

The **Bible** Unpacked

Comprehensive Study Series

The Bible's teaching compiled
for established believers

Paul Mallison

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The Bible's teaching compiled
for established believers

37. Rejecting Sin

Paul Mallison

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This copy made: 8-Feb-25.

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A Quick Word

This series of studies aims to present a compilation of the Bible's teachings in a clear and readable order. There are 40 booklets in the series, based on the 40 chapters of the book *The Bible Unpacked - Comprehensive Edition*. Each booklet has two sections, which can be used for two or more studies.

The material contains Bible verses. Before the verses are headings, which reflect what the verses say – in particular the parts of the verses in *italics*. The verses are sometimes followed by a comment.

The verses often have a brief introduction. Usually these state who is speaking and often who they are speaking to. Apart from God and Jesus Christ, the main speakers are:

- Moses – who led the Israelites and taught them God's laws;
- David – Israel's greatest king who wrote many of the psalms, most of which are essentially prayers;
- Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel and other prophets – who spoke to the people of Israel on God's behalf; and
- Paul, Peter, John and other leaders of the early church – who spoke to various groups and wrote letters to believers.

Much care has been taken in order to correctly interpret the verses. Nevertheless, if you encounter a verse that is used to teach something that is contrary to or goes beyond your understanding, assess its use by doing such things as: reading the passage it is from; and considering how its teaching fits in with Scripture as a whole (e.g. interpret OT teaching in the light of NT teaching).

For more information on *The Bible Unpacked* and free downloads, go to the website: www.thebibleunpacked.net.

Users are asked to pray regularly for persecuted Christians and, if possible, support them financially. These things can be done through organizations that provide aid to them and/or prayer notices, such as those listed under [Persecuted Christians](#).

Suggestions for Study Groups

Preliminary matters:

- Beforehand the leader should: check the context of any verses they are not familiar with; and review the questions. If need be, they should compose questions more applicable to the group.
- Each person should have a Bible, for things such as checking a verse's context. It would also be helpful to have Bible commentaries on hand.
- Pray before beginning the study. Ask God for help in understanding the meaning of the verses and to affect your lives through them. Also pray together at the end.

Doing the study:

- Ideally, read the material and answer the questions prior to the meeting. Then share answers and discuss any issues arising from the material in the meeting.
- Alternatively, read the material and answer the questions in the meeting – reading either aloud as a group or individually (prior to sharing answers). If reading as a group, **try having one person read the headings, another read the verses and another read the comments.** Additionally, a fourth person could read the Bible references.

General or concluding questions:

If time permits, conclude with one or more of the following questions:

- What is something that you either: **did not know** before; gained **greater insight** into; or **needed reminding** of?
- What verse would be helpful to memorize and bear in mind during the next week?
- In taking the verses seriously, is there anything you should change in:
 - (a) how you relate to God and/or to other people; or
 - (b) any other area of your life (e.g. attitudes, values or behavior)?

If so, are there any specific steps you could take to do this?

I. Encountering Sin

Inevitably on occasions sin “leaks” into our lives, with its ill effects on ourselves and on our relationship with God. But if we address it as the Bible says to, God promises to forgive our sins and take in hand its effects.

Note that the teaching in this section is applicable to both new believers ridding themselves of their old ways and to believers returning to God after having lapsed into sin. However, the focus is more on the latter – with the former being primarily dealt with in the section *Repentance*, in 21. *Being Right with God*.

a) Consequences of Sin for God's People

See also:

- d) *God Disciplines His People (I): Reasons*, Ch. 18

Prelude: God's people still sin

JAMES 3:2A [JAMES, TO BELIEVERS:] *For we all stumble in many ways.* NET

1JN 1:8 [JOHN, TO BELIEVERS:] *If we say that we do not have any sin, we are deceiving ourselves and we're not being truthful within ourselves.* ISV

No one's sinful nature has been completely eradicated.

Sin deprives God's people of his blessings

JER 5:25 [GOD, TO UNFAITHFUL ISRAEL:] *Your misdeeds have stopped these things from coming. Your sins have deprived you of my bounty.*

NET

Sin deprives God's people of rest

JER 6:16 The LORD said to his people: "You are standing at the crossroads. So consider your path. *Ask where the old, reliable paths are. Ask where the path is that leads to blessing and follow it. If you do, you will find rest for your souls.*" But they said, "We will not follow it!" NET

This indicates that if one does not walk in God's ways – i.e. continues to sin – one fails to find rest for one's soul.

