

2 Corinthians
Leon L. Combs, Ph.D.

Chapter Seven

2Cor 7:1 Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

Some commentators link these verses with 2 Cor 6:11-13 and then treat the remaining verses of chapter seven separately. I prefer to treat them in the given order so please refer back to verses 11-13 of chapter six for some continuity.

What are the promises? They are as Paul related them in the previous “chapter”:

2Cor 6:16b For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, "I will dwell in them and walk among them; And I will be their God, and they shall be My people.

2Cor 6:17d And I will welcome you.

2Cor 6:18 "And I will be a father to you, And you shall be sons and daughters to Me," Says the Lord Almighty.

These are awesome promises. Note that they are not commands but promises of God to His children. Since God has made us these promises, we should certainly be inclined to cleanse ourselves inside and out as we desire to perfect holiness in the fear of God. Using the terms “flesh” and “spirit” denotes all aspects of our lives. The Christian life involves separation from the world’s influences, fellowship with other Christians, and sanctification. “Perfecting” holiness means completing it and refers to every aspect of sanctification.

Phil 2:12 So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling;

Also note that the fear of God is fundamental to living as a child of God.

2Cor 7:2 Make room for us in your hearts; we wronged no one, we corrupted no one, we took advantage of no one.

2Cor 7:3 I do not speak to condemn you; for I have said before that you are in our hearts to die together and to live together.

2Cor 7:4 Great is my confidence in you, great is my boasting on your behalf; I am filled with comfort. I am overflowing with joy in all our affliction.

Paul now returns to an appeal for the church at Corinth to love him as he loved them. He had been accused of wrong doing but he emphatically denies ever wronging any of them in his stay with them. “Wronged” means to treat unjustly and “corrupted” refers to moral corruption and he certainly was not guilty of either mistreatment. Proud people love themselves and cannot love anyone else but Paul’s love and devotion to them should have been evident. “Condemning” others refers to passing a final judgment on someone and when Paul was correcting them he was

not passing any final judgment but showing them how to correct their behavior and be restored to full fellowship. Paul's desire was that they all live together for Christ, die for Him and then to live forever with God and each other in heaven. Verse four seems rather astounding since this church was the most trouble-filled church in the new church era. Paul's confidence was not in these people but in the promise of God as he expressed in:

Phil 1:6 For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.

He was then comforted because of his trust in the Lord. He could also overflow with joy in the affliction suffered by him and them because if they were friends with the world they would not be experiencing the affliction caused by spiritual conflict.

2Cor 7:5 For even when we came into Macedonia our flesh had no rest, but we were afflicted on every side: conflicts without, fears within.

2Cor 7:6 But God, who comforts the depressed, comforted us by the coming of Titus;

2Cor 7:7 and not only by his coming, but also by the comfort with which he was comforted in you, as he reported to us your longing, your mourning, your zeal for me; so that I rejoiced even more.

Paul is now returning to his thoughts expressed earlier:

2Cor 2:13 I had no rest for my spirit, not finding Titus my brother; but taking my leave of them, I went on to Macedonia.

He had written a harsh letter to them that was delivered by Titus and he badly wanted to hear from Titus to understand their reaction to his letter. But he did not find Titus where he had hoped to find him so he went on to Macedonia. But God did comfort Paul by bringing Titus to him. Not only did God comfort Paul with the presence of Titus but Titus also brought great news to Paul about the reaction of the church at Corinth. Their reaction was indeed as he had hoped as they were longing to see him and even mourning at his absence. Titus even revealed to Paul that the people had a great zeal for him. Being with Titus again and hearing this great news made him rejoice greatly.

2Cor 7:8 For though I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it; though I did regret it-- for I see that that letter caused you sorrow, though only for a while--

2Cor 7:9 I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to the point of repentance; for you were made sorrowful according to the will of God, in order that you might not suffer loss in anything through us.

2Cor 7:10 For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation; but the sorrow of the world produces death.

