visited by Archangel Gabriel. Those who do not engage in this struggle shut grace out of their lives and make themselves unworthy of that which is holy. The disobedient either do not really believe, no matter what they profess with their mouth, or they *know not what they do (Lk 23:34)*.

We partake of Holy Communion *only* because we have been made holy by Christ and in Christ; and we partake of it in order to become holy, i.e., to fulfill the gift of holiness in our life. It is when one does not realize this that one “eats and drinks unworthily”—when, in other terms, one receives Communion thinking of one’s self as “worthy” through one’s own, and not Christ’s holiness; or when one receives it without relating it to the whole of life as its judgment, but also as the power of its transformation, as forgiveness, but also as the inescapable entrance into the “narrow path” of effort and struggle.²

7:2. Open your hearts to us. We have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have defrauded no one. Paul introduces the element of trust. He feels he has earned a place in their hearts because of his unwavering care and concern for them. This is an important point. If we earn the love and trust of those around us through interaction with them in the day-to-day activities of life, our efforts to share the truths of the Gospel with them will bear more fruit.

7:3. I do not say this to condemn; for I have said before that you are in our hearts, to die together and to live together. Paul's admonishments are not meant as judgment of the Corinthians. His intent is not to dismiss them from his care but to redirect them, where necessary, as God redirected him, and to remain their advocate through all that life brings.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: (b). It would seem that to *die together* would be more difficult than to *live together*; yet the writings of the Fathers of the Church suggest that giving love and support in good times is more difficult and rare than during times of adversity. How can this be?

7:4. Great is my boldness of speech toward you, great is my boasting on your behalf. I am filled with comfort. I am exceedingly joyful in all our tribulation. The good news Paul has received regarding their spiritual progress brings him great comfort, even during times of tribulation. With the strength he receives from God, he speaks out boldly to encourage greater virtue and a closer walk with Christ.

7:5-7. For indeed, when we came to Macedonia, our flesh had no rest, but we were troubled on every side. Outside were conflicts, inside were fears. Nevertheless God, Who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus, and not only by his coming but also by the consolation with which he was comforted in you, when he told us of your earnest desire, your mourning, your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced even more. When Paul left Troas and went to Macedonia from where he writes (2 Cor 2:12-13), he was upset at not finding Titus waiting for him. He faced continual persecution for the work he was doing and was troubled by fears that it was not bearing fruit. Then, finally, Titus arrived! His arrival brought Paul comfort and joy, especially when Titus shared the encouraging news that the Christians of Corinth were responding to Paul's first epistle and the reprimands it brought with the spirit in which they were intended. They were repentant for the errors of their ways and were eager for Paul to return.

7:8-9. For even if I made you sorry with my letter, I do not regret it; though I did regret it. For I perceive that the same epistle made you sorry, though only for a while. Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance. For you were made sorry in a godly manner, that you might suffer loss from us in nothing. A wise parent admonishes his errant children, bringing temporary pain, in order to teach them and keep them from danger. In like manner, a spiritual father chastens when necessary to prompt repentance and correction of ways.

To soothe that he may hurt is the way of the Devil. To chastise that He may bring us to greater good is the way of the Lord. So when things are going easily amid plenty, beware. CHRYSOSTOM³

It had saddened Paul to write his stern letter, but if he had refrained from correcting them for fear of hurting their feelings or becoming unpopular with them, he would have been guilty of allowing them to drift away from God.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: (c). What responsibility do the faithful bear towards those who consider themselves Christians yet seem to be following a way of life which is contrary to that prescribed by the Gospel?

7:10. For godly sorrow produces repentance to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death. Godly sorrow produces repentance upon realization that one has been wrong spiritually. We should not regret producing godly sorrow. The sorrow of the world, on the other hand, is worthless because it is superficial, concerned only with physical comfort and pleasure rather than spiritual growth.