God punishes sin, which can mean physical suffering and emotional anguish . . .

Ps 38:3–8 [DAVID, TO GOD:] *My whole body is sick because of your judgment; I am deprived of health because of my sin. ⁴For my sins overwhelm me; like a heavy load, they are too much for me to bear. ⁵My wounds are infected and starting to smell, because of my foolish sins. ⁶I am dazed and completely humiliated; all day long I walk around mourning. ⁷For I am overcome with shame and my whole body is sick. ⁸I am numb with pain and severely battered; I groan loudly because of the anxiety I feel.* NET

. . . along with various other troubles

Ps 40:12 [DAVID:] *For evils have encompassed me beyond number; my iniquities have overtaken me, and I cannot see; they are more than the hairs of my head; my heart fails me.* ESV

The clause “my iniquities have overtaken me” refers to the results of David’s sins, which had overwhelmed him.

Sin defiles God’s people – making them spiritually unclean

Ps 106:39 *They [the sinful Israelites] were defiled by their deeds, and unfaithful in their actions.* NET

LAM 1:8A *Jerusalem has sinned greatly, therefore she has become unclean.* ISV

God turns away from those who persist in sin

Mic 3:4 *Someday these sinners will cry to the LORD for help, but he will not answer them. He will hide his face from them at that time, because they have done such wicked deeds.* NET

As sin makes people spiritually unclean, God will ultimately turn away from those who persist in sin, for God in his holiness will not coexist with such uncleanness.

Further implications of deliberately or habitually continuing to sin

1JN 3:6 *So anyone who lives in Christ does not go on sinning. Anyone who goes on sinning has never really understood Christ and has never known him.* NCV™

HEB 10:26–27 *For if we deliberately keep on sinning after receiving the knowledge of the truth, no further sacrifice for sins is left for us, ²⁷but only a certain fearful expectation of judgment and a fury of fire that will consume God’s enemies.* NET

To deliberately keep on sinning after having previously accepted Christ’s sacrifice as payment for sin is effectively to spurn Christ’s sacrifice. The result is that one is left without any possible “further sacrifice for sins” (v. 26) and so faces God’s judgment and dreadful punishment (v. 27).

What effects of sin have you been aware of in your own life and/or in the lives of people close to you?

Can we know if suffering or other troubles we have are due to sin? Are there any indicators that such things may be God's punishment/discipline for sin?

How does sin defile us?

Pray for persecuted Christians

b) Addressing Sin (I): Return from Sin to God

See also:

- *Ch 21. Repentance*

Even if sin has not led to a believer completely falling away from God, all sin hinders one from being fully devoted to God to some extent. Thus one needs to turn away from any sin and return to being completely devoted to God.

Stop sinning, turning away from sin

1COR 15:34A Sober up as you should, and *stop sinning!* NET

2TIM 2:19 “*Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from evil.*” NET

Do not be stubborn, resisting God and persisting in sin

HEB 3:7–8 [THE WRITER, TO HEBREW BELIEVERS:] So then, as the Holy Spirit says: “*If you hear God’s voice today, ⁸do not be stubborn, as your ancestors were when they rebelled against God, as they were that day in the desert when they put him to the test.*” GNT

JER 5:3 [JEREMIAH, SPEAKING TO GOD ABOUT THE PEOPLE OF JUDAH:] O LORD, do not your eyes look for truth? You have struck them down, but they felt no anguish; you have consumed them, but *they refused to take correction. They have made their faces harder than rock; they have refused to repent.* ESV

So get rid of sin . . .