We do not have this letter that Paul wrote after writing 1 Corinthians but it was a letter that intended to cause the people to repent for their sinful actions. Delivering corrective measures either in written or verbal form can be painful for both parties but a Christian leader must point out the sin of people under his direction. The purpose of the correction is to cause the people to

see their sin in light of the Word of God and to repent. Until one sees that the response has been as intended, the wait can be painful. Thus Paul did initially have some regrets that his letter would cause them some pain as they realized their sin against God. But when he sees that their response was proper toward God he could now rejoice that he sent the letter. Sorrow at someone pointing out a sin can result in the person just being sorry at being caught and not lead to any ethical changes and that would be a worldly reaction that would then lead to separation from God after death. But sorrow according to the will of God will produce repentance and either justification or a renewed state of sanctification and thus the person doing the correction will have no regret.

2Cor 7:11 For behold what earnestness this very thing, this godly sorrow, has produced in you: what vindication of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what avenging of wrong! In everything you demonstrated yourselves to be innocent in the matter.

2Cor 7:12 So although I wrote to you it was not for the sake of the offender, nor for the sake of the one offended, but that your earnestness on our behalf might be made known to you in the sight of God.

Hearing the reaction of the church from Titus made Paul know that their godly sorrow indeed did produce an earnest desire for holiness on the part of the repentant church members. The reaction of the people perhaps even exceeded Paul's desire. The people vindicated themselves, which means that they expressed their sorrow to all so that their name could be cleared of the sin. The third indication that their repentance was real was that they were indignant, which means that they were angry that they had brought shame upon themselves and the entire congregation. Their fear of God showed that they indeed understood that their sin was against Him. They longed, or yearned, to have their relationship to God and to Paul restored. Their zeal to correct the situation was the sixth indication that their repentance was real. Truly repentant people also show a desire to avenge the situation by seeing that justice is done and making restitution where possible. They did not make excuses but they faced their sins and showed seven steps toward correcting the situation.

Paul then stated his true goal for writing the letter. His goal was not just for the sake of the person offended or for the person doing the offence. We do not know of whom Paul referred. Some think the offending person was the person guilty of incest and others think that he was an outsider causing trouble for the church. We need to only understand the principle involved and not the identity of the guilty party. His goal was that they would become more aware of their total devotion to God and their desire for purity of thought and action before God. They also then better appreciated Paul's devotion to God for his work with them. He was even willing to risk their alienation to bring about their repentance.

2Cor 7:13 For this reason we have been comforted. And besides our comfort, we rejoiced even much more for the joy of Titus, because his spirit has been refreshed by you all.

The above was sufficient reason for him and Titus to be comforted. But Paul was rejoicing also for the affect this event had on Titus. Titus certainly benefited spiritually from his part in this vindication. There is no substitute for being a part in the turning of a group of believers toward

repentance and restoration. All of us who may be involved in the spiritual guidance of others are richly blessed by a Godly result much more so than simply reading or being told about some event. The reaction of Titus should encourage all of us to be more involved in discipleship and teaching of fellow Christians as well as evangelism if the gift is present.

2Cor 7:14 For if in anything I have boasted to him about you, I was not put to shame; but as we spoke all things to you in truth, so also our boasting before Titus proved to be the truth.

2Cor 7:15 And his affection abounds all the more toward you, as he remembers the obedience of you all, how you received him with fear and trembling.

2Cor 7:16 I rejoice that in everything I have confidence in you.

Paul had told Titus about the church at Corinth but now he had the opportunity to experience the reality of their faith. If the people had not positively reacted then Paul would have been put to shame as his work would have proven to be in vain. The positive outcome proved their faith to be real and that the work of Paul had been blessed by God. Now Titus also had a great love for these people and he has many memories to assist him in his further work for the Kingdom. He can remember how they received him and how they demonstrated their obedience to God by their repentance and restoration of peace to the church. Paul can now rejoice in the confidence that he had for the work of God in these people. I am sure that he played this event over in his mind many times during his evangelistic travels. He could also now complete the collection that was being made for help of other churches as he discusses in the next two chapters.