And what is worldly? If you are in sorrow for money, for reputation, for one who has departed, all these are worldly. They also work death. For he who sorrows for reputation's sake feels envy and is driven oftentimes to perish: such was the sorrow Cain felt, such Esau. By worldly sorrow he means that which is to the harm of those who sorrow. For only in respect to sins is sorrow a profitable thing. He who sorrows for loss of wealth does not repair that damage; he who sorrows for one deceased does not raise the dead to life again; he who sorrows for a sickness not only is not made well but even aggravates the disease. He who sorrows for sins, alone attains some advantage from his sorrow, for he makes his sins wane and disappear. In this case only is it potent and profitable; and worldly sorrow is even harmful. "And yet Cain," one can say, "sorrowed because he was not accepted with God." It was not for this, but because he saw his brother glorious in honor; for had he grieved because he was not in good standing with God, he would have tried to emulate and rejoice with his brother; but, as it was, he showed that his was a worldly sorrow. But not so David, nor Peter, nor any of the righteous. They were accepted because they grieved over their own sins or those of others. And yet what is more oppressive than sorrow? Still when it is after a godly sort, it is better than the joy in the world. CHRYSOSTOM⁴

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: (d). What is the *death* that is produced by the *sorrow of the world*?

7:11. For observe this very thing, that you sorrowed in a godly manner: What diligence it produced in you, what clearing of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what vehement desire, what zeal, what vindication! In all things you proved yourselves to be clear in this matter. The godly sorrow aroused in the Corinthian Christians by Paul's admonitions caused them to realize the error of their ways and to set about to correct them.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: (e). Is it possible to bring about *godly sorrow* in the modern world?

7:12. Therefore, although I wrote to you, I did not do it for the sake of him who had done the wrong, nor for the sake of him who suffered wrong, but that our care for you in the sight of God might appear to you. The immoral relationship between the man and his stepmother (1 Cor 5:1) posed spiritual danger to the entire community. As their teacher, Paul must answer to God for his efforts to restore conditions that will allow spiritual health and growth. God's directives to His people are neither meant to restrict them unnecessarily nor to make their lives difficult. On the contrary, their purpose is to lead them to joys unending—in this life and the next.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: (f). What does Paul's concern that he do his best *in the sight of God* to guide the Corinthians say to all Christians, especially to those who are entrusted with the care of others, like clergy, parents and godparents?

7:13-15. Therefore we have been comforted in your comfort. And we rejoiced exceedingly more for the joy of Titus, because his spirit has been refreshed by you all. For if in anything I have boasted to him about you, I am not ashamed. But as we spoke all things to you in truth, even so our boasting to Titus was found true. And his affections are greater for you as he remembers the obedience of you all, how with fear and trembling you received him. Paul is elated that they responded positively to his letter and to Titus as his emissary. Titus' love for the Corinthians has grown as a result of their response to him and the seriousness with which they received the guidance he brought from Paul.

He who has faith in the Lord fears chastisement; and this fear prompts him to keep the commandments. The keeping of the commandments leads him to endure affliction; and the enduring of affliction produces hope in God. Such hope separates the intellect from all material attachment; and the person freed from such attachment possesses love for God. Whoever follows this sequence will be saved.

PETER OF DAMASKOS⁵

7:16. Therefore, I rejoice that I have confidence in you in everything. Confident of their love for Christ because of their affirming actions, Paul rejoices as does any parent who sees that his charges are on the right track.

Nothing so distinguishes a leader as much as paternal affection for those he leads. Begetting alone does not constitute a father, but begetting and loving...Moses, for the sake of those he led, left great riches and treasures untold, *choosing to suffer affliction with the people of God* (Heb 11:25).

CHRYSOSTOM⁶

FOOD FOR THOUGHT COMMENTS

(a). What are the attributes of holiness? Holiness is godliness (Lev 11:44).

Holiness does not mean chastity alone but freedom from every kind of sin, for he that is pure is holy. One will become pure if he is free from fornication, covetousness, envy, pride, and vainglory...It is important to avoid vainglory in everything, but especially in almsgiving (since it is not almsgiving, but display and cruelty, if it is tainted with vainglory)...in fasting, and in prayer.

CHRYSOSTOM⁷

We all accept that there is special training for philosophers, for teachers, for athletes. Equally, for those who have chosen to major in holiness, there is a special training in the word. It involves, as does any serious training, almost every detail of life: walking, eating, resting, working, every part is disciplined and every part contributes to the goal of spiritual health and beauty.

Mind you, this training (unlike some of the others) does not put people under emotional or physical strain and tension. It is not a matter of driving oneself to the limit so much as allowing the word to show us our weaknesses and moral flaws and then bringing us the Savior's own remedies, precisely gauged to meet every specific need.

CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA⁸

(b). It would seem that to *die together* would be more difficult than to *live together*; yet the writings of the Fathers of the Church suggest that giving love and support in good times is more difficult and rare than during times of adversity. How can this be? There are many who envy the good fortune of others, so find it difficult to rejoice when they prosper or are honored, while sympathizing with their misfortunes is easy. Envy shows lack of true love.

Nothing more destructive springs up in the souls of men than the passion of envy, which, while it does no harm to others, is the dominant and peculiar evil of the soul that harbors it. As rust consumes iron, so does envy wholly consume the soul it dwells in. More than this, as vipers are said to be born through devouring the maternal womb, so envy devours the soul that gives it birth.

BASIL⁹

(c). What responsibility do the faithful bear towards those who consider themselves Christians yet seem to be following a way of life which is contrary to that prescribed by the Gospel? God guides His people through His teachings, which have been passed on through the ages. The faithful try to direct their lives accordingly. Because of God's gift of free will, however, each person has the right to accept or to reject His guidance. This presupposes that all have had an opportunity to learn the fullness of His word and the obedience and spiritual growth it requires. To that end, each Christian is called upon to share its truths with those whose paths cross theirs, allowing them to make informed decisions about their lives on earth and beyond the grave. There are times when those who call themselves Christians engage in behavior or activity that is not Christ-like. In dealing with such instances, it is first of all important to remember that it is not our place to pronounce judgment upon others—judgment belongs to God.

Let us not be overcurious about the failings of others, but take account of our own; let us remember the goodness of others, while we bear in mind our faults, and thus we shall be well pleasing to God.

CHRYSOSTOM¹⁰

With that warning, however, it remains that there are times when someone might benefit spiritually from a firm nudge in the right direction—a loving gesture on the part of the one who makes such an attempt. Because we have no right to judge the person, the behavior or action in question must be our focal point.

For example: a brother has fallen into fornication. Do not disgrace him because of his fault; but don't laugh at it either. You will do no good to whoever hears you; rather it is more likely that you will do him harm, goading him further. But if you advise him as to what he should do, you will do him a great favor: if you teach him to use speech fittingly, and guide him so that he will abuse no one, you will teach him exceedingly well, and you will have brought him grace. If you speak with him about repentance, of the love of God, of giving to the poor, all these things will heal his soul. For all this he will be grateful to you. But if you laugh at him or speak hurtfully to him, you will provoke him instead. If you show any approval of his evil doing, you will undo him and destroy him.

CHRYSOSTOM¹¹

To try to correct someone is probably one of the most difficult things we can attempt. Such an endeavor should only be undertaken with extreme caution and with prayer for discernment. It is usually best to wait for the right moment and then to lovingly do or say that which is most likely to bring repentance and healing.

Keep in touch with them. Encourage them not to abandon their belief in the Lord's mercy

towards those who repent. Assure them that if they humbly and sincerely confess their sins and turn back to God, He will receive them and give them his strength and support to change their way of life. CYPRIAN¹²

Social pressure among peers can be a very powerful influence for good or evil. The purpose of Christian correction or guidance must always be to preserve, intact, the Church and her teachings, and to try to bring the person involved into fuller fellowship with it. This must be done very carefully because harm may be done if he is lost to the Kingdom.

Those who let us do as we like are neither good teachers nor good friends.¹³

There is no credit in spending all your affection on the cream of your pupils. Try rather to bring the more troublesome ones to order by using gentleness. Nobody can heal every wound with the same unguent; where there are acute spasms of pain, we have to apply soothing poultices. So in all circumstances be *wise as the serpent, though always harmless as the dove* [Mt 10:16].

IGNATIUS OF ANTIOCH¹⁴

(d). What is the *death* that is produced by the *sorrow of the world*?

The death produced by worldly sorrow is not the Christian death through which one passes from this life to the fullness of the Kingdom. Rather, it is the end of any hope and joy that comes from association with the things of God.

