

HOLINESS

September 30, 2012
17th Sunday after Pentecost
Revision C

Epistle: 2 Corinthians 6:16-7:1

Today's Gospel lesson is used in the West either at about this time of year (leading up to Lent and Easter) or in mid-August. Today's Epistle lesson is not used at all in the Western lectionary for Sundays.

Word Study: Holiness versus Uncleanness

There are a number of different words in the Greek New Testament that speak of holiness and sacred things versus uncleanness, defilement and contamination. Table I lists some definitions of Greek words. There are five root words listed that have different forms (noun, verb, adjective, etc.) and different connotations (the state of, the quality of), etc. To get a practical understanding of these words, let us look at how the root word is used in the New Testament.

Hagios is used as the name for the Holy Spirit (*Hagion Pneuma*). The Lord Jesus is referred to using *hagios*: "...the holy (*hagion*) thing being born (of Mary) will be called Son of God" (Luke 1:35). Some other uses of *hagios* are as follows:

| HOLY THING, PERSON | SOME REFERENCES |
|--|--------------------------------------|
| | |
| The Holy Prophets | Luke 1:70, Acts 3:21, 2 Peter 3:2 |
| The Holy Apostles | Ephesians 3:5 |
| The Holy Scriptures | Romans 1:2 |
| The Holy Angels | Matthew 25:31, Acts 10:22 |
| Jerusalem (The Holy City) | Matthew 27:53, Revelation 11:2 |
| New Jerusalem (The Holy City) | Revelation 21:2, 10; 22:19 |
| Mosaic Law (the Holy Covenant, The Holy Commandment) | Luke 1:72, 2 Peter 2:21, Romans 7:12 |

TABLE I
Greek Words Describing Holiness & Defilement

| GREEK WORD | DEFINITIONS | REFERENCE # IN STRONG'S DICTIONARY |
|-------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| HAGIOS | the saints or the sacred ones | 40 |
| Hagiazo | to purify, make holy | 37 |
| Hagiasmos | purification, state of purity | 38 |
| Hagion | a sacred thing | 39 |
| Hagiotēs | state of sacredness | 41 |
| Hagiosune | quality of sacredness | 42 |
| AKATHARTOS | impure in the demonic sense | 169 |
| Akathartes | state of impurity | 168 |
| Akatharsia | quality of impurity | 167 |
| KOINOS | common | 2839 |
| Koinoo | to make common | 2840 |
| MIAHINO | to contaminate | 3392 |
| Miahsma | contamination, the effect | 3393 |
| Miahsmos | contamination, the act | 3394 |
| MOLUNA | to make black, to soil | 3435 |
| Molusmos | a stain | 3436 |

Quite opposed to *Hagios* is the word *Akathartos*. While *Hagios* is used for the Holy Spirit, the most prolific use¹ of *Akathartos* is for “unclean” spirits (*akatharton pneuma*) that Jesus, the Twelve, the Seventy and others cast out of people. *Akathartos* is also used together with other words such as adultery, fornication, greediness, lewdness, covetousness, etc. For example:

- “Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: fornication, uncleanness (*akatharsia*) lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, etc.” (Galatians 5:19).
- Those alienated from God because of hardness of heart have “given themselves over to lewdness to work all uncleanness (*akatharsias*) in greediness” (Ephesians 4:19).
- “But fornication and all uncleanness (*akatharsia*) or greediness, let it not be named among you” (Ephesians 5:3).
- “Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness (*akatharsian*), passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry” (Colossians 3:5).
- The ungrateful, who professed to be wise and worshipped creation, “God gave them over in the desire of their hearts to uncleanness (*akatharsian*) to dishonor their bodies among them” (Romans 1:24).

¹ Matthew 10:1, 12:43; Mark 1:23-27; 3:11, 30; 5:2-13; 6:7; 7:25; Luke 4:33-36; Luke 6:18; 8:29; 9:42; 11:24; Acts 5:16, 8:7; Revelation 16:13, 18:2

Not as commonly used is the word *Moluno*, which comes from the Greek word meaning black, and therefore means to blacken or make dirty. It's only used four times in the New Testament; once in our Epistle reading (2 Corinthians 7:1). The other three uses are 1 Corinthians 8:7, Revelation 3:4, 14:4.

