

~Other Speakers S-Z: David Servant:

Our sanctification---our growing in holiness---is not something that is done by the Lord as we "let go" and "stop trying to be holy by our own efforts" as is sometimes taught. Believers must "strive against sin" (Heb. 12:4), "resist the devil" (Jas. 4:7), and "crucify the flesh with its passions and desires" (Gal. 5:24), to mention just a few biblical phrases that emphasize our part in the sanctification process. Today we read of our duty to "cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (7:1). Clearly, that is something we must do.

This is not to say, however, that the Holy Spirit doesn't help us to be holy. Sanctification occurs as we cooperate with the Spirit inside us. Maintain this balanced perspective!

From this same scripture passage, we also see the error in the idea that sin cannot originate from a Christian's spirit, or heart, but only from his flesh. Paul wrote of the need to cleanse ourselves from every defilement of flesh and spirit. Christians may possess wrong motives, which is why, for example, Jesus warned His followers about praying in public to be seen by others and why Paul cautioned about giving to the poor without love (Matt. 6:5-6; 1 Cor. 13:3).

Paul's words about "perfecting holiness in the fear of God" reveal to us that Christians aren't perfect, otherwise they would not need perfecting! On the other hand, his words also reveal that Christians are somewhat holy, otherwise they couldn't perfect their holiness.

Notice also that being motivated by fear of God is not a bad thing (as so many say today), but a very good thing that Paul recommends (7:1). I'm sure that God, like most parents, would prefer that His children obey Him out of love. But for most children, fear of discipline is a major motivation to obey their parents. Our Bibles tell us that God disciplines those whom He loves, and "He scourges every son whom He receives" (Heb. 12:6). Christians who ignore or don't believe in God's discipline are likely to be rebuking Satan when they are disciplined rather than examining themselves and repenting. Big mistake!

Themes from previous chapters resurface in today's reading. Paul continues to appeal to the Corinthian believers to open their hearts to him by reminding them of his love for them. He recounts how troubled he was after sending his severe letter to them (of which we have no copy), and how relieved he was when Titus returned to him from Corinth with a good report of their repentance (7:5-7).

How strange it is that so many professing Christian leaders speak negatively of guilt, as if it is something no Christian should accept since we've been declared righteous in Christ, and something that, when experienced, should be considered an attack from Satan. Paul wrote of "the sorrow that is according to the will of God [that] produces a repentance without regret" (7:10), and he was quite glad that the Corinthian believers had experienced that sorrow. Is there any relationship between guilt and sorrow for sin? If they are not the same thing, they are certainly quite similar. And it is very clear that the godly sorrow of the Corinthians resulted in a wonderful turn-around in their spiritual lives. Without guilt, no one would repent, and without repentance, no one can be saved. Thank God for guilt!

Where is there a single scripture that says anything about Satan making someone feel guilty? There isn't one in the Bible! About the closest thing is a scripture that speaks of Satan as being "the accuser of the brethren" in Revelation 12:10. But there it says that Satan accuses the brethren before God, not that he makes the brethren feel guilty. Why would Satan make anyone feel guilty? He would run the risk of motivating them to repent! If they are unsaved, it might lead to their salvation! Imagine that---Satan helping someone escape hell. Food for thought!