

7:1

Therefore, having these promises, having one promise (6:17) and then another (6:18) leads the reader to remember that there is at least some license to see the Old Testament as a book of promises. **beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness** This goes in concert with the talk about connections, commitments, and alliances in 6:14-16, and the need to “separate” in 6:17. **in the fear of God**. Remember that in the context of all of this is Paul saying “validate us and not them” (1 Corinthians 9:1-7; 2 Corinthians 11:1-15). In the context of this passage, we get the understanding that **holiness** is something that involves turning from false teachers or intrusive apostles. If that’s not it, why open (6:13) and close (7:2) with an appeal to honor his office? We are to be excellent separators—**perfecting holiness**. “The verb ‘to perfect’ (*epiteleîn*) means ‘to bring to completion,’ ‘to bring to its intended goal’.”¹ This is not easy and it takes intention. I will tell you that it does not happen accidentally, but the inverse is also true: backsliding does not happen intentionally, it must be practiced and then it is eventually perfected. One does not merely attempt to find themselves in a room being intimate with somebody with whom they are not married. That takes minutes or hours or years of perfecting. So also, **perfecting holiness** takes moments of deciding against pleasing yourself—often times chemically—as moments of sin typically release baths of euphoric chemistry into our brains.

Remember the appeal to 6:12 is that they are “restricted by their affections?” Contextually, one cannot separate from false teachers or divisive people when they decide they love them more than they should actually love them.

Also, we see that God is a Father to us in a wonderful way as we take on the spirit of this passage (6:18). We know that the passage requires separation from intrusive and divisive teachers, but as we take on the idea that this carries the spirit of God saying to His children “just play the part of the son and I’ll play the part of the dad.”

The reason we find this hard to embrace is because it can sound like salvation by works or “stop sinning to clean yourself up,” but we are not talking about earning salvation. We are talking about being energized by salvation. Christ did this for us (5:14-15) and we find reason and energy to do for Him.

The reason this is hard for us to think about is because of our view of salvation. We say things like “you can be no more right with God than you are in Christ.” That’s true as far as our position, but here Paul speaks to people who are God’s kids and yet offers them the opportunity or rather commands them to live the part of God’s kids. So, there really is a reality of pleasing the Father more.

Come on, though...how does one “separate” unto **holiness**? How does one decide from whom they should separate? Can you totally leave the world? We’ve already seen that the context speaks specifically of false teachers, and by extension—counterfeiting Christians.

However, Paul was kind enough to help us a little further: We separate from the pseudo Christian (1 Corinthians 5:10-11), and from misuse of a “culture of death” known as “the world.” We are to be using the system (1 Corinthians 7:29-31) while still creating emotional distance, living independently as possible, and support the body of Christ as much as possible.

¹ David E. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, vol. 29, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 342.