The Epistle reading starts off with a series of contrasts:

| | |
|---------------|-------------|
| righteousness | lawlessness |
| light | darkness |
| Christ | Belial |
| believers | unbelievers |
| temple of God | idols |

What is Belial? Belial here is a word borrowed from Hebrew meaning worthless. It is used a number of times in the Old Testament as “son of Belial” or “man of Belial” usually translated “worthless one” or “worthless man”. But it goes deeper than just worthlessness. Solomon referred to a man of Belial (Proverbs 6:12) as one who devised evil continually, and spoke of seven abominations that the Lord hates that were characteristic of the men of Belial. (Proverbs 6:16-19):

- Haughty eyes
- A lying tongue
- Hands that shed innocent blood
- A heart that devises wicked plans
- Feet that run to evil
- A false witness who utters lies
- One who spreads strife among brothers

These characteristics go deeper than just worthlessness; they're of demonic origin and imply *akathartos*. David stated that the only way to deal with men of Belial was with iron and the shaft of a spear (2 Samuel 23:6-7), probably because they can't be trusted to follow orders. What agreement can Christ possibly have with Belial?

Paul makes these contrasts to say that we are the temple of the Living God (2 Corinthians 6:16). He then quotes from Ezekiel 37:26-27, which in turn refers to the restored Kingdom of God that lasts forever. “I will dwell in them” as one dwells in a Temple (v.16).

John Chrysostom comments on this as follows: “Do you bear God within you and yet run to them (lawlessness, darkness, Belial, etc.)? God, who has nothing in common with them? And in what way can this deserve forgiveness? Bear in mind Who walks and Who dwells in you” (Homily XIII on 2 Corinthians 6).

Continuing with the Old Testament Temple analogy, Paul quoted from Isaiah 52:11 which contains mixed images from the restored Old Testament Kingdom and the future coming of the Kingdom of God in glory. Referring to the contrasts (Christ - Belial), Paul used the Isaiah 52 passage to encourage the Corinthians to “come out from among them and be separate. Do not

touch anything unclean (*akathartos, i.e., demonic*) and I will receive you” (v.17). Paul is not reimposing the Mosaic Law rituals regarding washings; he is warning against something sinister involved with being unequally yoked (v.14). Verse 18 follows with a loose paraphrase of 2 Samuel 7:14 which speaks of the close relationship between King David and the Lord.

Paul concludes “let us cleanse (*katharia*, the opposite of *akathartos*) ourselves from all filthiness (*moluno* or blackening, staining) of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness (*hagiosune* as in the saints, *hagios*, and the Holy Spirit, *Hagion Pneuma*) in the fear of God” (7:1). Chrysostom pointed out that Paul did not say to avoid intermixing with unbelievers, but to avoid being yoked with them.

Another example of cleansing of heart and soul in order to appear before God is the example of Israel at Mt. Sinai. To prepare to hear the words of the Law spoken by a Holy God, the people needed to prepare to become a kingdom of priests by:

- Washing their clothes
- Fasting from sex
- Consecration by Moses

Anyone, man or beast, that touched the holy mountain that the Lord God came down on was to be put to death (Exodus 19:10-15).

“Cleansing” is amplified by the Apostle John (1 John 2:4-6, 3:1-3): “He who says he abides in Him ought to walk as He walked” (1 John 2:6). This world does not know us because it didn’t know Him (1 John 3:1, John 1:10). That’s why we separate ourselves. The world won’t have anything to do with us; we’ll just get blackened or dirtied by the world.

While we are in the world, we, like Christ and the Holy Spirit, are not of the world. We are made holy or sanctified (Greek: *hagiazō*) by the Word (Greek: *logos*) which is Truth (John 17:14-19). By contrast, what the world offers is lawlessness, darkness, worthlessness, and delusion. As Ezekiel put it: “For I will take you from the nations, gather you from the lands, and bring you into your own land. Then I will sprinkle clean water on you and you will be clean. I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols” (Ezekiel 36:24-25). The whole point of the Mosaic Law’s focus on clean vs. unclean was not to exclude Gentiles but to focus on holiness and avoid the filthiness of demons and idols. Seen in this light, the Mosaic Law really makes sense.

Paul concluded this section with the encouragement to perfect holiness in the fear of God (7:1). Since we are in the world, but not of the world (John 15:19, 17:14; 1 John 4:4-6, 3:1), seeking holiness is a continual process. John Chrysostom comments: “Yet he (Paul) is not content with this, but adds, ‘Perfecting holiness in the fear of God’. For to avoid touching unclean things does not thereby make you clean, but something else is needed for becoming holy: earnestness, heedfulness, piety. And he well said, ‘In the fear of God’. For it is possible to perfect chasteness, not in the fear of God but for vain glory” (Ibid).