EZEK 18:31 *Get rid of all the sins you have done, and get for yourselves a new heart and a new way of thinking. Why do you want to die, people of Israel?* NCV™

. . . and get rid of things involved in sinful practices

JUDG 10:16 *They threw away the foreign gods they owned and worshiped the LORD. Finally the LORD grew tired of seeing Israel suffer so much.* NET

Return to God

LAM 3:40 Let us carefully examine our ways, and *let us return to the LORD.* NET

Return to God with all your heart

JOEL 2:12-13 “Yet even now,” the LORD says, “*return to me with all your heart – with fasting, weeping, and mourning. Tear your hearts, not just your garments!*” ¹³*Return to the LORD your God, for he is merciful and compassionate, slow to anger and boundless in loyal love – often relenting from calamitous punishment.* NET

In returning from sin to God, do what God wants

EZRA 10:11 [EZRA THE PRIEST, TO THE UNFAITHFUL PEOPLE:] Now then, confess your sins to the LORD, the God of your ancestors, *and do what pleases him.* GNT

HOS 12:6 [HOSEA, TO ISRAEL:] *But you must return to your God, by maintaining love and justice,* and by waiting for your God to return to you. NET

Why do supposed Christians stubbornly persist in sin? How can we recognize if we are stubbornly persisting in sin?

What steps could a Christian take to rid themselves of a sin that they find difficult to stop doing?

What leads Christians who have “gone off track” to return to God with all their heart? What part can we play as a fellow Christian?

Pray for persecuted Christians

c) Addressing Sin (II): Deal with Sin before God

Confess your sin to God

LEV 5:5 As soon as you discover that you have committed any of these sins, *you must confess what you have done.* CEV

NEH 1:6–7 [NEHEMIAH, TO GOD:] *I confess the sins that we Israelites have committed against you. Both I and my father's house have sinned. ⁷We have abandoned you by not keeping your commands, your ceremonies, and your judgments that you proscribed to your servant Moses.* ISV

Be sorrowful over your sin

PS 51:17 *The sacrifice God wants is a broken spirit. God, you will not reject a heart that is broken and sorry for sin.* NCV™

A “broken” spirit or heart is one that is deeply remorseful.

Humble yourself before God over your sin – and its consequences

LUKE 18:13 *The tax collector, however, stood far off and would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, be merciful to me, sinner that I am!’* NET

2CHR 33:12–13 *In his pain Manasseh asked the LORD his God for mercy and truly humbled himself before the God of his ancestors.* NET

Manasseh had been exiled because of his sin (cf. vv. 9–11).

Ask God for forgiveness and restoration

PS 51:1–2, 7–12 [DAVID, TO GOD AFTER HIS SIN WITH BATHSHEBA:] *God, be merciful to me because you are loving. Because you are always ready to be merciful, wipe out all my wrongs. ²Wash away all my guilt and make me clean again. ... ⁷Take away my sin, and I will be clean. Wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. ⁸Make me hear sounds of joy and gladness; let the bones you crushed be happy again. ⁹Turn your face from my sins and wipe out all my guilt. ¹⁰Create in me a pure heart, God, and make my spirit right again. ¹¹Do not send me away from you or take your Holy Spirit away from me. ¹²Give me back the joy of your salvation. Keep me strong by giving me a willing spirit.* NCV™

In petitioning God, express your anguish over consequences of your sin – even with fasting

JOEL 1:13–14 [JOEL, TO THE PRIESTS IN JERUSALEM:] *“Put on your mourning clothes, you priests; and cry aloud, you ministering servants at the altar! Come! Stay the night in mourner’s clothes, you ministers of my God, because withheld is the grain offering and the wine offering from the temple of your God. ¹⁴Set apart time for a fast! Call a solemn assembly! Gather the elders and everyone living in the land to the temple of the LORD your God, and cry out to the LORD!”* ISV

Apparently as a consequence of the people’s sin, an awesome plague of locusts had devastated the land of Judah, leaving neither grain nor wine even for offerings (v. 13b). Thus the prophet calls on the priests – and similarly the people (cf. vv. 5–12) – to express their anguish before God (vv. 13–14a), in conjunction with crying out to God for help (v. 14b).

Note: Accept God’s discipline for sin

PROV 3:11–12 [A WISE FATHER, TO HIS SON:] *My child, do not despise discipline from the LORD, and do not loathe his rebuke. ¹²For the LORD disciplines those he loves, just as a father disciplines the son in whom he delights.* NET

2SAM 15:25–26 The king told Zadok, “Take God’s ark back to the city. If the LORD looks favorably on me, he will allow me to come back and see both it and its dwelling place again. ²⁶*But if he says, ‘I’m not pleased with you,’ let him do to me what he considers right.*”

GW

What should we do about sin that we have committed?