As you become imitators of God you will see, as you walk the earth, that there is a God Who is operative in Heaven; you will begin to focus on His mysteries; and you will know love and admiration for those who incur persecution by their refusal to deny Him. Then too, you will see through the deceitfulness and error of this world once you have found what it is to live the true life of Heaven and have learned to despise the seeming death of the body and to dread only the real death which is reserved for those condemned to the fires of eternity—fires that will torment their victims forevermore. In the knowledge of those fires, your admiration will go out to all who endure a more transient flame for righteousness sake, and you will call them blessed.

MATHETES¹⁵

For more on the "fires of eternity," see Food For Thought Comments 2 Cor 5 (d) and (e).

(e). Is it possible to bring about *godly sorrow* in the modern world?

The modern world provides fertile ground for producing the godly sorrow which leads to repentance. As society in general strays further and further from God and the values His word teaches, the quality of life declines. Selfish concerns dominate and life seems cold, cruel and meaningless. In such a setting, some begin to realize something is amiss, and they search for direction. If at this point they are taught or reminded about God's truths, sorrow—godly sorrow—can build in their hearts for the sad state of mankind. This can produce the fruit of repentance and subsequent renewal in the joy of life God intended. We can be helpful in this process by trying in every circumstance to share with others, in a non-judgmental way that which God expects of His people—while at the same time acting in a loving manner toward everyone. Often the best way to do this is to be a good example, so perhaps those looking on who have strayed will realize their own lives are not following the path leading to God and will repent.

When Christ was establishing laws for His Disciples, what did He command of them?

Certainly not that they should perform wonders, that men might behold them. No. He said: *Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father Who is in Heaven.* To Peter likewise He did not say: *If you love me work miracles,* but *Feed My sheep* (Jn 21:17). And since on all occasions He singles him out from the rest, together with James and John, I ask why did He single them out? Because of their miracles? But all the Apostles cleansed the lepers, and raised the dead. To all alike He gave this power. Why then were these three preferred? Because of the virtue of their lives and the magnanimity of their souls. See then the need of a good life and the need of fruitful works? *You shall know them by their fruits* (Mt 7:16).

CHRYSOSTOM¹⁶

(f). What does Paul's concern that he do his best *in the sight of God* to guide the Corinthians say to all Christians, especially to those who are entrusted with the care of others, like clergy, parents and godparents? All who have been entrusted with the spiritual care of others have a very serious responsibility to do all they can to teach those dependent upon them about the wonders of God and His promises and will answer to Him in this regard. Because everyone has free will, however, including those to whom we minister, we will not be judged by the extent to which these efforts were successful but by the care and discipline we exercised to do our best (see this study for 1 Cor 3:12-15).

The priest, even if he disciplines his own life in a fitting manner, yet does not scrupulously have due care for both your life and the lives of those around him, shall go with the wicked into everlasting fire; and so he oftentimes, while not failing in his own conduct, will perish because of yours, if he has not done all that belonged to him to do.

CHRYSOSTOM¹⁷

Lay members of the Church also bear responsibility for the care and nurturing of the spiritual lives of others. As part of the Body of Christ we all belong to the *royal priesthood*, called to proclaim His praises to all who will listen (1 Pet 2:9).

¹ Toal, "On the Gospel," Vol. Two, p.176.

² Alexander Schmemmann, *Great Lent, Journey to Pascha*, Appendix, p.122.

³ Toal, "On the Gospel," Vol. Two, p.22.

⁴ Schaff, "Homily XV," Vol. XII, p.350.

⁵ Palmer, Sherrard, Ware, "Treasury of Divine Knowledge," Vol. Three, p.88.

⁶ Schaff, "Homily XV," Vol. XII, p.352.

⁷ *ibid*, "Homily XIII," p.345.

⁸ Winter, "The Word, our Instructor," (Day 52).

⁹ Toal, "On Envy," Vol. Four, p.142.

¹⁰ Schaff, "Homily IX," Vol. XIII, p.229.

¹¹ Toal, "The Christian Manner of Life," Vol. Three, p.239.

¹² Winter, "Helping those who Have Fallen Away," (Day 50).

¹³ Velimirovic, Part One, p.207.

¹⁴ Staniforth, "To Polycarp," p.127.

¹⁵ *ibid*, "Practical Conclusions," (10), p.181.

¹⁶ Toal, "The Leaven of Holiness," Vol. One, p.354.

¹⁷ *ibid*, "The Authority and Dignity of the Priesthood," Vol. Two, p.274.