Why is it important to be sorry for sin? To what extent should one be sorrowful?

Is there any response to one's own sin that is mentioned here, that you have not previously considered or often overlook? If so, how do you think this response might be helpful?

Pray for persecuted Christians

d) God's Response to Repentance

Prelude: God seeks to draw his wayward people back to himself

ISA 65:2 [GOD:] *I spread out my hands all day long to my rebellious people, who lived in a way that is morally unacceptable, and who did what they desired.* NET

JER 35:15 [GOD, TO THE PEOPLE OF JUDAH:] *I sent all my servants the prophets to warn you over and over again. They said, "Every one of you, stop doing the evil things you have been doing and do what is right. Do not pay allegiance to other gods and worship them."* NET

When we repent God forgives our sins . . .

ISA 1:16–18 [GOD, TO THE PEOPLE OF JUDAH:] *Wash! Cleanse yourselves! Remove your sinful deeds from my sight. Stop sinning! ¹⁷Learn to do what is right! Promote justice! Give the oppressed reason to celebrate! Take up the cause of the orphan! Defend the rights of the widow! ¹⁸Come, let's consider your options," says the LORD. "Though your sins have stained you like the color red, you can become white like snow; though they are as easy to see as the color scarlet, you can become white like wool.* NET

The repentant actions (vv. 16b–17) were critical to God forgiving the people's sins (v. 18b).

1JN 1:9 [JOHN, TO BELIEVERS:] *But if we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous, forgiving us our sins and cleansing us from all unrighteousness.* NET

. . . Being merciful and compassionate, God saves us from the consequences of our sin

DEUT 30:2–3 [MOSES, TO THE ISRAELITES:] *And when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before you, and you call them to mind among all the nations where the LORD your God has driven you, ²and return to the LORD your God, you and your children, and obey his voice in all that I command you today, with all your heart and with all your soul, ³then the LORD your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you, and he*

will gather you again from all the peoples where the LORD your God has scattered you. ESV

PROV 28:13 [SOLOMON:] *If you hide your sins, you will not succeed. If you confess and reject them, you will receive mercy.* NCV™

Note that the assertion in the above subheading does not mean that the consequences of our sin are always completely eradicated (cf. 2Sam 12:9–14).

When we repent God restores our relationship with him

ZEC 1:3 So tell the people [of Judah]: This is what the LORD All-Powerful says: ‘Return to me, and I will return to you,’ says the LORD All-Powerful. NCV™

JER 24:7B [GOD:] *I will be their God and they will be my people. For they will wholeheartedly return to me.* NET

Here God in effect promises his unfaithful people that if they returned to him wholeheartedly, he would restore his relationship with them to what it should be. As such, they would again be his people and he would be their God.

Note: Not repenting and returning to God brings judgment

JER 44:5–6 [GOD:] *But the people of Jerusalem and Judah would not listen or pay any attention. They would not stop the wickedness they were doing nor quit sacrificing to other gods. ‘So my anger and my wrath were poured out and burned like a fire through the towns of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem. That is why they have become the desolate ruins that they are today.’* NET

REV 2:16 [JESUS CHRIST, TO THE CHURCH IN PERGAMUM:] *Therefore, repent! If not, I will come against you quickly and make war against those people with the sword of my mouth.* NET

The reference to “the sword of my mouth” possibly means that the judgment would be in accordance with Jesus Christ’s words or pronounced by his word/s and thus come into being. In effect his words would “cut like a sword” (CEV).

What things does God do to draw wayward people back to himself?

Do Christians need to keep on repenting?

What is one thing you find encouraging in this section? Why is it encouraging?

Pray for persecuted Christians

II. Avoiding Sin and Being Holy

The Bible does not merely tell us not to sin. It also helps us not to do so by giving sound instructions and alternatives to sin. In conjunction with this, the Bible calls us to be holy – i.e. to live pure lives, set apart from all that is ungodly.

a) Avoiding Sin

See also:

- e) *Epilogue: Be Wary*, Ch. 38

Take care not to sin

1COR 10:12 *Even if you think you can stand up to temptation, be careful not to fall.* CEV

Ask God for help to avoid sin . . .

Ps 19:13 [DAVID, TO GOD:] *Moreover, keep me from committing flagrant sins; do not allow such sins to control me.* Then I will be blameless, and innocent of blatant rebellion. NET

. . . For God and Jesus Christ are willing and able to help us withstand temptation

1COR 10:13 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] *No temptation has overtaken you that is unusual for human beings. But God is faithful, and he will not allow you to be tempted beyond your strength. Instead, along with the temptation he will also provide a way out, so that you may be able to endure it.* ISV

HEB 4:15–16 *For we do not have a high priest incapable of sympathizing with our weaknesses, but one [Christ] who has been tempted in every way just as we are, yet without sin.¹⁶ Therefore let us confidently approach the throne of grace to receive mercy and find grace whenever we need help.* NET

Note that being tempted to sin is not sinning. But giving in to temptation is.

Use God's word to avoid sin

Ps 119:9, 11 [A PSALMIST, TO GOD:] *How can a young person maintain a pure life? By guarding it according to your instructions! ... "In my heart I store up your words, so I might not sin against you.* NET

Avoid sinful desires . . .

1PET 2:11 [PETER, TO BELIEVERS:] Dear friends, I urge you as aliens and exiles to *keep on abstaining from the desires of the flesh that wage war against the soul.* ISV

. . . Sinful desires lead to sin

JAMES 1:14–15 [JAMES, SPEAKING OF PEOPLE IN GENERAL:] But *each one is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desires.* ¹⁵*Then when desire conceives, it gives birth to sin, and when sin is full grown, it gives birth to death.* NET

Indulging sinful desires leads to temptation and then to sin.

Renew your mind and take care what you think about

ROM 12:2 Do not be conformed to this present world, but *be transformed by the renewing of your mind*, so that you may test and approve what is the will of God – what is good and well-pleasing and perfect. NET

PROV 4:23 *Be careful what you think, because your thoughts run your life.* NCV™

Get rid of sinful influences

MATT 18:8–9 [JESUS, SPEAKING FIGURATIVELY:] *If your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away.* It is better for you to enter life crippled or lame than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into eternal fire. ⁹*And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away.* It is better for you to enter into life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into fiery hell. NET

These instructions are not meant to be taken literally. They are hyperbole, emphasizing that one should do whatever is needed to get rid of sinful influences and avoid sin.

Avoid all evil

1THES 5:22 *Stay away from every form of evil.* NET

Hate evil and sin

PROV 8:13 [WISDOM PERSONIFIED:] To fear the LORD is to *hate evil. I hate pride, arrogance, evil behavior, and twisted speech.* GW

Along with hating evil, love what is good

AMOS 5:15A *Hate evil and love good.* GW

What kinds of things does God do to “provide a way out” (1Cor 10:13) from temptation? What “outs” should we look for?

How do sinful desires corrupt?

How can we renew our minds (cf. Rom 12:2)?

b) Alternatives to Sin

Instead of living by the sinful nature, live by the Holy Spirit

ROM 8:3B–5 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] He [God] condemned sin in the flesh ⁴so that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who *do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit*. ⁵For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. ^{ISV}

Our human nature (“the flesh”) is essentially sinful. But God has given his Holy Spirit to believers. As such, we are to live by God’s Holy Spirit. This involves: being both alert to and responsive to the Spirit’s promptings; and being reliant on his power, to enable and transform us. In conjunction with this, our minds should be focused on “things of the Spirit” (v. 5).

Instead of living in darkness, live according to the light

EPH 5:8–9 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] *In the past you were full of darkness, but now you are full of light in the Lord. So live like children who belong to the light. ⁹Light brings every kind of goodness, right living, and truth.* ^{NCV™}

When used figuratively, particularly in the NT, “darkness” represents evil and falseness, and is associated with spiritual ignorance. Believers once lived in the darkness, in a sense being “full of darkness” (v. 8). But now believers are to live in God’s “light”, which is a metaphor for holiness and truth. Doing so consists primarily of living according to the spiritual light and truth that we have from God’s word.

Instead of living as a slave to sin, live as a slave to righteousness and God . . .

ROM 6:19B, 22 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] *Just as you once offered the parts of your body as slaves to impurity and to greater and greater disobedience, so now, in the same way, you must offer the parts of your body as slaves to righteousness that leads to sanctification. ...* ²²But now that you have been freed from sin and have become God’s slaves, the benefit you reap is sanctification, and the result is eternal life. ^{ISV}

. . . In avoiding sin be focused on doing what is right

AMOS 5:14A *Make it your aim to do what is right, not what is evil, so that you may live.* GNT

Bear in mind that one of the most effective preventative measures against sinning is to be preoccupied with doing good.

Pursue righteousness

1TIM 6:11 [PAUL, TO TIMOTHY:] *But you, as a person dedicated to God, keep away from all that. Instead pursue righteousness, godliness, faithfulness, love, endurance, and gentleness.* NET

MATT 5:6 *Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied.* NET

Be good

2PET 1:5 *For this very reason do your best to add goodness to your faith; to your goodness add knowledge; ...* GNT

LUKE 6:45 *The good person out of the good treasury of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasury produces evil, for his mouth speaks from what fills his heart.* NET

What does it mean to “live according to the Spirit” (cf. Romans 8:3b-5)?

How does being preoccupied with doing what is right - including doing good deeds - help us to avoid sin? What right or good things could you be more focused on doing?

How does one "hunger and thirst for righteousness" (Matt 5:6)? What does it involve doing?

Pray for persecuted Christians

c) Be Holy (I): General

See also:

- b) *God Makes His People Holy*, Ch. 18

To be holy involves being separated from corruptive influences and totally dedicated to God. As such it includes moral purity and obedience to God. The ongoing process of becoming increasingly holy is largely facilitated by God, but in accordance with it believers are called upon to be holy. (See also the introductory comment on *God Makes His People Holy*, Ch. 18.)

Be holy, because God is holy

1PET 1:14–16 [PETER, TO BELIEVERS:] As obedient children, do not be shaped by the desires that you once had in your ignorance. ¹⁵Instead, *just as the one who called you is holy, be holy in every aspect of your life.* ¹⁶For it is written, “You must be holy, because I am holy.” ISV

If we are to be God’s people, acceptable to him, we need to be holy because: God is holy and so does not accept anything that is not holy. Therefore we should aspire to be holy, like God.

Be pure . . .

1TIM 5:1B–2, 22 [PAUL, TO TIMOTHY:] *Treat younger men like brothers, ²older women like mothers, and younger women like sisters, with absolute purity. ...* ²²Do not ordain anyone hastily. Do not participate in the sins of others. *Keep yourself pure.* ISV

JAMES 3:17A *But the wisdom that comes from God is first of all pure, then peaceful, gentle, and easy to please.* NCV™

. . . Be blameless

DEUT 18:13 *You must be blameless before the LORD your God.* NET

Make every effort to be holy and pure – particularly in view of what is to come

2PET 3:11–14 [PETER, TO BELIEVERS:] *Since all these things will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people should you be? Your lives*

should be holy and dedicated to God, ¹²as you wait for the Day of God and do your best to make it come soon—the Day when the heavens will burn up and be destroyed, and the heavenly bodies will be melted by the heat. ¹³But we wait for what God has promised: new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness will be at home. ¹⁴And so, my friends, as you wait for that Day, do your best to be pure and faultless in God’s sight and to be at peace with him. GNT

Some things that lead to holiness

ROM 6:19B [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] Just as you once offered the parts of your body as slaves to impurity and to greater and greater disobedience, so now, in the same way, *you must offer the parts of your body as slaves to righteousness that leads to sanctification.* ISV

2COR 7:1 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, *bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.* ESV

Fear of God facilitates holiness.

Some things that lead to purity

1JN 1:9 *But if we confess our sins to God, he will keep his promise and do what is right: he will forgive us our sins and purify us from all our wrongdoing.* GNT

1JN 3:2–3 Dear friends, we are now God’s children, but what we will be like has not been revealed yet. We know that when the Messiah is revealed, we will be like him, because we will see him as he is. ³And *everyone who has this hope based on him keeps himself pure, just as he is pure.* ISV

The “hope” of Jesus Christ’s return and of being like him (v. 2) leads one to make or keep themselves pure (v. 3). For focusing on such a hope makes anything that it is not pleasing to Christ incompatible with one’s own goals and desires. Additionally one would not want to do anything that would bring Christ’s disapproval on his return.

We should be holy and pleasing to God because of what he has done for us

ROM 12:1 [PAUL:] I therefore urge you, brothers, *in view of God's mercies, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices that are holy and pleasing to God*, for this is the reasonable way for you to worship. ISV

What does it mean to "be holy"?

What points made in this section should motivate us to be holy? What other reasons/motivations can you think of?

How can we be holy?

d) Be Holy (II): Being Set Apart

Being holy involves being set apart for God from worldly things. Such things include: compromising associations with the people of this world; and the ways of the world.

Be set apart for God

LEV 20:7 [GOD, TO THE ISRAELITES:] Therefore *separate yourselves and be holy*, because I am the LORD your God. ISV

EZRA 6:21 The lambs were eaten by the Israelites who had returned from exile and by *all who had separated themselves from the unclean practices of the non-Jews in the land to worship the LORD God of Israel*. GW

Do not love this world

1JN 2:15 *Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him*. ESV

Do not conform to this world

ROM 12:2 *Do not be conformed to this present world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may test and approve what is the will of God – what is good and well-pleasing and perfect*. NET

In the NT the “world” often refers to the system of values, attitudes and behaviour commonplace in society – along with the people and social structures that conform to this system. This system is largely antagonistic towards or dismissive of God. As such, the “world” is essentially evil, and so it is imperative that believers do not conform to it – nor love it (cf. 1Jn 2:15 ↓).

Do not live as other people do . . .

EPH 4:17 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] So I tell you and encourage you in the Lord’s name *not to live any longer like other people in the world. Their minds are set on worthless things*. GW

. . . Worldly behavior to be avoided

1JN 2:16 *These are the ways of the world: wanting to please our sinful selves, wanting the sinful things we see, and being too proud of what we have. None of these come from the Father, but all of them come from the world.* NCV™

Avoid bad company . . .

Ps 26:4–5 [DAVID:] *I do not keep company with worthless people; I have nothing to do with hypocrites. ⁵I hate the company of the evil and avoid the wicked.* GNT

. . . Bad company is corruptive and harmful

1COR 15:33 Do not be deceived: *“Bad company corrupts good morals.”* NET

PROV 13:20 The one who associates with the wise grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm. NET

Avoid compromising alliances

2COR 6:14–15 *Do not become partners with those who do not believe, for what partnership is there between righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship does light have with darkness? ¹⁵And what agreement does Christ have with Beliar? Or what does a believer share in common with an unbeliever?* NET

This appears to be speaking against forming close, binding associations with unbelievers that would risk leading a believer to compromise aspects of their faith and/or inhibit their service and witness to Christ. Additionally, basic differences between believers and unbelievers mean that such relationships lack: fellowship (v. 14); agreement (v. 15); and things in common (v. 15). Probably Paul had primarily in mind affiliations either with false teachers who had appeared in the Corinthian church or pagan idolaters. Note that “Beliar” (v. 15a) is Satan.

Note: God’s people are not of this world . . .

JOHN 15:19 [JESUS, TO HIS DISCIPLES:] *If you belonged to the world, it would love you as it loves its own. But I have chosen you out of the*

world, so you don't belong to it. That is why the world hates you.
 NCV™

. . . God's people are in effect strangers in this world

1PET 2:11 [PETER, TO BELIEVERS:] Dear friends, *you are like foreigners and strangers in this world.* I beg you to avoid the evil things your bodies want to do that fight against your soul. NCV™

Is there anything of this world - even something that is not necessarily sinful in itself - which you need to stop loving (cf. 1Jn 2:15) and/or separate yourself from?

2 Corinthians 6:14–15 (in *Similarly, avoid compromising alliances with unbelievers and the wicked*) is often applied to male/female relationships. How is it applicable? What other common relationships might it be applicable to?

In what way are God's people strangers in this world (cf. 1Pet 2:11)?

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Religious Liberty Commission – www.worldevangelicals.org/commissions/rlc

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Religious Liberty Prayer Bulletin – rlprayerbulletin.blogspot.com

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